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CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

Glenn E. Hawkins

INTRO: With the rapid approach of a new millennium, the overall theme of this lectureship — *The Next Millennium and Beyond* — is most appropriate. The thoughts and minds of many people are on the religious aspect of the approaching millennium. Questions are being asked, such as “Is the second coming of Christ at hand?” and “Will Jesus come in the year 2000?” Subjects like the thousand-year reign, the rapture, the Antichrist, etc. will be discussed on television and in books and magazines. Unfortunately, very little of the discussions will be based on a proper understanding of the second coming of Christ and the events associated with it.

The topic for consideration at this time is *The Consummation of All Things*, with text from 2 Peter 3:1-14. The word ‘consummation’ means that which is brought to completion, the end. The phrase “all things” refers to what Peter described in 2 Peter 3:1-14 as the end of the world associated with the Second Coming of Christ.

In other words, history had a beginning and it will have an end. The world had a beginning; it will have an end. Time as we know it had a beginning; it will have an end.

As one reads the second epistle of Peter, written to those saints who were scattered among the dispersion (1 Peter 1:1), he is made aware that there were false teachers among the brethren, teaching among other things, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:4a). In other words, these teachers were skeptical that God would keep His promise. It is very foolish to doubt the promises of God, as Peter goes on to show. What does Peter teach in regard to the final consummation of all things? Let us note three major points in these first fourteen verses of 2 Peter 3.

God’s Promise is not Slack (2 Peter 3:1-9)

Evidently, the scoffers in verse two held to some kind of uniformitarian philosophy. They argued that since Christ had not come since the fathers (patriarchs or early Christians) died, and since all things remained the same, Jesus is not coming back.

Many people today scoff at the idea of a literal return of Jesus, so this idea is still around.

Peter offers three replies to this argument proposed by the scoffers. *First*, these scoffers had willingly been ignorant of what happened to the earth in the time of Noah. Instead of reading and believing the Genesis account of the universal flood, which was God’s judgment on the world of Noah, they had willfully ignored it. Peter hastens to point out that this world in which we live has now been “reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). This is in keeping with what Jesus taught in Matthew 24:36-51 and Matthew 25.

Second, Peter appeals to the fact “that God does not exist in time as we humans do: his habitation is in eternity.” In other words, the amount of time between what God promised to do to this old world and the realization of it should not be interpreted that God will not fulfill that promise. The phrase “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” indicates that passing of time, no matter how long, does not affect the keeping of the promise made by God.

Third, Peter points out to his readers, including the scoffer, that God is longsuffering. Long ago, Augustine said, “God is patient because He is eternal. He who is from everlasting to everlasting can afford to wait.” God’s longsuffering is designed to give all people, including the skeptics and scoffers, an opportunity to repent and not perish! God’s patience is truly remarkable. We need to take advantage of the offer of salvation now!

The Day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10-13)

Despite what the scoffers think, the destruction of this world is a certainty. The verb “will come” in verse 10 is in the emphatic position in the Greek text. Whatever else occurs, “coming surely is the Lord.” Notice what accompanies the return of Jesus. [1] It is unexpected, like a thief. [2] The heavens will pass away with a great noise. The word translated ‘noise’ is *rhoizedon*, which is an onomatopoeic term in which sound denotes the meaning. “Its kindred noun, *rhoizedon*, was used in classical Greek of the whizzing of an arrow, the whirring rush of wings, the sound of the wind, and the murmur of rushing waters” (Guy N. Woods, *Commentary of Peter, John and Jude*, p. 186). [3] The elements

shall melt with fervent heat. “The elements are the basic building blocks of all material things, the very atoms themselves” (Burton Coffman, *James, Peter, John, Jude*, p. 325). [4] The earth also and works that are therein shall be burned up. This universe, this planet, and everything material in it will be burned up! This fire that will consume the earth is not a renovating and purging as some teach, but a fire of destruction. There will be no human life on earth following the return of Jesus — *because it will not be here.*

Peter then gives us an admonition. In view of the coming consummation of all things, “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.” The Christian should be living a holy and godly life. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” As Noah and his family lived holy and godly lives, they were spared destruction by flood, so it is that those who lead godly and holy lives today will not be destroyed when the Lord comes again.

In verse 12, Peter says, “looking for and hasting (hastening, ASV) unto the coming of the day of God...” Perhaps the suggestion is made that Christians are not to look for or desire the coming of the Lord, but to speed it up by living faithful lives and performing the duties God has given them.

