

Prepare the Way

Preparing the Bride of Christ for the return of Christ

Issue No. 114
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Peter Pollock
**The pigsty
perspective**

**The real spirit of the
New Covenant**

**Don't let a secret
ruin your life**

**5 Reasons
Satan hates
the rapture**

Ravenhill classic
**The taming
of the tongue**





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COVER: "But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:8)."

Talk to us..

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Five keys to spiritual strength

from the writings of A.W. Tozer

(1) DEAL THOROUGHLY WITH SIN...

This is not to preach sinless perfection. This is to say that every known sin is to be named, identified and repudiated, and that we must trust God for deliverance from it, so that there is no more sin anywhere in our lives. It is absolutely necessary that we deal thus, because God is a holy God and sin is on the throne of the world.

(2) NEVER OWN ANYTHING

I do not mean by this that you cannot have things. I mean that you ought to get delivered from this sense of possessing them. This sense of possessing is what hinders us. All babies are born with their fists clenched, and it seems to me it means: "This is mine!"

One of the first things is "mine" in an angry voice.

That sense of "This is mine" is a very

injurious thing to the spirit.

If you can get rid of it so that you have no feeling of possessing anything, there will come a great sense of freedom and liberty into your life.

(3) NEVER DEFEND YOURSELF

We are all born with a desire to defend ourselves. And if you insist upon defending yourself, God will let you do it. But if you turn the defence of yourself over to God He will defend you.

(4) NEVER SPEAK BADLY OF OTHERS

"Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8)." The tale-bearer has no place in God's favour. If you know something that would hinder or hurt the reputation of one of God's children, bury it forever. Find a little garden out back – a little spot somewhere – and when somebody comes around with an evil story, take it out and bury it, and say, "Here lies in peace the story about my brother." God will take

care of it. "With what judgement you judge, you shall be judged (Matthew 7:2)."

(5) NEVER ACCEPT ANY GLORY

God is jealous of His glory and He will not give His glory to another. He will not even share His glory with another. It is quite natural, I should say, for people to hope that maybe their Christian service will give them a chance to display their talents.

True, they want to serve the Lord. But they also want other people to now they are serving the Lord. They want to have a reputation among the saints. That is very dangerous ground – seeking a reputation among the saints. It's bad enough to seek a reputation in the world, but it's worse to seek a reputation among the people of God. Our Lord gave up His reputation, and so must we.

May God give us the grace and strength to trust Him in each of these areas.

Amen. 



The pigsty perspective...

by Peter Pollock

THESE days we seem most loath to preach or teach about HOLINESS and RIGHTEOUSNESS. The modern seeker-friendly movement avoids it like the plague!

Simply, holiness is to be separated unto God and righteousness is something that is only brought into your life by the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is His righteousness that covers us as we stand before God Almighty.

Whenever I think of holy, I am reminded of that wonderful hymn about deciding to follow Jesus. Once you accept the Cross and everything it means, the world will automatically be relegated to a firm position behind you and you will resist the temptation to look back!

Holiness is not a halo, a harp and a good Christian “CV.” It’s being born again, saved and sanctified in the Blood of Jesus Christ, never to be the same again. It’s about once being blind spiritually to suddenly find yourself “seeing” and “walking” in the light. It is something that is totally and utterly achieved by Jesus in your life once you have given up your independent right to yourself and opened the door for true spiritual awakening and regeneration. It is separation unto God!

For me to think that I can achieve holiness and righteousness means that I am in total deception, probably because I either live in worldly ignorance or am subjected to some highly deceptive teaching and ministry. That’s the bottom line!

Added to that, we also steadfastly don’t want to believe that God is a disciplinarian! It’s downright laughable but I have heard young pastors express just such a

view despite Scripture being so full of evidence to the contrary.

That God is in the judgement and discipline business is an irrefutable, immutable aspect of doctrine and should not need re-emphasising. As an old boss used to say to me: “Peter, just suck it up and move on.”

In the same category there are many who battle with the issue of our sinfulness and wretchedness. And, just don’t dare to go anywhere near any doctrine about the depravity of man. There is no more important issue than accepting the “monstrosity” that is sin in our lives and understanding that we not only have to recognise it and accept it in its entirety, but we have to repent of it!

And furthermore, you can’t repent unless you truly believe your wretched predicament. Conviction of sin has to be the starting motivation, the vital initial self-examination. No doubt that is why God set His Holy Spirit up to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgement.

Opportunities to meet God

All the tough hurdles of life should not be reasons for us to get exasperated and disillusioned because they are, in fact, wonderful opportunities for us to really meet God. All things, no matter how troublesome and how evil they might appear to be, God can and does turn for good for those who love and seek Him!

God’s plans for us ultimately are not to bring us harm and ruin. But we damage and harm ourselves when we stray and get caught up in the things of the world. It’s a very hard lesson for us to learn – that it’s not about us and our self-indulgence, it’s

about where we stand with Jesus!

As the years fly past, it would appear that we as the human race are becoming more and more selfish and self-centred. Granted it was there in the beginning with Adam and Eve but there is no question this monster has become a veritable ogre, spoon-fed by a world that sees self-indulgence and freedom as a life prerequisite.

Maybe the “millennials” have put the bow on the show in terms of self? But the friction, argument and offence that arises when you broach this subject, just confirms that this is a real hotspot, a truly sensitive area.

There is nothing new under the sun, so it’s just an old problem. But it’s an old problem that, with more and more intense application, and with much help from an end-time spirit of lawlessness and rebellion, has hugely increased its outworkings.

There is only one solution, one antidote, and that is the gospel!

Sadly, many consider that an oversimplification. Yes, dare I say, even among church adherents.

But let’s examine the prodigal son. Luke 15:11-24 produces some challenging truths, some profound basics that I pray the Holy Spirit will illumine for us.

And it starts right at the beginning with the son’s plea that the father should give him what he is due – what falls to him, his inheritance. The whole gospel does start there simply because it underlines the great human problem of it all being about “me, me, me, me” and “gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme!”

It’s all about I, me and myself. Poor little me. Nobody understands me!

The Big “I” problem – sIn, prIde and InEquItY. Just look at all those I’s!

We all have an “ego” problem and if we have had any fame and success that “ego” transforms into a veritable ogre. I define modesty as a relative ability some people have, compared to others, in being able to hide their egos!

It’s a problem common to us all, but some hide it better than others. Maybe the introvert will argue that he doesn’t have this problem but further study will reveal that the dreaded ego is everywhere, even rampant deep down in introversion.

Yes, it is a monster that all started when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Everybody is looking for freedom these days. In a nutshell, modern “freedom” wants nothing to do with discipline, respect and obedience. These are biblical principles firmly entrenched in the Word of God!

God is in the discipline business, for sure. He insists on respect, along the lines of “honouring your mother and father that it may go well with you,” and anyone suggesting that God does not demand obedience, has just not read the Bible!

I would dare to suggest that the “freedom” that the modern world seeks in God’s eyes would be nothing short of rebellion and anarchy.

Anyway, the prodigal son demanded his inheritance and the father gave in. In reality his dad was handing him over to the consequences of his godless desires and values.

We shouldn't need a preacher

In Romans chapter one, we read that we should have no problem acknowledging God in the world we see around us. We should not even need a preacher trying to convince us that God exists. In fact, the Bible says that we have no excuse whatsoever.

Yet, despite God’s goodness and His great love being so evident and obvious, mankind, “thinking themselves so wise became fools” still chooses to ignore God and worship the work and the idols of their own hands. So God has handed us over to the consequences of this foolishness and godlessness and we have consequently “inherited in ourselves” the due rewards.

Ever since God gave Adam and Eve their “own will,” we have become responsible and accountable for our own decision-making process. Our home and our destiny is where our heart is, as much as

we don’t want to hear that. Our wills are the very essence of each one of us and our fate is our choice and never more so than with Christianity.

The prodigal son soon made this discovery! He found out about the harsh reality of a fickle world full of fair-weather friends. Superficiality abounds, also deception, when pseudo-synthetic values dominate.

The scripture in this passage says a “famine arose.” Indeed a famine will always arise literally, figuratively and spiritually in these godless circumstances. Worldliness chokes out intimacy with God because worldly compromise and powerlessness are inseparably linked in the Christian walk.

Famine, hunger and starvation mean a shortage of something. Something is missing when you are without God because there is a void, an emptiness, that cannot be filled by drugs and drink or deception and deceit.

He had joined the world

Deep down we know this, but it’s a constant fight, this battle against denial and humanism. Anyway, the prodigal son found himself in the pigsty. He was down and out, feeding the swine, hardly an appropriate place for a young Jewish man!

The scripture says that he “had joined the world,” confirming that he was enduring the consequences of his own decision-making. As believers we are called to be “in” the world but not “of” the world. If Jesus is truly Lord of your life, you will be in that spiritual position.

But the ultimate degradation is to be “in” the world and “of” the world, separated from God, living outside God, spiritually dead and disconnected – tantamount to a spiritual pigsty! The problem for us, though, is that when we are in fact living in the spiritual pigsty we don’t see the pigs, smell the pigs and hear the oink-oinks!

In fact, we might well be living in the lap of luxury, daily nonchalantly and ignorantly speeding to hell in our fancy cars gadding about our fancy lifestyles.

The prodigal son had an advantage over us. At least he saw his predicament, he recognised all the tell-tale signs and “came to himself.” Indeed, there in the pigsty, the penny finally dropped for him. He came to the most profound moment of truth in his young life. He came under conviction of sin – his sin! “I have sinned,” he cried. “I am unworthy,” “I perish.”

Yes, he was a sinner heading for hell! He

had made a right royal mess of his life. He had come to understand that he alone was responsible for his position. He came face to face with his wretchedness and was now finally in a position to hand over to God. He was ready to repent and die to self. He was ready to give up his independent right to himself. He was set to return to the love of forgiving father’s arms. He was set never to be the same again!

The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgement to aid us all in getting to this prodigal place where at long last we can vacate the throne of our lives, abdicate as kings of the road to hell, and meet up with God and the truth of this world and its delusions.

The Father is always waiting! But everything depends upon the Prodigal Son making a CHOICE. God has ordained this is the process with each and every one of us. “Sinner revelation” is such a key factor.

When I first got saved I was intrigued by the word “wretch.” I was a wretch! I looked the word up in the dictionary – a “miscreant.” God does not “mis-create,” I thought, until it hit me full force that God had not “mis-created” with Adam and Eve.

God was originally pleased with what He had made. But it was after their temptation and “fall” and consequent spiritual death, that we attained sinner status. Yes, wretched miscreants!

“I have sinned.” What an incredible confession. I am unworthy! No excuses or no alibis. No ifs and buts. Just utter repentance!

Only the “dead self” truly submits to God. The prodigal son owned his own sin. It is a key issue.

The “pigsty” perspective is vital in the road we have to travel to find the pearl of great price – that “pearl” being Jesus Christ. The son had wanted his “inheritance.” He took it and then found that it had nothing to do with wealth, fame or material things. All those things disappear.

Even those who have been miraculously healed, die someday. It takes more faith to face death than to try and avoid it. We need treasure in heaven! The prodigal passage tells us that the son was both “dead” and “lost.” Outside Jesus Christ we are “dead” and “lost,” miscreants heading for hell.

Then came the pigsty perspective – conviction on sin, righteousness and judgement – and his life would never be the same again! 🐷



The taming of the Tongue

A classic from Leonard Ravenhill

UNTIL fairly recently, we were pretty much in the dark about the human body. But then came the X-ray with its peeping eye... a marvellous instrument which has saved us much human misery.