Since this world, earth, etc. shall melt with fervent heat, where will we live eternally? Peter says that we look for a “new heaven and a new earth.” The word translated ‘new’ is *kainos*, which means new or fresh, in contrast to something old and worn out. It seems that this is an obvious reference to heaven — the home of the soul!

Conclusion (2 Peter 3:14)

“Wherefore” — Peter is drawing a conclusion from the things he had just written. Since Christians know that Jesus is coming back and that this world will be destroyed, we must be diligent to strive “to be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” We must be at peace with God and man. We must be found spotless and blameless at His coming.

History is on a straight line to judgment (Hebrews 9:27). There are ultimately only two places one may be in on that great

day — the right or the left. Where one finds himself on that day will be determined where one is at death — saint or sinner?

Biographical Information

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Born October 16, 1943 in Dexter, MO
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Graduate of Harding University, 1965, B.A. in Bible
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THE STATE OF THE DEAD

Mark E. Bass

My topic of study is a very simple one and yet at the same time it is very complex. As to the state of the dead, the answer depends on several things. In order to deal with this topic, we need to first deal with some preliminaries.

The New Testament makes it quite clear that God does not want anyone to perish (II Pet. 3:9). This truth is further evidenced by God's plan of redemption which began in Eden and culminated in the sending of His Son (Jn. 3:16). Such a beautiful thought--salvation has been made possible for every responsible, obedient person (Rom. 1:16; Rev. 22:17).

The desire of Christ for our salvation is expressed in the words of Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

There Are Three Classes Of Individuals In The World

The New Testament teaches that there are three classes of individuals in the world (everyone fits into one of these three categories).

First, there are the children who have not reached the age of accountability. They are neither saved nor lost--simply safe (Matt. 18:3; 19:4)--should they die in infancy, they will go to heaven. They cannot respond to the gospel invitation because it does not apply to them. This is also true of the mentally deficient (assuming they were such before reaching the age of accountability).

Second, there are those who can and do obey the gospel. All who reach the age of accountability (i.e., knowing right from wrong) are subject to the invitation of the gospel. Paul tells us that the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). The gospel consists of commands which must be obeyed before salvation can be obtained. Those who obey the gospel are saved from past sins and are added to the church (Acts 2:38,47).

Third, there are those who can, but do not obey the gospel. In Ephesians 2:12 Paul tells us that these people are sinners are

separated from Christ, without God and without hope in this world. The New Testament makes it clear that those who do not obey the gospel will be lost (I Pet. 4:17; II Thess. 1:7-9). In view of the preparations God made for man's redemption, it's hard to conceive of anyone refusing salvation. In actuality, most are not planning on going to hell--they intend to prepare later. I am reminded of the old song we sometimes sing, "Oh How Sad To Face The Judgment Unprepared To Meet Thy God."

Where Are The Dead Between Death And Judgment?

Before we can understand the state of the dead we must first address the question of where do the dead go after death? The Bible does not give us a lot of information on this subject. Many questions are left unanswered. Basically there are three views in regard to this question.

Some teach that the dead sleep in an unconscious state. This doctrine of "soul-sleeping" is taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses. The error of this view will be seen a bit later in our study.

Others teach that the dead go to an intermediate state to await the judgment.

Still others believe that the dead go directly to their eternal destiny--heaven or hell. However, if this view is correct then the saved will have to leave heaven to appear in the judgment and the lost will have to leave hell to appear in judgment. Remember, judgment is an appointment that must be kept by all (Heb. 9:27; II Cor. 5:10).

Just What Is Death

Perhaps we should define what we are talking about when we speak of death. The word death simply means a separation and the end of a condition or state.

It is imperative that we understand that man is a dual being --consisting of body and soul (II Cor. 4:16). When physical death occurs it simply means that the spirit (soul) has left the body and our earthly existence is at an end. When death occurs, there is no longer any life in the flesh (Jas. 2:26). Numerous passages of

scripture show that man's soul or spirit is separated from his body in death (Gen. 35:18; I Kgs. 17:21, 22; Ecc. 12:7).

Keep in mind that even after death, the spirit lives on. We sometimes sing a song that says, "I'm on my way to that fair land where the soul of man never dies." In Matthew 10:28 Jesus warned, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31) destroys the doctrine of the annihilation of the soul in that these two did not cease to exist after death.