It was able to show us the human heart, but it couldn't show us the soul. It could show us the throat, but not the voice. The brain, but not the mind.

Nevertheless, medical science has done much to help this outward man that perishes. If our eyes are getting dim, we can get glasses. If our kidneys or heart fail, we can have a transplant. But as far as I know, there is one member of the body that has never been transplanted. If we used our arms and legs as much as we use this part, we'd be incredibly stiff and sore. But this member never gets tired, and I've never seen one with a splint on it.

As you get older you may get dentures – but you will always have the same tongue you were born with! There are artificial joints made these days, but no artificial tongues.

My mother was pretty smart when it came to the tongue. She sprinkled her daily conversation with wise sayings like “Keep your tongue between your teeth” and “Think twice before you speak once.” The Scottish people have some proverbs, too: “Keep your tongue a prisoner and your body will go free” and “A long tongue shortens friendships.” My mother would also tell us, “Remember, one day you'll answer to God for every word you say.” The Bible mentions many kinds of tongues:

A flattering tongue (Psalm 5:9). A proud tongue (Psalm 12:3; 73:9). A lying tongue (Psalm 109:2; Proverbs 6:17). A deceitful tongue (Psalm 120:2). A perverted tongue (Proverbs 10:31; 17:20). A soothing tongue

(Proverbs 15:4). A healing tongue (Proverbs 12:18). A destructive tongue (Proverbs 17:4). A mischievous and wicked tongue (Psalm 10:7). A soft tongue (Proverbs 25:15). A backbiting tongue (Proverbs 25:23).

James also talks about the tongue. He says it's a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. He calls the tongue a fire, the very world of iniquity. James says it is untameable, a restless evil full of deadly poison, used both to bless God and to curse men. But James also told us that a man who doesn't stumble in what he says is a perfect man. (James 3:2-10)

I wonder how startled James would be today to find out how much man has “conquered.” We've put men into big, fancy tin cans, and shot them off into space. We've sent men into submarines without coming up to the surface for months. Man has had the moon under his feet and he's left his footprints on the ocean floor as well. We've also put some fantastic canisters up into the sky, bouncing our voices off these satellites to countries around the world. Look at how we've harnessed the wind with giant windmills, and made the rivers and waterfalls drive our turbines. What incredible power man has over his world!

And yet, he has still not conquered his own tongue.

A Damaging Sword

In Psalm 64:3 the tongue is called “a sword.” This sword has certainly damaged, bruised, wounded, and killed more people than all the swords in all the wars since history began. You've seen it many times. That newly married couple – so lovey-dovey for days and days on end. But one day the fellow lost his temper and slashed into the heart and affections of his wife with uncontrollable anger and with words he might regret forever. But it was said. The damage was done.

How often we need to remember that old saying: We cannot call back the arrow we've shot into the air, the water under the bridge, or the spoken word.

Is there something that could be numbered greater than the incomprehensible amount of stars in the heavens? What about the sands by the sea, every blade of grass, or we could add all of these things together. There would still be something that would exceed them in number! It's the things said by this little monster called the tongue. This uncontrollable little red rebel that lives in a red cave guarded by two rows of white soldiers called teeth.

The tongue has done more damage than any other instrument in the human body.

We are responsible for the words that

we speak. “And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgement. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned (Matthew 12:36&37).

Our own words snare us (Proverbs 6:2). We are ensnared by vows and promises spoken, but not kept. By reckless criticisms and rash judgements.

“How can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil (Matthew 12:34&35)

The human heart can be a snakepit, a dungeon of devilry, a foxhole of filth, a pit of perversity. Actually, it's the manufacturing place of all uncleanness and all sin. The showcase of the heart is the tongue. My simple words cannot exaggerate the corruption of the heart. And the filth that comes out of a filthy heart comes through the lips.

But when I've said all I can about it, the strongest thing is surely said in Proverbs 18:21, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue...”

A Rolling Story

A rolling stone gathers no moss, but a rolling story gathers something fresh every time we say it. Every time we repeat it, something is added and something is taken away until it's nothing like the truth. Some little bit of gossip starts with a whisper, then it swells and becomes a tumult, and somebody's left heartbroken. Do you wonder that Proverbs 10:19 says, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise”? Or Ecclesiastes 10:14, “The fool multiplies words...?”

The old hymn goes “Oh, what needless pain we bear...” Someone should write a verse about what needless pain we cause when we lacerate people, wound them, and bruise them with our tongues. I want to sound a word of caution about the flippancy of our language, and the carelessness and exaggeration in the language used by preachers. What awful things come from their lips these days that cannot be justified by Scripture!

Products of the Tongue

Have the Christians of today improved over the Christians in Corinth? They didn't have a Bible to read but Paul wrote boldly to them, “For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes,

slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances.”

These are all products of the tongue.

Have you been caught up in unprofitable, ridiculous debates, arguing just to be proved right? So very often we win the debate and lose the friend. Paul said that among these professing Christians there was strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances.

After Jesus Himself, I believe that Paul was the greatest preacher who ever lived. But when writing to the Corinthians, he said, “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling (1 Corinthians 2:1-3).”

That doesn't sound like the Apostle we think of, clothed with all the armour of God, pulling down strongholds and putting the devil to flight.

But then he goes on in verse 4, “And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom...”

I doubt he was a fascinating preacher, juggling with words that sparkled. His job was to glorify Jesus. If we preach and people remember us, we've missed it. He says that his preaching was not with persuasive words of wisdom, “but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

There was nothing flippant or fleshly about what he said, and certainly nothing foolish.

Paul warns us, “In reference to your former manner of life, lay aside the old self... be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth... Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice (Ephesians 4:22-31).”

Paul also exhorts us, “There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting (Ephesians 5:4).”

I've heard preachers eating dinner together get into borderline jokes, and then someone pushes it further until it's totally disgusting. I like humour, but I don't like stupidity, filthiness, or coarse jesting. Oh how many silly, stupid things are said.

Dr Tozer used to say to me, “Len, be careful. Remember, never, never, speak lightly of the devil. Don't tell any jokes

about hell.” The devil is not almighty, but we must not forget that he is mighty. All too often Christians speak too lightly of the kingdom of darkness, as if to treat the whole thing as unimportant (Jude 9).

Muzzle Your Mouth

David says, “I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle (Psalm 39:1).” We usually think of other parts of our body as being agencies of sin, but not our tongue. David says “I will guard my mouth.”

Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt.” Not pepper! Sometimes anger gets in our speech and spoils everything that we've said. Psalm 12:3 says, “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things.”

These surely are stern warnings to believers.

Psalm 15 asks, “Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.”

So there you have it: walking and talking. Walking uprightly, speaking the truth in your heart. And in verse 3, “He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.”

I believe we sabotage a lot of our prayers because we're doing what James says – one minute we're blessing God, and then afterwards we're cursing men. Not blaspheming or using vile language, but criticising them. One minute our tongues are speaking about holy things, and the next, unholy things.

You see, the tongue is an index of the heart. Do you wonder that I shudder when I look at a large congregation singing, “Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise...?” Goodness me, if they did have 1 000 tongues, there would be 999 times more gossip and criticism and slander than there is now! Earth would be hell and the Church would be as bad. Oh, no! If we can't control the one we have, how could we manage 999 more?

How often do we sing our great Redeemer's praise? For a few minutes on Sunday morning? And the rest of the week it's careless and silly talk. Talk of anything but the deep things of God.

Showcase Of The Heart

Our words reflect what's in our hearts. If a man loves sports, he talks sports. If he loves money, he talks money. If he loves art, he talks art. I marvel at the slackness of speech among Christians and at how often preachers are guilty of gross exaggerations

in their reports about their meetings, and at how carelessly they slander others.

I was at a ministers' conference some years ago and we drove back and forth in packed buses all week between the hotel and the conference centre. But never once among all those ministers was the conversation about God or holiness or the coming of Jesus. It was sports, or golf handicaps, or how big their church was. It was just senseless chatter even among preachers.

Do you wonder that the psalmist in Psalm 51 cries “Create in me a clean heart?”

You can't cover up your heart. If there's bitterness in our hearts, it will come out through what we say and how we say it. If there's hatred, hatred will come. If there's anger, anger will come. No wonder James says that the tongue can't be controlled. The heart is engineering all that the tongue is going to say.

The heart is the factory that produces all these vile things, and the tongue is the showcase of the heart. Surely one of the most amazing things about the transforming grace of God is that man loses his filthy language, lying tongue, and unholy anger when he gets saved. There's little use carrying a big Bible and wearing a lapel pin saying how spiritual we are if we explode at the office, speak unkindly to our children, or if we're critical and bitter and become known as somebody who carries on.

Stick Out Your Tongue

In the springtime my mother used to say, “Put out your tongue and let me see what it's like.” She'd say, “Oh, no! You're not in good condition,” and then she had some horrible concoction that we had to take.

I wonder, if we had to put out our tongues at the end of each day if they would be unclean with gossip, slander, criticism, or bitterness? Or do we have them under control, as Paul says, “sound in speech which is beyond reproach (Titus 2:8)?” Is our speech always with grace, seasoned with salt?

This is a day when people are screaming about ecology. We want pure rivers and pure air. What about pure hearts? It's a pity we don't raise our voice in the Church and call everyone to recite Psalm 51 and cry with David, “Create in me a clean heart!”

My prayer is, “Lord, teach me to hold my tongue. Teach me to do as the psalmist says, set a watch at the door of my lips that my speech may always be seasoned with grace. My tongue never a sword. My speech always edifying, uplifting, and that which glorifies God.” Amen. 🐟



by *Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)*
"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)."

WE will offer, first of all, two or three remarks upon growth "in grace" in general; and secondly, a few remarks upon growth "in grace" being intimately connected with growth "in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The first remark we make is, that **there is a sense in which there is no such thing at all as growth in grace.** God's grace never increases; it is always infinite, so it cannot be more; it is always everlasting; it is always bottomless; it is always shoreless.

It cannot be more; and, in the nature of God, it could not be less. The text tells *us* to "grow in grace." We are in the sea of God's grace; we cannot be in a deeper sea, but let us grow now that we are in it.

I must make another remark. It is certain that, **while the grace of God toward us does not grow, yet there is such a thing as the development of grace.** There are some who are further advanced than others are, some with greater faith than others have. There are "great faiths" as well as "little faiths," great loves as well as little loves; there are men of ardent spirits who have grace more

fully developed in them than it is in others.

It is true, they are not more loved of God than others are, and not more justified, nor more accepted, for in that respect we all stand on a level, and there is no difference; but as to the development of grace in our souls, and the display of grace in our lives, everyone must admit that there is a difference between different saints.

Some grow faster in five minutes...

Now for a third remark, which is that **growth in grace is not to be measured by weeks, and months, and years.** Do not suppose that people grow in grace according to their years. Some grow faster in grace in five minutes than others do in 50 years. I believe that some saints progress further in grace in one single month than others do in 12 months or 12 years.

I am sure I may speak concerning myself. I have sometimes grown more in grace, in one hour, than I have at other seasons in a week, a month, or a year, when God, in His infinite wisdom, has been pleased to give me a vision of the Saviour, or to break up the fountains of wickedness that lay hidden in my soul.

I have learned more in one hour, when the

Holy Spirit's hand has been upon me, than I have in weeks and months simply with my own study. God's people grow like trees grow. Sometimes they take a start, and grow upward; at another time, they are growing downward. Sometimes, apparently, the sap sleeps within the branch – a winter time comes over it, and it is asleep.

Also, **growth in grace is not to be estimated by our feelings.** Do not suppose, when you are depressed, that, therefore, you are not growing in grace. Many of God's plants grow best in the dark, and He often puts them in the dark to make them grow.

I can tell you that you will often grow faster in the dungeon than on the top of a mountain; but it is not a pleasant place to be in. When our depravity is revealed to us, when our desolation of spirit, and our utter hopelessness and powerlessness are uncovered and made manifest by God's Holy Spirit, we grow, I believe, even faster than we do when, on the wings of seraphs, we are privileged to mount on high.

So, do not measure your growth in grace by your feelings. Some of you make a kind of barometer of your feelings. Do not do so. If we are in Christ, we are in Christ by faith, and not by feelings; and recollect that, whether your feelings are good or bad, you

are no more or less a child of God.

Your faith unites you with the Lamb – not your feelings. Trust Him in darkness; trust Him in distress, lean on Him when you cannot see Him; and when there seems nothing to walk on, still walk, for the ground is firm beneath the foot of faith.

Now we come to the second thought, that growth in grace is intimately connected with growth “in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

No grace except you know Him

In fact, there cannot be any grace at all except as we know Christ, and there can be no growth in grace except as we grow in our knowledge of Christ. We may always test whether we are growing by this question – Do I know more of Christ today than I did yesterday? Do I live nearer to Christ today than I did a little while ago? For increase in the knowledge of Christ is the evidence as well as the cause of true growth in grace.

In order to prove this, I will mention one or two Christian virtues, and you will see that they must increase as we know more of Christ.

With regard to love, some of us say, “How little we love Christ!”

“Oh,” you say, “I long to grow in love. I want to know that I love Jesus. I want to feel my heart going out after Him, and my soul knit to Him.”

Well, the way to grow in love is to know more of Christ. The more you know of the Saviour, the better you must love Him; the more you discover of His beauties, of His excellences, of His virtues, of His perfections, and of His glories, the more your soul will be drawn towards Him.

Know more of Christ; read more of Him; think more of Him; ask about Him more; because you will be sure to grow in the grace of love, in proportion as you know more of Christ.

So is it **with regard to faith**. What is the reason why so many of us groan because our faith is so feeble? It is because we do not know enough of Christ.

There are many people who need to know a great deal more about Jesus than they know at present; and if they knew more about Jesus, they would have more faith.

“Oh!” says one, “when I look at myself, I think, ‘Oh, what is to become of me?’ Then I search to see if there are not some evidences of grace.” That is all wrong! You have no business to look there; you will not grow in faith by looking at yourself.

If you want to have more faith, keep your eye on Jesus. If you would grow in faith, you must live near to the Cross. The sweet flower of faith was first sown in Christ’s precious blood, and it must be watered by it every day.

Know more of Christ, think more of Him, and your faith will increase. Your little faith would soon get strong if you lived more on Jesus.

So is it **with regard to our courage**, for that is a Christian grace and one in which many are terribly deficient. Our Christian courage will always increase in proportion as we know Christ. It is because we do not know enough of Christ that we are afraid of anything. I believe that, when we come truly to know Christ, we shall be afraid of nothing at all.

So is it **with regard to our zeal**, which is a grace sadly lacking in these times. If we would like to be more zealous, we must live nearer to Christ. I cannot think it possible for men to lack zeal when they know Christ. They would then say, “Did my Saviour shed His blood for me, and shall I fear even to die for Him? Did He come all the way from heaven to earth to save souls, and shall not I also seek to win them for Him?”

Should we have so many lazy preachers if they had more of Christ in their hearts? If they understood more of Jesus, should we have so many slothful, sluggish members in our churches, with so many who can make any excuse rather than labour for Christ, patching up any empty apology for idleness?

No; brethren, if we knew more of the Saviour, if we had more frequent visions of Him, if we saw Him more often on His Cross, and viewed Him more frequently sitting with the crown upon His head, we should say, “I vow revenge against my sloth; all I can do will be too little for so good a Lord –

*“All that I am, and all I have,
Shall be forever Thine;
Whatever my duty bids me give,
My cheerful hands resign.
Yet if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great,
That I should give Him all.”*

Further, if we would grow also in **the grace of brotherly kindness**, we must know more of Christ. O beloved, we must lament that there is too little brotherly kindness in the world! I think true brotherly kindness is always to preach the truth, and tell our brethren where they are wrong, and give them the opportunity of getting set right; to preach whatever we believe to be true, and to maintain what

God has taught us; and then, after all, to say, “Well, brother, you differ from me. I am not infallible; I still love you.”

True love will make us honest, zealous, and affectionate. Why don’t we love one another as much as we ought? It is because we do not love the Saviour enough, and we have not seen enough of Him.

Lastly, there is another grace in which we need to grow; that is, **the grace of humility**. I am sure we would increase in that grace if we lived nearer to Christ.

O humility, most precious thing, you are most rare! He who talks most of it has least of it. O humility, where can I find you? Where are you? Nowhere can I see you, or know what you are, except I sit at the feet of Jesus, and behold myself a lost, ruined sinner purchased by divine love. If you, dear friend, would be truly humble, you must look at your Saviour, for then you will say –

*“Alas! and did my Saviour bleed?
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?”*


You will never feel yourself such a worm as when, by faith, you see your Saviour dying for you; you will never know your own nothingness so well as when you see your Saviour’s greatness. When you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you will be sure to grow in humility.

Think nothing of themselves

Growing Christians think themselves nothing, but, full-grown Christians think themselves less than nothing; and the nearer we get to Jesus, the smaller self will appear to be.

Self and Christ can never come close together. When I stand near self, Christ is small; when I stand near Christ, self is small.

May God grant to you, dear friends, to grow in the knowledge of Christ!

Read the Scriptures more. Seek more the influences of the Holy Spirit upon them; spend more time in devotion; ask God the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh sight of Calvary; be more often on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the garden of suffering, in the hall of agony, under the Cross of crucifixion; live with Jesus, and near to Him; and so, changed from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord, you shall each one of you grow unto the stature of a perfect man or woman in Christ Jesus. 



The Meaning of Heaven

An ethereal spirit world or a tangible new earth?

by Dr David R. Reagan

FOR many years I had little desire to go to Heaven. My only interest in Heaven was prompted by a desire to avoid Hell. I just couldn't get excited about being a disembodied spirit residing in an ethereal world, floating around on a cloud playing a harp.

My interest in Heaven developed slowly over a long period of time. It became a passion, not as a result of my study of prophecy, but because of my growing relationship with the Lord. The more I came to know Him, the more I desired to be with Him.

The New Earth

The reason my study of prophecy did not play the key role in developing my interest in Heaven is because the Bible is strangely silent about the subject. The Bible tells us in great detail what the Millennium will be like, but it gives us almost no detailed information about the eternal state.

What it does tell us often comes as a great surprise to most Christians because the scriptures about Heaven have been so terribly spiritualised.

For example, the Bible plainly says the Redeemed will spend eternity on a new earth.

Isaiah was the first to speak of this truth when he spoke of "the new heavens and the new earth" which will endure forever before the Lord (Isaiah 66:22). This truth is repeated in the book of Revelation where the apostle John says he was shown a new earth, "for the first heaven and the first earth passed away (Revelation 21:1)."

John goes on to describe the New Jerusalem descending to the new earth, "coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2)." And then he states that God Himself will come to live on the new earth: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among

them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them (Revelation 21:3)."

This truth had already been revealed to the Old Testament prophets. While being taken on a prophetic tour of the millennial Temple, Ezekiel was told by his guide (the Lord Jesus in a pre-incarnate appearance): "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever (Ezekiel 43:7)."

The Redeemed are going to dwell forever in new bodies on a new earth in a New Jerusalem in the presence of Almighty God and His Son, Jesus. Heaven will come to earth!

The New Jerusalem

The most detailed information which the Scriptures give about Heaven pertains to our eternal abode – the New Jerusalem. Twenty verses in Chapter 21 of Revelation are devoted to a description of it.

The information contained in Revelation 21 is not the first reference in the Bible to the New Jerusalem. It is mentioned in Hebrews 11:10 as a city "whose architect and builder is God." Jesus made a reference to it that is recorded in John 14:1-4. He called it His "Father's house," and He said He would prepare a place in it for His Church.

Jesus is currently expanding, embellishing, and beautifying this house which God the Father designed and built. Jesus is preparing it for His bride, just as in Old Testament times a bridegroom would add a room on to his father's house to accommodate himself and his bride.

The city is described in Revelation as beautifully decorated, like "a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2)." Later, John actually refers to the city as the bride of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9), because the city contains the bride of Christ, His Church.

I believe this implies that at the end of the Millennium all the Redeemed will be taken off the earth and placed in the new Jerusalem which will most likely be suspended in the heavens. From that vantage point we will watch as God burns up this earth and reshapes it like a hot ball of wax into a new earth, a perfected earth like the one which God created in the beginning. Then, we will be lowered down to that new earth inside the new Jerusalem.

The city will be spectacular in both size and appearance. It will be in the form of a cube that is 2 500 kilometres in every direction! And it will reflect "the glory of God (Revelation 21:11,16)."

The Size of the City

The incredible size means the city would stretch from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Atlantic coast of America to Colorado. It would also extend 2 500 kilometres into the atmosphere.

This tremendous extension of the city vertically into the air is a clue that the new earth may be considerably larger than the current earth. Otherwise, the city would not be proportional to its surroundings.

Would such a city be able to adequately accommodate all the Redeemed? That's a good question. The best answer I have ever run across is the one provided by Dr Henry Morris in his book *The Revelation Record*.

Dr Morris postulates the total number of Redeemed might be as many as 20 billion. He further guesses that approximately 75 percent of the new Jerusalem might be devoted to streets, parks and public buildings. Can 20 billion people be squeezed into only 25 percent of the space of this city?

The answer is yes! In fact, it can be done easily. Each person would have a cubical block with about 75 acres of surface on each face. We are talking about an im-

mense city!

This assumes, of course, that our new glorified bodies will be immune to the current law of gravity, as are the bodies of angels. This is a safe assumption, for Philippians 3:10&11 says that our glorified bodies will be like the body of Jesus after His resurrection, and His body was not subject to gravity, as evidenced by His ascension into Heaven.

This is the reason the city will be so tall. We will be able to utilise and enjoy all levels of it. There will be vertical streets as well as horizontal ones.

The Beauty of the City

And what streets they will be! The Bible says they will be “pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:21).” In fact, the whole city will be made of pure gold with the appearance of clear glass (Revelation 21:18).

The city will sit on a foundation made of 12 layers of precious stones (Revelation 21:19&20). Each layer will feature the name of one of the 12 apostles (Revelation 21:14). The city will be surrounded by a jasper wall over 70 metres high (Revelation 21:17). There will be 12 gates, three on each side, and each one will be named for one of the tribes of Israel (Revelation 21:12).

And yes, the gates will be “pearly gates,” each one consisting of one huge pearl (Revelation 21:21).

Best of all, God the Father and Jesus will both reside in the city with us (Revelation 21:22). The Shekinah glory of God will illuminate the city constantly, and thus there will be no night nor will there ever be any need for any type of artificial light or the light of the sun (Revelation 22:5).