Where Does The Spirit Of Man Go When He Dies?

The question still remains, "Where does the spirit of man go when he dies?" The Bible teaches that the spirit goes into an intermediate state and remains there until the judgment at which time they will be rewarded or punished. This intermediate state is called hades (the Hebrew word is Sheol). Hades is the realm of departed spirits. Every soul after departing the body goes into hades.

From Luke 16:19-31 we learn that hades consists of two parts. The first part of the hadean world is called Paradise (Paradise means garden of pleasure). It is important to understand that Paradise is used in reference both to heaven and that part of the hadean world where the departed spirits of the righteous are found. For example, in Luke 23:43 paradise is used to refer to part of the hadean world. In Revelation 2:7 the same word is used in reference to heaven.

The second part of the hadean world is known as Tartarus (ASV--Torment). In II Peter 2:4 the word translated "hell" (tartarus--ASV footnote) does not refer to the place of eternal punishment -- notice that these angels are being reserved for judgment and judgment precedes eternal punishment. Tartarus is where the wicked are being held until the day of judgment.

According to Luke 16:30, these two places are separated by an impassible gulf. There was no way for the rich man to pass over to where Lazarus was. His opportunities were all gone -- he had neglected or ignored them. His eternal destiny was sealed.

The doctrine of purgatory is here refuted along with the idea that the lost will be given a second chance --the rich man pleaded for mercy but he was too late -- his fate had been fixed for eternity.

People sometimes ask, "Why have a judgment if our eternal destiny is sealed at death?" Since God has not told us why, we cannot know with any certainty. It is my opinion that judgment will not be for the purpose of determining guilt or innocence -- that will already be known -- the books will be opened (Rev. 20:12,13) that we might know why we have been given the sentence that we are receiving. Much like a man who has been convicted of murder is not sentenced until weeks or months after his trial. Another possible explanation for having a judgment is so that all men will finally confess the name of Jesus and bow to Him. In Romans 14:11 Paul says, "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." At the judgment there will be no atheists or skeptics, all men will bow the knee to Christ and acknowledge him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Will There Be Consciousness After Death?

Invariably in a study of death and eternity the question is raised, "Will there be consciousness after death?" The answer is a resounding yes! The story of the rich man and Lazarus confirms this. Notice some of the things that the rich man was able to do: He was able to see (v. 23), to talk (v. 24), to feel (v. 24), to be tormented (v. 24), he would remember (v. 25, 27,28), he could reason (v. 30).

Think about it, if there were no consciousness, how could there be any punishment? The very idea is absurd.

Prior To The Judgment There Will Be A Resurrection Of Both The Just And The Unjust:

Listen to Paul's words in Acts 24:15, "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." In John 5:28, 29 the Lord said, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, (29) And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of

damnation.” Other passages could be cited but these are sufficient to show that there will be a simultaneous resurrection of both the good and the bad. The Bible nowhere teaches that there will be two resurrections with a thousand years between. This is another false doctrine that Satan has pawned off on the religious world.

Judgment

The Bible clearly teaches that after the resurrection we must stand before God in judgment. It is an appointment that everyone must keep (Heb. 9:27).

On that great day, Christ will be the judge (Acts 17:31). On that day all the secrets of men’s hearts will be revealed.

What will be the standard of judgment? We will be judged by the words of Christ (Jn. 12:48). We will be judged according to what we have done or not done in this life (Matt. 25:31-46; II Cor. 5:10). We will be judged by our works (Rev. 20:11-13).

From the judgment we will go to one of two places -- heaven or hell. On that day the righteous will hear him say “Come” (Matt. 25:34,46), while the wicked will hear him say “Depart” (Matt. 25:41,46).