The throne of God and His Son will be in the city, and “a river of the water of life, clear as crystal” will flow down the middle of the city’s main street with the tree of life growing on both sides of the river, yielding 12 kinds of fruit – a different fruit each month (Revelation 22:1&2).

That’s it. God’s Word only gives us a glimpse of Heaven. But what a tantalising glimpse it is! It’s a glimpse of perfect peace and joy and beauty.

The Activities of Heaven

What will we do for eternity? Again, the Word is strangely silent. All it says is that we “shall serve Him (Revelation 22:3).”

I have fantasised a lot about our Heavenly activities. I can imagine us spending a great deal of our time in worship, singing the psalms of King David, with him directing us. I think it is likely that our talents will be magnified, and we will be

able to sing or paint or write with a majesty and scope we never imagined possible – and all to the glory of God!

Surely we will spend considerable time in the study of God’s Word. Think of studying the gospel of John with the apostle John as the teacher! I thrill to the thought of Jesus teaching the Old Testament, even as He did to His disciples following His resurrection (Luke 24:44&45). The Word of God is infinite in its depth, and I believe we will continue learning from it forever.

As we study the Word, I believe we will grow in spiritual maturity in the likeness of Jesus. And since God is infinite, no matter how much we grow in His likeness, there will just be that much more growing ahead of us. In this regard, I suspect that our spiritual growth will pick up where it left off in this life.

Sometimes, I really get far out in my thinking about Heaven. For example, I can imagine the Lord giving us the opportunity to see “instant video replays” of great events in Bible history. I hope so. I would like to see the dividing of the Red Sea, the destruction of Jericho, and the resurrection of Lazarus.

And what about tours of the universe? Surely we will be able to travel through space in our glorified bodies and see the miracles of God’s creation up close. Imagine visiting all the planets in our galaxy as well as touring thousands of other galaxies!

But what does it mean in Revelation 22:3 where it says we will serve God as His “bond-servants?” I’m not sure. I suppose it means we will be given productive work to do. What that work will be I can’t say for sure. But there is a hint in Revelation 22:5 where it says we will reign with the Lord “forever and ever.”

To reign implies, of necessity, that we must reign over someone. Who will that be? Again, there is a intriguing clue. Revelation 21:24-27 refers to “nations” that will live on the new earth outside the New Jerusalem. Revelation 22:2 indicates that the people composing these nations will be in fleshly bodies, for it says that the leaves of the tree of life will be used for “the healing of the nations.”

Who are these “nations?” This is one of the greatest mysteries of Bible prophecy. There are as many different guesses as there are commentaries on the book of Revelation.

Could they be the Redeemed who accept Jesus during the Millennium? Nothing is said about the ultimate destiny of those

who are saved during the Millennium. No promises are made to them of glorified bodies.

I don’t know the answer. It is one of those areas where we look into a dimly lit mirror and will not understand fully until we stand “face to face” with the Lord (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Heavenly Fellowship

This brings me to the greatest blessing of Heaven. Revelation 22:4 says we shall see the face of God!

The Word says in Exodus 33:20 that no man has ever seen the face of God. But we will be given that privilege when we fellowship with Him in Heaven.

And that is really what Heaven is all about. We will experience an intimacy with the Lord that transcends anything possible in this life. We were created for fellowship with God (John 4:23), and that purpose will reach its zenith in the eternal state as we live in God’s presence.

That is why Paul wrote, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).” He went on to explain that to continue living in the flesh meant the opportunity for fruitful labour in the Lord’s kingdom. But he still had a desire to depart this life, for that departure would open the door for sweet, intimate, personal fellowship with the Lord (Philippians 1:22&23).

What about you? Are you clinging to this world, or do you yearn for Heaven?

The more you come to know the Lord, the more you will love Him. And the more you love Him, the more You will desire to be with Him.

That’s only natural. We always desire to be with those whom we love.

Longing for Heaven

I love my wife dearly. We have been married for more than 40 years. I have to travel a lot. I call her every night I’m on the road to tell her that I love her. I send her mushy love cards. And when I have to be gone for an extended period, I send her gifts like bouquets of flowers.

I love to talk with my wife by phone. I love to send her love notes. I love to surprise her with gifts. But none of these are substitutes for being with her! When you love someone you want to be with them.

In like manner, I love to fellowship with the Lord in worship, in Bible study, and in prayer. But these spiritual activities are no substitute for actually being with the Lord.

Because I love Him, I want to be with Him. Personal, intimate fellowship with the Lord – that is the essence of Heaven.

May it become a reality very soon! 

Going Fishing

by David Wilkerson

I WANT to speak with you about a unique experience that is shared primarily by those who yearn to go deeper in Christ. It has to do with a tremendous spiritual letdown that usually follows periods of fresh anointing and divine revelation. Only those men and women of God who have had a unique touch from Him can understand the deadlock and dark plunges that follow spiritual highs.

It is the testimony of spiritual giants in all ages, that the most severe temptations, the most oppressive battles – follow soon after the greatest spiritual experiences.

Paul's thorn in the flesh came after his greatest revelation – soon after he had ascended into the third heaven and witnessed things too awesome to describe.

Daniel set himself to pray, and in a spirit of intercession he was given wisdom and revelation. Freshly anointed with the Spirit of Almighty God, he was cast into a lion's den.

The three Hebrew Children entered into a pact to live holy, separated lives. They became spiritually and physically wise and enlightened beyond all their peers. It got them a fiery furnace. Their spiritual hunger resulted in revelation, which in turn brought on an even deeper spiritual test.

Christ Himself could not escape the inevitable test that follows great anointing. He was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil immediately after the Spirit descended upon Him as He came out of baptismal waters. He went directly from revelation to temptation.

When preaching at a convention in Dallas, Texas, at the conclusion of my message concerning the sufferings of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord came upon me in a mighty way, literally taking possession of my entire being and through my lips began to exalt the Lord Jesus. Only three words were spoken - "Glory, Honour, and Praise." Over and over, higher and higher, the words poured forth like a rushing river.

I was suddenly swept away in that river of praise, and I felt my spiritual man leaving the auditorium. My praises were now joined to those of angels, of heavenly

hosts around the throne. Hundreds sat in silence as I collapsed in the pulpit.

Although my physical body lay prostrate in that auditorium, my spiritual man was no longer on this earth. I was with the worshipping hosts near God's throne. What freedom I felt to praise. What marvellous light – so warm and comforting.

I thought, "This must be what saints of all ages have seen of the heavenlies." In the spirit, I was rejoicing, falling down before him crying out, "Glory, honour, and praise. Worthy is the Lamb."

I cannot describe that experience fully. In His presence there was no thought of seeing Moses, or Abraham, or any of the patriarch, not even Paul. There was no desire to seek out family or friends. I saw clearly why there would be no marrying, I saw how unimportant the question is, "Will we know each other in heaven?"

None of these things mattered. There was no concern for streets of gold, or mansions, or even reward. Christ was everything – all-consuming, all fulfilling, all-satisfying. There was no room for anything more. No earthly memories. No human attractions. In His presence there is fullness of joy, at His right hand there are pleasures evermore. It was the revelation of Christ in eternal glory that was so overpowering. Truly, in Him is the fullness of the Godhead.

The ecstasy of heaven

I knew at that moment that the joy and ecstasy of heaven is not static or level. The joys, the revelation of who Christ is will be ever unfolding, all through eternity. We will have an ever-expanding capacity to enjoy His glory throughout eternity – with newer and greater joys and revelations. We will grow in the knowledge of Him, and that revelation will give us an ever-growing sense of joy and peace. There is a peace that truly passes all understanding.

I did not want to leave that glorious scene. My praises had become one with the eternal voices of worship – while multitudes worshipped, it seemed as but one grand and glorious voice. It was awesome! I began to realise how little we know of the glory of praise, and how our praises blend



with the praises of all saints of all ages into one glorious, eternal chorus.

And what glorious light! It permeated everything! Christ radiated, not rays of light, but diffused light that brought life, comfort, joy, and a sense of nearness to Himself.

I knew that what I was experiencing was not a result of any personal holiness or spiritual goodness on my part. It was simply God answering my desperate hunger and my inner cry to know Him better – that alone was allowing me to taste just a little bit of His glory.

When I awakened and sat up, my wife was relieved. People thought for a moment I may have had a heart attack. But she was at ease when she saw the glory of the Lord on my face. The afterglow was so powerful, it was a long time before we spoke a word to each other.

That night I thought I could never again go down into a valley of despair. Hadn't I seen a glimpse of His glory? Was it not the greatest single revelation in my lifetime? Had I not set my heart to abandon all fleshly ways, to go all the way with God?



Certainly some would think such an experience is emotional, too charismatic, or even unscriptural. But no one can take from me what I experienced – it was too sacred and awesome.

It was less than a week later that I entered into the driest six weeks of my life. I seemed to go from the heavenlies, to agonising emptiness. Not that I once doubted His love for me. On the contrary, I loved Him more than ever. My salvation was never in question.

I had thought tremendous growth would soon follow. I would increase in spiritual revelation by leaps and bounds. My hunger for Him would be answered by ever-increasing divine wisdom and biblical revelation. The Scriptures would open more easily. Prayer would be more glorious.

Instead, the heavens seemed to shut on me. My prayer life became stifled, and a spiritual dryness crept in. I felt like I was stymied, as though I was losing spiritual ground.

Certainly God was not in hiding, for He has promised to never leave or forsake us. Yet He seemed to have stopped the flow of spiritual energy. But deep within me I

could sense a purpose in the trial. I knew I was experiencing a trial common to many others.

The greatest revelation the disciples would ever receive focused on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was the first day of the week, and the disciples were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Suddenly, there He was, in full resurrection glory – victorious over death, hell, and the devil. He showed them His hands, His feet, His pierced side. Then He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

What glorious truths were coming forth. Revelation upon revelation. A new anointing, a new commission to go forth in His name, power to bind and loose, victory over the power of sin.

It was too much for the disciples – especially Thomas. He reacted with passive despair. Peter said, “I go a fishing.” Other disciples went with him.

It was as if Peter wanted nothing more to do with the high cost of revelation. Had he not failed one test already? From that proud boast that he would never forsake his Lord, to despair of denial. Peter could not take it all in.

I think I know nearly exactly what he said to himself as he headed back to his fishing nets - “I’ll never make it, I’m too dull to understand the way God works. I can’t comprehend the cross, and how will I ever understand His resurrection? I’m making no spiritual progress – after all this time I’ve spent with Him, I have understood so little. Let those who are brighter than me go on with Him. I’ll always love Him, but no more delving into the deep thoughts of Christ. I just want to do my own thing, in my own quiet way.”

Reacting to spiritual letdowns

In one way or another most of us react to spiritual letdowns in the same manner of speaking. In our frustration we mope about, getting lazy about spirituals – neither hot nor cold. We move into spiritual vacuum. We end up wanting to pray, yet with no motivation to do it. We are pricked in our conscience because of our neglect of His Word, but the desire to dig in has gone. It is a fretful condition to be in.

We know the Lord has called us to go on in Him, to go deeper – but because we do not understand our despair, we fall back into our old ways. We get stagnant. Worst

of all, we begin to feel guilty for our lethargy. Our fears mount that we will never measure up to what God wants for us.

So we go back to busyness - some to shopping sprees, others to their hobbies. Some seek release in building something or starting a new project. The time once spent with God in growing, is wasted on some form of “fishing” – and in an ever-increasing bondage to details. We become frivolous and indecisive.

How many times I’ve told the Lord and myself - “I’ll never understand the things of God like I should. The more I read, the less I seem to comprehend. I am so dull, so spiritually blind, I can’t seem to retain what I read and hear. The hungrier I get, the less I seem to grow. I seem to take two steps back for every step forward. Why is it that other men of God get such clear revelations and they know so much about Christ – and I struggle, fast, pray, and see so little. Lord, am I making any progress at all?”

Peter did go fishing, and at the Lord’s command he cast his net on the opposite side and gathered a tremendous harvest of fish. Later, while Peter separated his catch, Jesus said to him, “Do you love Me more than these?” In other words, “Peter, if you love Me, get back to where you were. Follow ME – Feed My Sheep. Stop doing your own thing – wake up! If you love Me - that love will turn you around and get you back on the road of growth and usefulness.”

Are you going through a most difficult right now? Are you spinning your spiritual wheels, in the doldrums of dryness? Are you finding it hard to even understand or explain what you are going through?

I have one question for you: do you really love Him? That is all He asks of you, a love that obeys. You are experiencing growth pains. It’s all a part of becoming mature in Christ. God has His hand on you more than ever. Satan knows it, and is trying everything within his power to sidetrack you with lies and distortions.

Move on in blind faith until the joy returns – and it will. Ride out your storm, and don’t worry about measuring up. You will come through on the other side realising how much you have grown. Don’t ever again let your own deadlocks or dry spells bring you to despair. Rejoice in them – they are part of God’s plan to bring us into His purpose and thoughts.

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God shall Himself perfect you

by Andrew Murray (1828-1917)

“The God of all grace, who called you unto His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, shall Himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. To Him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 5:10&11).”

THROUGH suffering to glory: this is the keynote of the First Epistle of Peter. The word suffer occurs 16 times, the word glory 14 times. In its closing words the readers are reminded of all its teaching, as he writes to them: “The God of all grace, who called you unto His eternal glory... after you have suffered a little while...”

In no Epistle of the New Testament are the two aspects of Christ's death – that He suffered for us and that we are to suffer with Him and like Him – so clearly and closely linked together. Fellowship with Christ, likeness to Christ, manifested in suffering, is the point of view from which Peter would have us look on life as the path to glory.

To be a partaker of the sufferings and the glory of Christ is the Christian's privilege. He was perfected through suffering by God: the same God perfects us for suffering and glorifying Him in it.

“...God... shall Himself perfect... you.” In God alone is perfection. In Him is all perfection. And all perfection comes from Him. When we consider the wondrous perfection there is in the sun, in the laws it obeys, and in the blessings it dispenses, and remember that it owes all to the will of the Creator, we acknowledge that its perfection is from God.

And so, through the whole of nature, to the tiniest insect that floats in the sunbeam and the humblest little flower that basks in its light, everything owes its beauty to God alone. All His works praise Him. His work is perfect.

And have we not here in nature the open

secret of Christian perfection? It is God who must perfect us! “God... shall Himself perfect... you.” What is revealed in nature is the pledge of what is secured to us in grace.

“For it became Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author (leader) of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10).”

It was becoming that God should show that He is the God who works out perfection amid the weakness and suffering of a human life. This is what constitutes the very essence of salvation, to be perfected of God, to yield oneself to the God, for whom and of whom are all things, Himself to perfect us.

God has planted deep in the heart of man the desire after perfection. Is it not this that stirs the spirit of the artist and the poet, of the discoverer and the craftsman? Is it not the nearest possible approach to this that wakens admiration and enthusiasm? And is it only in grace that all thought and all joy of present perfection is to be banished? Certainly not, if God's Word be true.

The promise is sure and bright for this our earthly life: “God... shall Himself perfect... you.” The “Himself perfect you” can refer to nothing but the present daily life. God shall Himself put you into the right position, and in that position then establish and strengthen you, so as to fit you perfectly for the life you have to live and the work you have to do.

We find it so hard to believe this, because we do not know what it means. “You are not under the law, but under grace

(Romans 6:14).” The law demands what we cannot give or do. Grace never asks what it does not give; and so the Father never asks what we cannot do. He Himself who raised Jesus from the dead is always ready, in that same resurrection power, to perfect us to do His will. Let us believe and be still until our soul is filled with the blessed truth, and we know that it will be done to us.

Let us learn to know this God and claim Him, in this His character, as your own: “God shall **Himself** perfect you!”

Worship and adore Him here until your faith is filled with the assurance: my God Himself is perfecting me. Regard yourself as clay in the hands of the Great Artist, spending all His thought and time and love to make you perfect.

Yield yourself in voluntary, loving obedience to His will and His Spirit. Yield yourself in full confidence into His very hands, and let the words ring through your whole being: God shall Himself perfect you, perfectly fit you for all He would have you be or do. Let every perfect bud or flower you meet whisper its message: only let God work; only wait upon God; God shall Himself perfect you.

Believer, have you longed for this? O claim it, claim it now. Or rather, claim now in very deed this God as your God. Just as the writer to the Hebrews, and Peter in this Epistle, gather up all their varied teaching into this one central promise, “God shall Himself perfect you,” so there may come in the life of the believer a moment when he gathers up all his desires and efforts, all his knowledge of God's truth, and all his faith in God's promises,

concentrates them in one simple act of surrender and trust, and yielding himself wholly to do His will, dares to claim God as the God Who perfects him. And his life becomes one doxology of adoring love: To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ☩





Don't let a secret ruin your life

by J. Lee Grady

IDON'T know exactly why, but many people confide in me. I can't count the times people have told me, "I don't know why I'm telling you this, but..." and then they share a horrible moment from their past. They finish by saying: "You're the first person I've ever told."

At a recent men's retreat in South America, dozens of men came to the altar one evening and asked for prayer because they had been victims of sexual abuse or they struggled with a pornography addiction. Most of them told me they had never shared their secret with anyone because it was too embarrassing.

After they admitted what happened – often through tears – they found indescribable relief. It was as if a huge weight they'd carried for years just dropped off their shoulders.

We know what the Bible says about secrets. Whether we are hiding a sin we committed or suffering from the shame of something done to us, transparency is the path to freedom.

James 5:16 says: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

The devil thrives in darkness. Satan loves it when we keep our sins, failures and embarrassing moments locked up in a vacuum-sealed emotional compartment.

As long as no one else knows our pain, our enemy can exploit it.

When no one else knows about our issues, Satan whispers his lies without being challenged. His arsenal is full of accusations. He tells us: "No one else struggles with this," "You are the only one with this problem" or "Anyone with your problem is a terrible Christian – you might as well give up."

Good for the soul

Have you heard those words? If you have never brought your pain into the light, unlock your heart and allow the light of God's love into your darkness.

The old adage says, "Confession is good for the soul," but it's good for your physical health, too. Here are nine of the most common secrets people are afraid to reveal:

Abuse: Some victims of abuse were warned if they ever told anyone about what happened, they would be harmed. No wonder so many people hide this ugly secret.

Abortion: Our culture minimises the emotional effects of abortion, and some people even push others to abort. Yet abortion is often accompanied by overwhelming guilt – for the woman who ends a pregnancy or for a man who is responsible for it.

Bullying: Some people have been marked for life by verbal abuse – toxic words spoken by parents, classmates, teachers or relatives. God can shatter the power of these hateful word curses.

Rejection or abandonment: People who have been abandoned by parents or spouses are tempted to blame themselves – and then they hang a huge scarlet "R," for "Rejected," around their neck for the rest of their lives.

Sexual sin: I will never forget the moment when a man wept in my arms and admitted he had been unfaithful to his wife more than eight years earlier. He had carried that weight for too long, and he assumed God would never forgive him. The blood of Jesus is powerful enough to forgive; today his marriage is healed, and he is active in ministry.

Sexual confusion: Some Christians lack compassion for people who struggle with same-sex feelings or gender confusion. But the fact is that people wrestle with their sexual identity for a variety of reasons. If the church does not become a safe place to talk about these problems, people will simply seek help from the world.

Panic attacks, anxiety or unnatural fears: Some people are tormented by embarrassing fears or worries. It's hard to admit such quirks to others, so we suffer in silence.


Depression: People who suffer from depression often choose to hide their sadness behind a mask – since "good Christians" are supposedly happy all the time! But hiding depression is not only bad for you – it is bad for the people around you. You need to talk about it.

Addictions: Many Christians never grow in their faith because they are hiding a secret addiction—to either prescription medicine, alcohol, gambling, nicotine or marijuana.

The only way to silence such voices of confusion, fear and rejection is to bring your pain into the light. Open up and share what you are wrestling with.

When you decide to open your heart, don't just talk to anyone. It is best to share with a mature Christian who has a track record of confidentiality and compassion.

In some cases, it is also good to join a support group with others who have the same struggles.

Find those who will listen without judging, speak words of forgiveness and help you receive God's amazing mercy! 



The spirit of the new covenant

by Zac Poonen

IN the Old Testament, just after the giving of the ten commandments (Exodus 20), comes a beautiful ordinance that God gave to the Israelites that aptly describes the difference between the old and the new covenants. There, in Exodus 21:1-6, we read of the Hebrew slave who served six years because he was a slave and was compelled to serve; and who then served his master on a different basis – because he loved to do so (Exodus 21:5).

This was God's postscript to the law, prophetically portraying the spirit of the coming new covenant.

The six years of compulsory slavery corresponds to serving God legally. The seventh year onwards corresponds to the

"Sabbath rest" that God has ordained for His people (Hebrews 4:9).

Under the law, the people could rest on the seventh day only after working for six days. But when God created Adam, He gave him a day of rest first and then six days of work (for God's seventh day was Adam's first day of existence).

This was to teach that all man's labour for the Lord was to come out of a relationship of love and fellowship with Him. Otherwise it would be legalistic and worthless.

The fact that we live in the new covenant age does not mean that we always live by the new covenant spirit. It is possible to have understood the message of "victory over sin" and yet to live by legalistic principles. In Romans 7:1-6, we see that even

the man who has come through Romans 6 (the chapter that presents the gospel of victory) can still be in bondage to legalism.

In practice too, we find this to be true. Many who have come to an upright and good moral life are yet living by the principles of the law.

It is possible to live an externally righteous life – from wrong motives. Under the old covenant, the Israelites had to keep the law, but the motive with which they kept it could not be judged by the law.

Most people kept the law out of fear of judgement. Others kept it out of hope of reward. Both these motives are however inconsistent with the spirit of the new covenant. In the new covenant, the spirit matters more than the letter (Romans 7:6). It is possible to keep all the commandments and for the Lord to rebuke us saying, "I have something against you. You are no longer keeping My commandments out of love for Me, as you did at first. Therefore repent (Revelation 2:4 – Paraphrase)."

When love was not the motive, it was not a crime under the law. But under the new covenant, this is so serious, that the leader in Ephesus was in danger of losing his anointing, if he did not repent. Do we realise that it is not enough to keep the commandments if our motive in keeping them is not right?

A good testimony

When we cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh, we get a good testimony before men. But it is only when we cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the spirit as well, that God bears testimony about us. This is the way of perfecting holiness, as 2 Corinthians 7:1 makes plain. There is "iniquity in our holy things (Exodus 28:38)." What is this iniquity but the wrongness of our motives in our pursuit of righteousness?

Beneath this iniquity lies the far more serious evil of seeking the honour of men. It is when we seek the honour of others (particularly in the church) that we are careful to keep our external life in order. This is the evil that we must be quick to detect behind our legalism, or else it will destroy us.