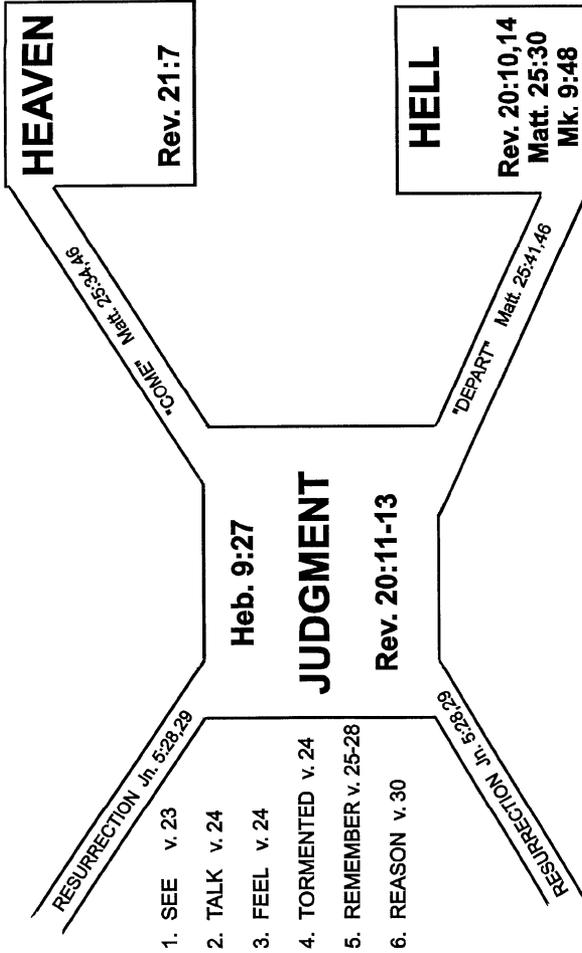
The idea of a judgment day should be a sobering thought (especially if one is unprepared (Acts 24:25).

From judgment we will go to heaven or to hell.

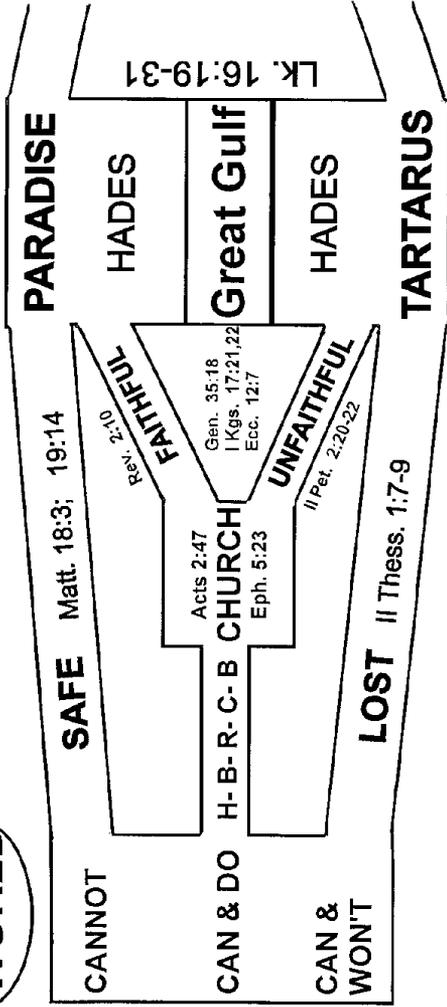
Heaven is the eternal home of the soul for the righteous. It is far more beautiful and wonderful than any description in the Bible or anything that we can imagine. A little girl looked up at the starry heavens one summer evening and said to her father, ”If the bottom side of heaven is so beautiful, how wonderful the other side must be.”

In contrast to this beautiful place called heaven, the wicked will be turned into hell. There is nothing about hell that would make it appealing to anyone in their right mind. Notice some biblical descriptions of hell.

Revelation 20:14 describes hell as a “lake of fire” and calls it the “second death.” Verse 10 of the same chapter describes hell as a “lake of fire and brimstone” whose occupants shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. The Lord describes hell as a place of “outer darkness” where there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30). In Mark 9:48 hell is further described as a



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place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. Hell is a place of eternal separation from God. It is a place of eternal, endless punishment (Matt. 25:41,46). The irony is that hell is not provided for man, but "...for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

Cconclusion

Granted there are many questions left unanswered regarding death, the judgment, the hadean world, etc. Unlike the works of men, the Bible makes no attempt to satisfy man's curiosity. However God has given us all the information we need to make our way from earth to heaven.

It is not so important to have all our questions answered as it is to be prepared for eternity.

If you have not yet begun to prepare for death and the judgment you need to do so immediately.

Biographical Sketch

Mark Bass was born in 1957 in Valdosta, Georgia. His father, Herschel Bass was also a gospel preacher. Mark began fill-in preaching at age 14 and full-time preaching at age 17. He attended Freed-Hardeman College and the University of Tennessee at Martin. He married Joanne Canup of Elkin, North Carolina in 1978. Mark and Joanne have two children, Michael, age 18 and Bonnie, age 16. Mark has worked with congregations in Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois and Ohio. He has been with the Alkire Road congregation for 6 ½ years. He has preached and conducted preacher training classes in India, the Carribean, Russia and the Ukraine.

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

David P. Stevens

Introduction

1. I appreciate the invitation to speak on the 1999 WVSOP lectureship. The theme: “The Next Millennium and Beyond” captures the anticipation as well as the anxiety of the moment. Many look forward with optimism to the next millennium and, at the same time, have anxiety about what it will mean to themselves and the Lord’s church.

2. The topic assigned to me: “The Origin of Life” has been and will continue to be a controversial one. There are really only two choices when deciding the question of origins. The first choice is that all life forms evolved over vast eons of time by mere chance. The second is that God created all things, including all life forms, by His omnipotent Word.

3. In this present study, we will show that the claims of the macroevolutionist are false. We will also allow God to witness to His own hand in bringing life into existence.

4. Basic Thesis: All life forms originated by the creative acts of an omnipotent God. Corollary thesis: All spiritual life originates through the redemptive acts of God in Christ. Thus, all life, natural and spiritual originates with God!

Macroevolution Is False!

Macroevolution is the belief postulated by some in the field of science that the vast variety of species of life on the earth today evolved through eons of time by mere chance from one single celled ameba. Macroevolution describes the result of one species evolving into another species. It is to be distinguished from microevolution which is the view that there are variations within a species.

How can one demonstrate that macroevolution is false? There are at least two methods. The first is to show that evolution is impossible or that the preponderance of the evidence is against it. The second is to present the evidence for design in the universe that can be accounted for only by the existence of a Master Designer.

Overall, there are six areas that present a significant challenge to the claims of evolutionists. Each of these areas will be discussed briefly in this lecture.

The first challenge to the evolutionist concerns chance verses design in the area of the language of life — DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). DNA contains the genetic information code and is a crucial part of all living matter. “If all the DNA in your body were placed end-to-end, it would stretch from here to the moon over 100,000 times! If all this very densely coded information were placed in typewritten form, it would completely fill the Grand Canyon forty times! And yet, all of your DNA would not fill two teaspoons. The discovery and understanding of DNA is just one small reason for believing that you are ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139:14).”¹

DNA can only be produced with the help of at least 20 different proteins. But, these proteins can only be produced by DNA. Since each requires the other, a satisfactory explanation for the origin of one must also explain the origin of the other. Apparently this entire manufacturing system came into being simultaneously. This implies Creation.

DNA is not now capable of evolution nor does it show signs of ever having evolved. DNA presents one of the most perplexing problems for the evolutionist. DNA is genetic intelligence and points to an omniscient Master Designer—God!

A second area of concern for evolutionists is spontaneous generation. Spontaneous generation is the idea that life can come from non-living matter. Spontaneous generation has never been observed! It conflicts with the Law of Biogenesis which states that life only comes from life. Clearly, the evolutionist is put into a serious dilemma on this point. He is forced to contradict what the scientific method affirms! Such self-contradiction is self-defeating!

A third problem area for evolutionists is the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

This law states that, “although the total energy in the cosmos remains constant, the amount of energy available to do useful work is always getting smaller.”² Basically, order tends to disintegrate into disorder. Evolutionists believe that life is becoming more

complex (amoeba to man). The theory of evolution contradicts the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

A fourth problem facing evolutionists is the evolutionary mechanism—natural selection. According to Darwinian evolutionists species evolve because the process of natural selection perpetuates mutations that cause life-forms to be better adapted for survival. However, mutations rarely are beneficial to an organism. Natural selection fails as a suitable explanation for the “how” of evolution.

A fifth area of concern for evolutionists is the gene pool and its limits to change.

Breeding experiments have shown that variation within a species occurs up to a point at which a barrier is encountered that cannot be broken. If a species can only evolve so far before it hits a barrier and is forced to remain the same species, then no macroevolution occurs.

A final problem for evolutionists and one of the most powerful is the gaps in the fossil record and the absence of transitional forms. One reason the fossil record seems to condemn evolutionary theory is that many complex life forms appear in the very earliest rocks without any indication of forms from which they could have evolved. If evolution occurred, the fossil record should show continuous and gradual changes from the bottom to the top layers and between all forms of life. However, the fossil record actually shows many gaps.