In the parable of the 10 virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), it is clear that none of them were "harlots." They were all virgins. They had all cleansed themselves from the filthiness of the flesh. Therefore they had a good testimony before men. Their lamps were burning and men saw their good works

and praised them (Matthew 5:16).

Little did men know that some of these virgins had no inner life. Although all 10 appeared spiritual in the eyes of undiscerning unbelievers, yet God could see that only five of them had truth (reality) in their innermost being (Psalm 51:6).

The other five were legalistic, keeping the letter of the law, content with their testimony before men. Little did they realise that they would be left behind in the rapture. The Bridegroom said to them, "I do not know you." He did not call them "workers of iniquity," as He called another group (Matthew 7:23), for these five were not workers of iniquity. Yet, they had not partaken of the spirit of Christ in their inner life.

The Lord told them (as it were), "I do not have any fellowship with your spirit. Your spirit is the spirit of legalism, even though your external life is upright. You are the Pharisees of the new covenant". This is the implication behind the words, "I do not know you."

Radiate the Spirit of Christ

It is possible to keep the letter of the New Testament commandments and yet not to radiate the spirit of Christ. For example, when another has done us some evil, we can obey the word that says that we are to repay evil with good. And we can go to that man, perhaps, even with an expensive gift, to show our love to him, and to do him good, according to the commandment.

Yet our spirit, in our approach to him, may be saying these unspoken words, "Here I am, the great saint, coming to do good to you, an evil sinner". In such a situation, even though we may have spent much money buying that gift, and gone to much pains to do that "good" act, yet our offering is not a fragrant aroma to God, for our "self" has not been sacrificed (see Ephesians 5:2).

Consider another situation. A brother may sit quietly, without opening his mouth, at a time when his wife is upset and angry with him. It may appear to an undiscerning outsider there, that the husband is the "saint" and the wife the "sinner."

But God, who weighs the spirits of men, may have an altogether different opinion about both of them. For the unspoken words of the husband's spirit, even while

his mouth is shut, may be, "Lord, I thank Thee that I have victory over anger, unlike my wife".

He may not realise, that his defeated wife may be more acceptable to God than he, the self-righteous Pharisee. Truly, the harlots and thieves will get into the kingdom before the Pharisees.

Losing one's temper is certainly unbecoming of a Christian. But so is Phariseism.

What we must do is to cleanse our spirit from the filthiness of the Pharisee that it can so easily be polluted with in such situations. This is the way of salvation.

In the parable of the prodigal son, we have the attitudes of Christ and of the Pharisee, clearly portrayed in the persons of the father and the elder son. The father was delighted to see his younger son repent and come back, even though the lad may not have got victory over his sins yet.

The Pharisaical older son, however, could not welcome his younger brother in the same way. If he'd had his way, he would have put his younger brother in the servants' quarters for at least a year to test whether his repentance was genuine or not.

This Pharisaical spirit in our flesh is most evident, in our attitude towards those who have harmed us in some way. Even when they apologise for their error, we can still "put them in the servants' quarters" for a while, to test their repentance.

Yet Jesus told us that even if a person sinned against us every two hours in a 12-hour day, and came back each time saying that he had repented, we were to forgive him, without questioning the genuineness of his repentance (Luke 17:4). We were to accept his words at their face value. He may not be genuine, perhaps. But that is for God to judge – not us.

We can only see the outward appearance. God sees the heart.

In the day of judgement we shall discover that the reason why we did something was far more important than what we did (1 Corinthians 4:5). The elder brother had "never disobeyed a single commandment" of his father's (Luke 15:29). Yet we find him at the end of the story outside the father's house (the church), because his spirit was the spirit of legalism.

He was a virgin, but he had no oil in his vessel. His motivation was finally exposed. He had served for reward. He tells his father, "Even though I obeyed all your commandments, yet you never rewarded me!"

Jesus warned His disciples against this attitude, when Peter asked Him (after the rich young ruler had turned away from Him), "What shall we get, who have forsaken everything (unlike the rich young ruler) (Matthew 19:27)?"

Jesus replied with the parable of the landowner, hiring labourers. Five sets of labourers were hired by this landowner. Four of them were hired on the basis of a specific contract. The last group alone came without any contract (Matthew 20:1-16).

This is the point of the parable. The first group worked for the specific wage of one denarius (verses 2). The second, third and the fourth groups also worked for reward, although the amount was not specified (verses 3-5). These four groups of labourers are all symbolic of those who keep the commandments or who serve God or make external sacrifices for Him – but who are secretly hoping for some reward for it all – perhaps the carnal joy of sitting on a throne in the millennium, or of wearing a "crown" on their heads; or perhaps even what looks like a "spiritual" desire, of being in the bride of Christ.

All such Christians are working for a reward. And that is the spirit of the old covenant.

The crown he is looking forward to

The only reward that a truly spiritual man desires is the reward of partaking more of God's holy and loving nature and of a closer fellowship with Him. This is the "crown" that he is looking forward to; and this is the reward that Jesus is coming with (Revelation 22:12). And this reward will be in exact proportion to the faithfulness with which a man has worked out his salvation, cleansing himself, not only of the filthiness of the flesh, but also of the filthiness of the spirit – particularly the filthiness of the Phariseism in his spirit.

This is why the degree of our glory, when we are resurrected, will be as different from each other's as the brightness of the various stars (1 Corinthians 15:41&42). For a righteous God will reward each "virgin" righteously – according to what He saw, and not what men saw (2 Corinthians 5:10).

In the above parable, only the last group of labourers came to work, without any contract and without any promise or hope of reward (Matthew 20:7). They came in

The spirit of the new covenant

Continued...

the spirit of the new covenant. Therefore they were rewarded first – and received (proportionately speaking) far more than all the others (see Matthew 20:16).

The first group of labourers, on the other hand, were exactly like the Pharisaical older brother of the prodigal son – self-righteous and legalistic and expecting to be rewarded.

Jesus is our Example and Forerunner, in this new covenant. And He certainly did not keep His Father's commandments in order to gain some reward or some position or honour – either now or in eternity. Much less did He keep the commandments, because He was afraid of being punished by His Father.

We read that He endured the cross, only because He thought of the joy that was set before Him – that supreme joy of fellowship with the Father. In the Father's presence alone is there fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11).

Fellowship with His Father was what Jesus desired all the days of His life. Therefore He cried with loud cries and tears that He might be saved from “death” – that is, from a break of fellowship with His Father (Hebrews 5:7).

No other way

For 33 years on earth, He had preserved Himself from “death.” Finally, in Gethsemane, when He saw that His fellowship with His Father would still be broken on the cross for three hours (when He would have to suffer the pain of being forsaken by God for our sins), He cried out again, seeking to find if there was some other way. But there was no other.

And in love for us, having counted the cost, He went to the cross and paid the greatest price that He could ever pay.

It is only when we partake of this spirit of Christ that eagerly desires fellowship with the Father, that we can be freed from legalism. Freedom from legalism – from straining at gnats and swallowing camels – can never be attained by any techniques or by any method.

There is only one way. That is the way described in 2 Corinthians 3:18. There, Paul, after contrasting the old and the new covenants in the whole chapter (verses 6-17), finally states that the Holy Spirit has come to show us the glory of Jesus in the mirror of God's word, and then to transform us into that same likeness.

The Holy Spirit desires, first of all, to show us how Jesus lived on this earth. He was born under the law (Galatians 4:4). Yet, when Jesus meditated on those commandments in the law, He saw more in those commandments than any Israelite before Him had ever seen.

Jesus saw that the command not to commit adultery also meant that one should not lust after a woman in one's heart, and the command not to commit murder also meant not to be angry in one's heart, etc. There was a great desire in Jesus' soul, when He was on earth, to obey the Father perfectly, and not just according to the letter of the law. Thus, although He was born under the law (Galatians 4:4), He inaugurated a new covenant.

To follow Jesus in this way means to meditate on the Scriptures as He meditated on them. Then we shall find more in God's commandments than others find in them.

The words that Jesus spoke were spirit and life (John 6:63). This is why many could not understand Him when He was on earth and this is also why many cannot understand Him today. God gives light only to those who love the truth. He allows all others to be deceived. This is the plain meaning of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

When we meditate on God's word, with a wholehearted love for the truth, we shall no longer congratulate ourselves for keeping the letter of the law, but judge ourselves often, for not having kept it in the right spirit.

In the 10 commandments, it was possible for man to keep nine of them, but impossible to keep the tenth – for the 10th commandment dealt with covetousness, which was an inward matter. The law could never discover whether a man coveted in his heart, and could not therefore punish a man even if he did.

This is why Paul, even though he said he was blameless according to the righteousness of the law, yet acknowledged that he could not keep the 10th commandment (compare Philippians 3:6 with Romans 7:7-10).

He was one of the few who were hon-

est enough to acknowledge this. Thus God could lead him further into the new covenant.

The 10th commandment was placed there by God to test man's honesty. Those who were honest enough to acknowledge having failed in this, would be led on. Only to such would the law become a “school master” to lead them to Christ and the new covenant (Galatians 3:24). The rest, who concealed their inward sin, would remain under the old covenant.

This is the main reason why many Christians remain defeated today. They are not honest enough to acknowledge their inward failures. They remain content with the honour of men. They do not love the truth about themselves. Thus God allows them to be deceived.

To test his honesty


It was never God's intention that man should live by rules and regulations. The law was not given to lead man to life, but only to show man's impotence and to test his honesty (as we have just seen). Therefore after Christ came, the Law was set aside and a new covenant was ushered in (Hebrews 8:7,8,13).