The theory of evolution is fraught with so many problems that it is on the brink of total collapse. Smith observes, “if by evolution we mean macroevolution, then it can be said with the utmost rigor that the doctrine is totally bereft of scientific sanction...There exists to this day not a shred of *bona fide* scientific evidence in support of the thesis that macroevolutionary transformations have ever occurred.”³

If it is the case that macroevolution is false, then the creationist wins the argument concerning origins by default. This is one way of demonstrating the truthfulness of creation by God and answering the question of origins.

Natural Life Is The Result Of The Creative Acts Of God

The special revelation that we have received from God reveals that all things were created by Him (Gen. 1,2; Exodus 20:11). The origin of life is explained by the following declarations of Scripture.

First, life originates in the Being of God Himself. God is self-existing. “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). The fulness of life that belongs to God and Christ is not derived from nor does it belong to another. This life is spiritual and eternal.

Second, the natural life possessed by man and animals originates in the omnipotent acts of God in creation. “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:11). “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3). A distinction should be made between plant life, animal life and human life. Plant life does not have consciousness, but both animals and men do. Animal life is not characterized by an eternal spirit or soul. The spirit of an animal ceases to exist when the body dies (Ecclesiastes 3:21) and goes back to the earth. The spirit or soul of man is eternal and is also made in the image of God. The latter phrase, the image of God, is profound and impossible to fully comprehend. The phrase must refer to those characteristics possessed by man that are not found in animals. Some of these characteristics are: moral consciousness, the ability to think abstractly, an understanding of beauty and emotion, and above all, the capacity for worshipping and loving God.⁴

Third, life originates by the spoken word of Almighty God. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Gen.1:26; Psalm 33:9). The means through which God’s awesome power

was affected was through His spoken word. Human life in particular has its origin in the creative power of God's own word. This makes human life precious and valuable. This makes the human soul worth more than the entire world (Matt. 16:26).

Spiritual Life Originates In The Redemptive Acts Of God

The unique way in which God created man resulted in man possessing a physical body and an eternal soul. God placed a premium upon the soul of man. In His infinite wisdom, He foresaw the need to plan for man's redemption. Man's soul is worth more than the entire world (Matt. 16:26). God loved man (John 3:16) and purposed to save man in one body (the church) by the cross (the death of Jesus) (Eph. 2:16).

Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Human mortality is not the plight from which Jesus saves. Jesus saves from condemnation, damnation before the justice of Almighty God (Rom. 5:8,9). Man's own sin creates the need for redemption (Rom. 5:23-26). Jesus came to deliver us from the consequences of sin. The deliverance we have through Him gives life — everlasting life.

The redemptive acts of God manifest the power of God once again through His spoken word (John 6:63). The words that Jesus spoke "they are spirit and they are life." God begets men through His word (James 1:18). This begetting is the means of becoming a child of God (a Christian). In this way, we become the new creation of God (Eph. 2:10; 4:24; Col. 3:10).

Spiritual life (eternal life) is the result of the power of God working through His Word to bring into being that which did not exist before—a new creature—a child of God.

Conclusion

Evolutionists cannot adequately account for the origin of life. The theory of evolution fails so miserably in explaining the complexities of life that it is not to be seriously considered in explaining origins.

All life, especially human life, originates in the creative acts of Almighty God. God alone is the one who has life in Himself. He alone has the power to create by divine fiat. He alone is responsible for man's physical life and soul.

All spiritual life—eternal life- is in Christ (I John 5:11,12). No one outside of Christ at the Judgment Day will live eternally with Jesus in Heaven. All those who freely drink of the *living water* and eat the *bread of life* will stand before the throne of God in glory!

Endnotes

¹David A. Noebel, *Understanding The Times*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1997), 327.

²*Ibid.*, 330.

³*Ibid.*, 346.

⁴Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 74.

Biographical Information

David was born April 19, 1956 at Barrackville, WV. He is the son of Earl and Vonda Stevens of Fairmont, WV. He was baptized into Christ May 3, 1969 and began preaching at the age of 15.

He graduated from St. Marys High School, St. Marys, WV in 1974. He furthered his training at Ohio Valley College, Parkersburg Community College and Fairmont State College. He has completed a Masters in Science Degree in Ministry from Southern Christian University (1999).

On Jan. 7, 1978, he married Kathy Stewart. They have two children: Rachel and Scott.

David began preaching in July of 1971 at Mooresville, WV in a meeting held in conjunction with his dad (Earl) and his brother (Steve). He has held full-time works at New Lexington, OH (1978-1991) and Groveport, OH (1991 to the present).

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In 1995, he published a book of sermon outlines along with his father and brother entitled, "*100 Years of Preaching.*"

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CULTISM AND THE MILLENNIUM

Bruce Daugherty

Due to the guarantee of religious freedom in the United States, cults have been present in our country for many years. The last thirty years, however, has witnessed a significant shift as our society has changed from a dominant Protestant background to a truly religiously pluralistic one. Christianity now competes with more than 1700 religious bodies in our country and more than 20,000 world wide!

Unfortunately, tragedy has frequently accompanied the cults over the last thirty years as well. Jim Jones led more than 900 of his followers to death in November 1978.¹ Then came the fiery inferno of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas in April 1994. More recently, was the occurrence of the Heaven's Gate group and their mass suicide in March 1997. Even within churches of Christ we have been troubled by the Crossroads/Boston movement which has been labeled by many as being cultic in its control of its members.

If the Lord permits time to continue, it can be certain that cults and their tragedies will be present in the Next Millennium and Beyond. As we approach the next millennium it is important to understand what the cults teach regarding the end of time. As Christians, we must remember that false Christs are nothing new (Matthew 24:4-5; 1 John 2:18-23). We need to gain an understanding of the cults and their doctrines so that we might observe the warning Jesus gave: "let no one deceive you!"

It is worthwhile to begin by defining special terms used in this study. By **millennium**, it is understood as the joining of two Latin terms, mille meaning one thousand and annum meaning year. Thus millennium is simply one thousand years. With the approach of the year two thousand, many people view this as being an end to time and the return of Jesus.

Another word which needs to be defined is **eschatology**. Eschatology is the study of end times. The Bible, as well as the cults, has many things to say regarding the end of time.

There is a certain amount of difficulty involved in defining what is a **cult**. The word itself is so laden with negative

connotation that some sociologists refuse to use it.² Sometimes being identified as a cult depends on who is doing the defining. As Paul defended Christianity, he recognized that outsiders viewed them as a “sect” (Acts 24:14). In using the term cult, I mean no disrespect for the groups discussed in this study. For purposes of this study, I am defining a cult as any religious movement which claims the backing of Christ or the Bible but which distorts the central message of Christianity which is God offering salvation through Christ, to be received by faith in men. Often the modern cults are syncretistic blends of Christianity, Eastern religions, mysticism and science fiction.

It is important to realize that some religious groups were once identified as cultic, but because of changes in their doctrine or methods, or because of an acceptance into the religious mainstream, some groups are no longer classified as being a cult. Some believe a good example of this would be the Seventh-Day Adventists, yet it needs to be pointed out that the Branch Davidians came out of Adventism.³

Though it is difficult and somewhat subjective to define a cult, there are identifying traits which cults have in common. Among these traits are:⁴

- an extra scriptural source of authority. Usually this is held as originating from God and to be viewed as authoritative for the adherents of the cult. This source of authority can be written or it can be held in the oral deliveries of messages from the cult leader. Most cultic groups will teach that they accept the Bible but they will say that it has been mistranslated and misinterpreted, thus necessitating the additional revelation.
- a devaluation of Christ and His work. Cultists minimize the deity of Jesus, His cross and His resurrection. Jesus is often portrayed by cultists as an abstraction, a second god, an angel or just an enlightened man. The minimization of Jesus coincides with the exaltation of a new Messiah, which is usually the cult leader. While they may give lip service to Jesus, this cult leader is the living head of the group.
- along with the de-emphasis of Christ is an obscuring of the grace of God. Salvation is no longer viewed as God’s free gift

extended to those who will respond in faith. Instead it becomes the object of an incredible system of works. Many cultists live in a continual fear that they have not done enough, given enough, prayed enough, worshipped enough, etc. This fear is then used by others to manipulate and control the followers.

- another feature is the cult's central role in eschatology. The cult is convinced that their presence marks the end of history and the beginning of a new age. Many of their practices are done in view of what will take place at the end of time. Later this study will focus on some of the cultic teachings regarding the end of time.