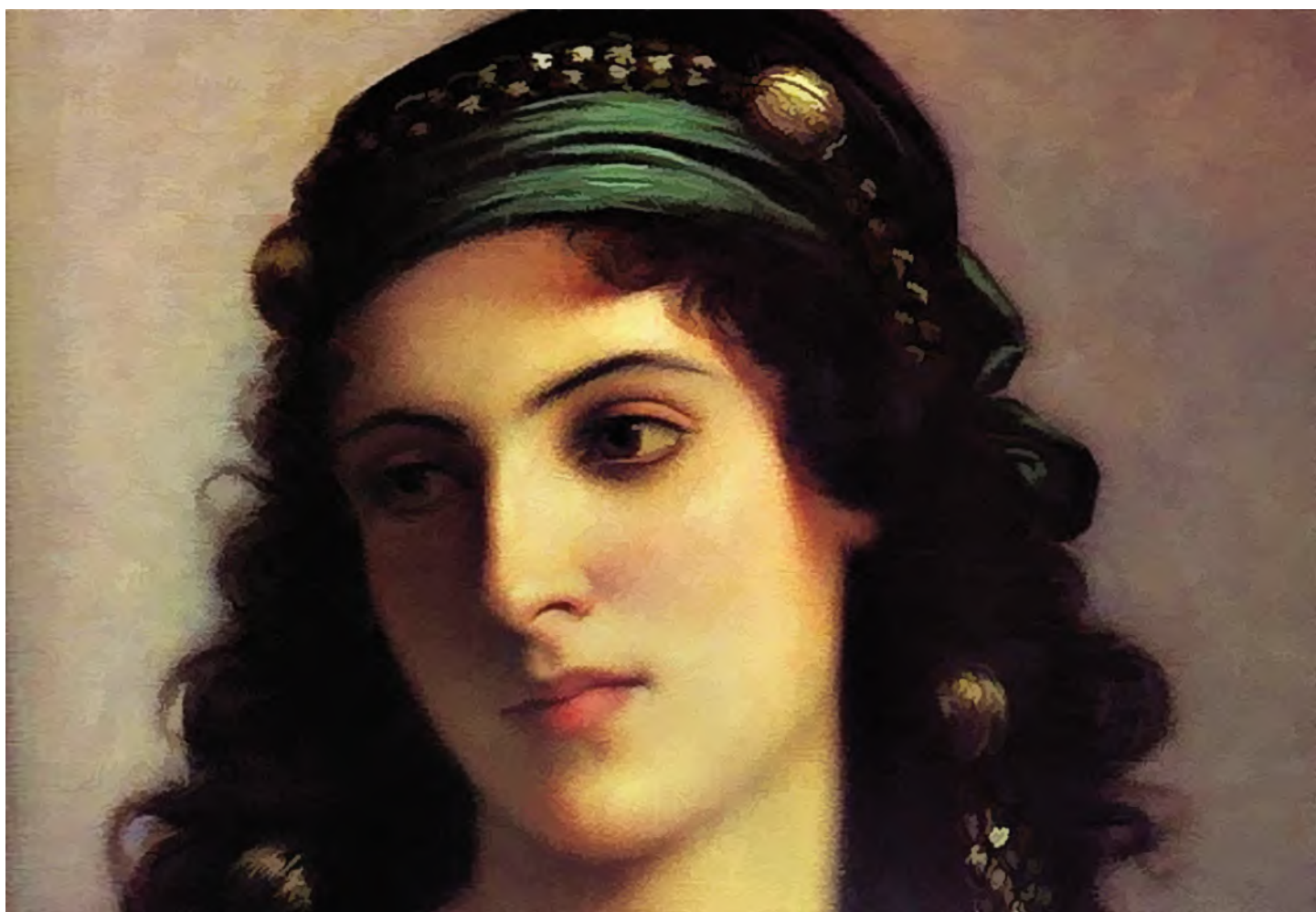
When God placed Adam in Eden, He told him not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In other words, man was not to live by a rule book of “good and evil,” avoiding all that was evil, and doing all that was good. This is where true Christianity differs from false Christianity and also from all other religions.

God intended man to live by the tree of life – by the leading of God's Holy Spirit who would tell him what was pleasing to God and what was not (see 1 Corinthians 6:12&10:13). To live by the knowledge of good and evil is to live by the law. This can only bring us into bondage, without understanding the spirit behind the Law.

We can come to a righteous life externally (“become virgins”), by keeping the commandments externally. But the only way that we can get oil in our vessels is by cleansing ourselves of the filthiness of the spirit, which no man can see.

Paul, when writing new-covenant truths to the Christians in Ephesus, knew that his words could not give them revelation. So he prayed that their eyes should be opened by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:17&18).

This is what we need to pray for ourselves, too. 



A return to Abigailism

by Greg Hinnant

FOR decades secularism has harmed Christian and traditional womanhood – as it has manhood! As godless feminism has risen, and biblical femininity has fallen.

It's time the daughters of Zion relearn and relive godly womanhood. For that, we need look no further than Abigail.

Let's review Abigail's assets – the qualities that prompted God to approve, anoint, send, use, reward, and honour her (see 1 Samuel 25).

She was wise and insightful (verse 3), as this dramatic story reveals. She was "beautiful" (verse 3) yet not conceited or self-obsessed. She was mismatched but faithful, honouring God by keeping her vows with a dishonourable spouse (verse 3). She was respected by her companions; they came to her, not Nabal, when grave trouble arose (verse 14).

She possessed acumen, quickly assessing and solving the crises resulting from Nabal's provocative message to David

(verses 13&34). She was generous, bringing David's men plenty of food (verse 18). She was ready for action, not shrinking from responsibilities she alone could fulfil (verses 18-20). She was discreet, withholding information from her angry husband until the time was right to speak (verses 19&36).

An inspiring leader, her servants followed her unhesitatingly even at the risk of losing their positions or worse when Nabal discovered they went against his orders (verse 19). She was courageous, risking her life to meet David's 400 angry soldiers who could have easily killed her before she spoke a word (verse 20).

She was humble, prostrating herself before David and, after marrying, asking only to be a servant to his servants (verses 23&24,41). She was an intercessor, "praying" to David and God for the life of her family and servants (verse 28).


She was merciful to the merciless, as her actions saved Nabal despite his unmercifulness to David (verses 10&11,17).

She was a prophetess, or Spirit-filled spokesmen accurately foretelling David what God would do with and for him (verses 28-31).

She was not vengeful, since after God struck Nabal she didn't reproach him for his contemptible behaviour (verses 36&37; also see Exodus 4:24-26).

She was a compliment to David, her character being a mirror image of his. She was a comfort to David, a deep, healing joy after he had endured Michal's hateful, wounding tongue (2 Samuel 6:20-23).

She fulfilled her name, which means "cause of joy," by delighting God, David, and everyone she met! She was the personification of the perfect wife, the proverbial "virtuous woman," or woman of powerful character (Proverbs 31:10-31).

Here is a model of godly womanhood every Christian wife and woman may study and follow. May "Abigailism" spread throughout our churches and land, reversing the gains of godless feminism! 

Five Reasons Satan Hates the Rapture...



by Jonathan Brentner

SATAN hates the pretribulation Rapture, and throughout the history of the church he has sought to either bury the doctrine under layers of false teachings or discredit it. If ever there was a time in which this rings true, it is today. His hostility to it, however, began in the earliest days of the church.

In the book of 1 Thessalonians, Paul promised his readers they would not see the “wrath” of the Lord (1:10, 5:9&10). I believe that “wrath” in these passages refers to the judgements of the tribulation, referred to in the Old Testament as the beginning of the “day of the Lord.”

It’s clear from 1 Thessalonians 5:2 that Paul is writing about the “day of the Lord” judgements, not hell.

With the ink scarcely dry on the parchment of his first letter, false teachers forged a message to the believers in Thessalonica stating that the day of the Lord had already begun. Even though this contradicted what Paul had earlier written to them, it created considerable panic among these new followers of Christ who thought the tribulation had begun (2 Thessalonians 2:1&2).

Do you see what happened? Satan immediately contradicted the apostle’s reassuring message in 1 Thessalonians that Jesus would come for them before this time of wrath. In response, Paul penned a second book to reassure them that the day of the Lord had not yet begun.

Why does Satan hate the Rapture? Scripture gives us several reasons for this.

1. The Rapture Enables Us to Stand Firm

First, the devil hates it because the hope

of Jesus’ imminent return encourages us to persevere in our faith against fierce opposition.

After writing about Jesus’ appearing and the transformation of our “lowly” bodies “to be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20&21),” Paul said this in Philippians 4:1: “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.” The apostle based his admonitions here upon our hope of a glorified body at Jesus’ return.

In Paul’s day, to “stand firm” meant standing strong in a battle; the word pictured a soldier holding his position as the enemy attacked. For us, it denotes persisting in a biblically-centred walk with the Lord in a world hostile to all we believe and hold dear, especially our hope of Jesus’ imminent return

Paul used the same word in Philippians 1:27 to describe believers as “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” in the face of opposition. Such a courageous stance, he says, “is a clear sign to them (the persecutors) of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God (verse 28).”

Our hope in the Rapture strengthens us in the face of persecution.

2. The Rapture Motivates Us to Purity

In 1 John 3:2-3, we read this about the Rapture: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He

is pure.”

Here the apostle John identifies purity as the result of focussing on Jesus and His imminent appearing.

If we walk in the reality that at any moment we could find ourselves in the presence of the Saviour, it will have a refining impact on both our behaviour and thought life.

In 1 John 2:28 the apostle tells us to “abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at his coming.” This warning is for believers who lose sight of Jesus’ imminent appearing and drift away from abiding in Christ. Once in the presence of the Saviour, their lifestyle at the time causes them to back away from His splendour and righteousness.

Let me make clear that I am not at all saying that only those who watch for the Rapture abide in Jesus; however, I am asserting that those who eagerly anticipate it have an additional incentive to do so – one which the devil hates and seeks to eliminate.

3. The Rapture Encourages Steadfast Service

I love how Paul concludes his 1 Corinthians 15 discussion of our future resurrected bodies, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain (verse 58).”

Notice the connection between our work for the Lord and the Rapture. Our anticipation of the immortal bodies we receive at Jesus’ appearing encourages our “steadfast” service for the Lord. This

expectation not only enables us to stand firm, but also inspires us to persevere in our work for the Lord.

For the past 34 years, I have written an adult Sunday school curriculum for David C. Cook. Despite the fact tens of thousands study each of my lessons, I can count on one hand the number of times I have heard from people who have read them. What matters, however, is not the feedback I receive but the certainty that the Lord sees all I do and will reward accordingly when He comes.

4. The Rapture Comforts Us in Sorrow

The Jews in Thessalonica not only chased Paul and Silas out of town, but also persecuted the young church. On top of that, the believers in the city were grief-stricken because some of them had died.

In response, Paul gave them further teaching regarding the Rapture two times telling them “to encourage one another” with his teaching on it (1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11). The hope of Jesus’ return for His followers was something the young believers were to use in comforting “one another.”

Whether we face persecution for our faith or the loss of a loved one in Christ, the Rapture reminds us that a better day is coming, perhaps very soon. This hope comforts us in the worst of times.

5. The Rapture Helps Us Maintain a Healthy Perspective

Although not a verse we typically associate with the Rapture, Colossians 3:4 speaks of a time when we will suddenly find ourselves in glory, “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Imagine walking down a sidewalk one day and your next step is in heaven, in the presence of your Saviour! This verse speaks of a sudden transition from this life to eternity!

Earlier in Colossians 3, Paul encourages us to “seek the things that are above” and to focus “on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth” where our lives are “hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3).” How do we retain such a perspective? We remember that someday Jesus will return for us and we will immediately be walking at His side with our new immortal bodies!

Paul also wrote about this healthy outlook on life in 2 Corinthians 4:17&18 where he said that “the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” I like to call this a two-world perspective where we value eternal realities over the temporal things of this life.

My wife recently bought a hibiscus plant that has big, beautiful, raspberry-red blossoms that are eye-catching to say the least.

Unfortunately, the blooms only last a day or two at best before their grandeur fades.

Isn’t this like our lives on earth? The Lord gives us many good things to enjoy in this life, but like the hibiscus blossoms they are temporary. We laugh and enjoy the good things He sends our way with the perspective that they are temporary and not our ultimate hope.

Our lasting joy resides in our expectation of a better day that will exceed all our earthbound dreams and blessings.

In addition, our anticipation of Jesus’ appearing also gives us courage to persevere through trials and times of sorrow, knowing this life is but a vapour compared with the joy we will experience in eternity.

With all the many benefits of eagerly anticipating the Rapture, is it any wonder that our enemy hates it and does all he possibly can to take our eyes off it? He surely does not want us to anticipate anything that increases our focus and dependence on Jesus.

Lately, I have felt a little depressed at all the teachings that not only deny the Rapture, but also Jesus’ glorious return to set up His kingdom on the earth. My solace for these thoughts is that this false teaching is yet another sign of the departure from faith Paul said would happen in the last days (1 Timothy 4:1-5). ☞

Will you help us be a blessing?



Did you know that *Prepare the Way* is sent free of charge to church leaders in many African countries, as well as overseas missionaries and prisoners? But this **only** happens through the support and donations of people just like you.

If you have a heart for the nations and a desire to see churches built up through sound, Biblical teaching, then please would you consider supporting this ministry?

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If you are able to help, please fill in the form below, or simply do a direct deposit into the magazine’s account (Prepare the Way, Standard Bank, Howick Branch, Branch code 058325, Account number 052449815)

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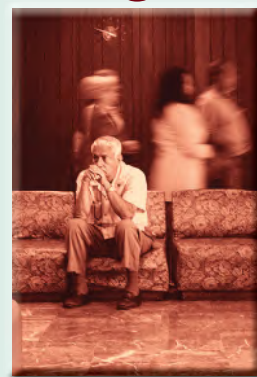
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The Courage of Marie Monsen

MARIE Monsen (1878-1962) is a name held in high honour among Christians in China, yet she is barely known in the West, even in her native Norway.

In 1900, a nationalist uprising in China, the “Boxer Rebellion,” had seen many foreign missionaries slaughtered. Suspicion and fear were everywhere. Even so, Monsen travelled alone to Henan province in September 1901, to work for the Lutheran China Mission Association.

Not long after her arrival, she fell down some stairs and hit her head so hard that she was unconscious for several days.

The trauma left her unable to study language for two years. For six years she suffered debilitating headaches, as well as dysentery, malaria, pain, and frustration. The first 20 years of her service were God’s learning curve for her, causing her to be constantly aware of her weakness and to cast herself on Him in constant dependence. Marie learned the power of endurance.

Monsen’s devotional life was her mainstay, taken to a new level in the 1927 Shantung Revival. She had an uncanny sense that the Lord was directing her, speaking clearly in words that seemed almost audible. She sensed that God intended to move powerfully in China, and she prayed fervently for 20 years until it began in Shantung in 1927 – a revival that is still continuing and is being called “the biggest revival in history.”

In order to serve her Lord better, she remained a lifelong celibate. She also endured severe trials with fortitude and trust.

Her courage was remarkable. She was fearless, travelling hundreds of miles through



bandit-infested territory to share the Gospel. Once, the ship she was on was captured by pirates. When an invading army of looters was ravaging a whole city, Monsen urged the Christians not to fear but to pray; the looters were prevented from coming near her mission compound because of angels standing sentry over it!

This and many more examples can be found in her book *A Present Help: Standing on the Promises of God*.

She was no respecter of persons: she would tell church leaders to their face that they were hypocrites! A present-day house church leader writes: “She didn’t speak smooth words to impress the people. Instead, she brought fire from the altar of God.”

She took the emphasis off

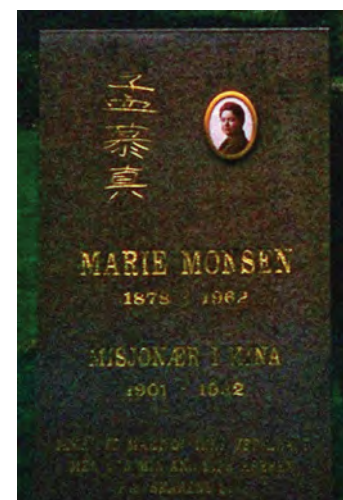
the human wisdom so prized by Chinese, and showed each person they were individually responsible before God for their own inner spiritual life. For this, she was greatly loved, and church leaders saw her as “mother in Christ.”

Monsen was bold enough to say no to prospective baptism candidates on occasions. She discouraged “cultural” emotion (Chinese weep easily). She cared nothing for numbers, but wanted to be sure each soul had left the way of destruction and truly encountered God.

Don’t gather unripe fruit was a maxim of hers.

When she died, Monsen was buried in at Solheim cemetery in Bergen, Norway. In his best-selling book *The Heavenly Man*, a leader of the Chinese house church

movement, Brother Yun, tells of how Chinese believers were incredulous to find that Marie Monsen’s grave in Denmark was unmarked. So they made the need known and donations came in, such that in 2001 a monument was erected to one of God’s outstanding (but humble) warrior women. ☩



WATCH & PRAY

Thanks to
Elizabeth Kendal

CHRISTIAN CRISIS IN NIGERIA

A growing number of Nigerian civic, political and religious leaders are convinced that an Islamic agenda is being advanced. Not only is President Muhammadu Buhari (a Fulani Muslim) unwilling to tackle the escalating Fulani violence ravaging the North and Middle Belt, he is even unwilling to recognise it. Consequently, the killings – which amount to ethnic cleansing – continue unabated and with impunity. The security forces, dominated by Fulani Muslims, are not neutral. Nigerian Christians feel vulnerable and abandoned. On August 28 the Christian stronghold of Nunman LGA in Adamawa State was rocked by a gruesome Fulani-led political assassination (beheading). Meanwhile, massacres continue in Plateau State: victims include a pastor burnt alive with three of his sons, after his wife was shot dead.

Please pray for Nigeria and its suffering Church.

NORTH KOREA: IN NEED OF A BREAKTHROUGH

North Korea and America have taken steps to improve their relationship. However, a stalemate has set in which threatens to freeze millions of North Koreans – especially those who are poor, imprisoned and/or Christian – in an appalling status quo. North Korea wants America to sign a peace treaty, after which

Manna for mahala!

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confidence-building measures and concessions can proceed.

Meanwhile, the US is demanding, first and foremost, North Korea's "complete verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation." Hence, the stalemate needs a breakthrough. Fortunately, our God is "Baal-perazim," the God who breaks through (2 Samuel 5:17-21).

Pray that our ever-creative God will break through the stalemate so the painstaking work of peacemaking can proceed. May God sustain his remnant Church in North Korea.

PRIESTS KILLED IN EASTERN ETHIOPIA

On August 4, Ethiopian troops swept into Jijiga, the capital of Ethiopia's 98 percent Muslim Somali Region (also known as Ogaden), to apprehend the regional president, Abdi Iley. When Abdi Iley sent his own troops into the streets, clashes ensued, after which his supporters went on a rampage, looting and burning churches and targeting ethnic non-Somalis. By the time reinforcements arrived, dozens were dead, including 15 priests. Ten Orthodox churches were burnt and nine Evangelical churches looted.

A corrupt and brutal tyrant, Abdi Iley represented the old regime and was the Somali face of the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front, doing their bidding in exchange for total power and impunity. His removal is another step towards reform.

Please pray for Ethiopia, especially the Church in Ogaden.

PLAYING THE RELIGION CARD IN COMOROS

The population of Comoros – a union of three islands on the northern edge of the Mozambique Channel – is 98 percent Sunni Muslim and less than one percent Christian. Determined to retain power, President Azali Assoumani held a referendum in which Comoros voted to end the rotating presidency, meaning he can contest the next election. To undermine his main rival, Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, Azali also had Sunni Islam enshrined in the constitution as the state religion. He did this because Sambi, though a Sunni, maintains close ties with Shi'ite Iran. Azali has thus paved the way to wield Sunni religious intolerance for his political gain.

Christians in Comoros are anxious, aware that escalat-

ing Sunni intolerance will threaten both Shi'ites and Christians. Please pray for the Church in Comoros.

PRIESTS ASSASSINATED IN THE PHILIPPINES

Three Catholic priests have been shot dead in six months, while a fourth has survived with bullet wounds. The targeted priests all openly criticised the violence and impunity being fostered by President Rodrigo Duterte. Meanwhile, President Duterte has signed the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) which will place territory in the Southern Philippines under the control of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The imposition of Sharia Law will see Muslims lose their constitutional right to religious freedom and make Christian ministry to Muslims even more dangerous than it is already.

Please pray for the Philippines and its Church.

Final Prepare the Way day of 2018

November 4 is the date for this year's final *Prepare the Way* day at Mount Zion Church, Merrivale (near Howick, KZN). Please come and join us as we bring the ministry of this magazine before the Lord. Peter Pollock will be ministering, and you're welcome to stay for (free!) lunch.



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Called to Love

by Judith MacNutt

THE Lord calls us to love. Most of us know the verse John 3:16, “For God so loved the world” – but are we familiar with 1 John 3:16? In 1 John 3:16, the apostle John speaks again of love: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

We are called to be the presence of Jesus in this world – to show His love to people. Love fulfils the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe one day when we stand before the Father, one question He will ask us is, How much did you love? Did you love those I placed in your life? Did you show my love to your husband, to your wife, to your children? Did you reflect my glory and my love with those I brought to you?

I find that many people want to be anointed by God to have a healing ministry. When I sit down with them and tell them what a healing ministry really entails, they usually change their mind. The healing ministry is hard work.

Ministry in general is hard work. It requires laying down your life for another person. It calls us to lay down our humanity and our natural emotional responses. When people reject you, it requires loving them in response.

Gifts with these types of loving responses is difficult. It assaults our pride. Instead of offering forgiveness to people, everything in us might want to strike back. As a society, we are too sophisticated or cultured to strike back physically, but we do it verbally or sometimes nonverbally.

We want to punish a mean person and let them know they will have to live the rest of their lives with the consequences of their

mistakes.

Paul invites us to pray for the renewing of our minds – I find this to be a necessary response, and one that is advisable. In addition to a changed and renewed mind, our hearts must be softened in order to give and receive love.

In marriage counselling I found this to be pertinent. A person may understand intellectually that their spouse loves them, but they might be unable to receive love and therefore find it difficult to return love. They might say, “I feel like my heart is a block of ice.” Where do we begin the work of healing with someone whose heart is unable to receive? We can’t just read them Bible verses and say, “Claim that scripture.”

I love the Word of God. It is precious to me and to most believers, but my experience is that some haven’t been able to incorporate the Word into their lives. They can hear it, but it hasn’t yet made that 12-inch journey from the head to the heart, the journey that enables them to love.

Ideally, when the Lord moves into our lives and we receive Him and the Holy Spirit – changes start taking place in our hearts. Unfortunately, many people stop at the point of conversion. They receive Jesus, but they don’t incorporate His life, love and mercy into their lives. The grace of God must be poured out supernaturally into our hearts.

The love of God will do two things – it will bring healing of the experiences that have wounded us (the events that prevent us from walking in love), and it will enable us to receive the gift of love to act graciously toward other people.

While I was a psychologist working in Boston, I thought, If I could only love

enough, these people would be healed. Hour after hour I poured out love to my patients. My efforts gave them a shred of hope, but didn’t heal them.

God got through to me and allowed me to realise that my love doesn’t heal – He is the healer. When I combined prayer and God’s love with the love that I felt, healing was able to flow. Then and only then did I begin to see people healed of all kinds of mental illnesses.

It is very difficult to be a loving person if we have not been shown love. In psychology, we were taught that the cornerstone of mental health is love, acceptance, and affirmation of your life, your goodness and your very being.

You can often tell when someone grew up with wonderful, loving parents. They are secure, confident, loving and accepting of others and self because they didn’t experience rejection. When parents reject a child, it may be difficult for them to believe they are acceptable.

I have had people say to me, “If my own mother didn’t love me, how can you love me?” or “My father abandoned me at birth, I must have been terrible and ugly.” Lack of love or abusive behaviour in the home may be the cause of deep wounding.

Someone once said that our lives are shaped by those who love us and also by those who refuse to love us. Those who have rejected us leave a powerful imprint on our hearts.

Those who love us unconditionally, however, come and help wash away the hurt. God’s love cleanses and frees us to then become His agents of healing to others – to be His hands extended on this earth. Allow the Spirit to show you what keeps you from knowing and receiving His love. ☞