It has been said that “cults are the unpaid bills of mainstream Christianity.”⁵ While it may be exaggerating the case, cults and their tragedies speak of the failure of the institutions of modern society. The fragmentation of the home, communities, schools and churches will continue to feed the cults. There is a great need for the Church to show real living and genuine love to the lonely and confused.

One does not have to spend a great deal of study on the cults to realize that eschatology figures prominently in the doctrine and practices of the group. Even their names reflect this pre-occupation with the end of time: the Mormons call themselves “Church of Jesus Christ of *Latter Day Saints*,” Jehovah’s Witnesses designate themselves as the “*New World Society*.”⁶ The reasons for the prominence of eschatological elements are many.

First, the group often appeals to those who have been marginalized by society. Since the current society has rejected these individuals, they look to the end of time when things will be reversed. The “us against them” mentality is part of the psychological makeup of the cult member which is reinforced in end times teaching.

Associated with this belief is the fact that though the cult is comparatively small in number and often persecuted by society, they look forward to the day when the cult will be vindicated by God. The end of time will bring recognition that they are indeed who they have been claiming, God’s chosen people.

Third, the cult is convinced that it has been chosen by God for the purpose of providing what has been overlooked, or neglected

by the “mainstream” churches. The end of times will bring to light the “truth” of their message and the exposure of those churches who they believe have missed the mark or have been corrupted.

Finally, the very existence of the group is believed to coincide with the climax of human history. The group views itself as being God’s instrument in bringing forth the end of time, in being the means of escape from divine judgement, and as a picture of God’s final triumph.

Often, the view that the group has of the end of time will lead to their withdrawal from society or their refusal to observe societal customs. When people believed William Miller’s predictions, many individuals left their jobs, families, and houses to climb trees and hills to be closer to the Lord at His return. This was the reason in the establishment of Jones’ followers in isolated Guyana and Koresh’s compound in Waco. Also this is demonstrated in the Jehovah’s Witnesses who refuse to say the pledge to the flag or their lack of observance of national holidays.

It is important to understand what Jesus taught concerning the relationship between His followers and society. Jesus prayed that His disciples should not be “taken out of the world” (John 17:15). Jesus taught His disciples to submit to the authorities and to pay taxes (Matt. 17:27; 22:21). The apostle Paul acknowledged the Christian’s recognition of the civil authorities, including the paying of taxes and the observance of societal customs (Rom. 13:1-7). Paul also taught Christians to pray for those who are in authority (1 Tim. 2:2). Peter told Christians to “honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:17). While there is and must be tension between the world and the Church, it does not give sanction to the cults’ perversion of Biblical eschatology.

The last portion of this study will examine a few of the doctrines of some specific cults regarding eschatology. Though many groups could be studied, space does not permit us to do more than a brief study of two groups.

Article 10 of the Mormon Articles of Faith gives a brief summary of their doctrine concerning the end of time: “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this [the American] continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.”⁷

From this article it can be seen that Mormon eschatology involves gatherings, a physical reign of Christ on this earth, and then division into final destinations.

The gathering of Israel will take place in three phases: the gathering of Ephraim, the gathering of the Jews, and the gathering of the ten lost tribes.⁸ When all these gatherings have been completed, Mormons believe that Christ will return to earth to set up His millennial kingdom. This millennial reign will take place on the North American continent from the city “Zion.”

The millennial reign is believed to be a personal, physical reign of Christ on earth for 1000 years. This will be a period of great peace and love on the earth, though sin and death will not be completely abolished. The end of the millennium will be marked by a loosing of Satan who will gather the wicked to fight against Christ in a last great battle. At this battle, Satan and his forces will be defeated.

Following the defeat of Satan and his forces, Mormons teach that the earth will be renewed and transformed into a celestial world. With this transformation will come the assigning of individuals to their final state. Those who are lost, “Sons of perdition,” will spend eternity in hell. In contrast, those who are saved will spend eternity in one of three different kingdoms: the celestial, the terrestrial, and the telestial kingdoms. The differences in these kingdoms involve a graded reception of blessings and glory, with the celestial kingdom being the highest in order.

Summarizing the above, we cannot in the strict sense of the term call the Mormons Universalists, since they do hold that some human beings (though their number is very small) will be consigned to everlasting punishment in hell, along with the devil and his angels. One could, however, call Mormons virtual Universalists since, according to their teaching, the vast majority of the human race will attain to some kind of salvation.⁹

The most prominent and socially accepted cultic group is the Seventh-Day Adventist. Adventist eschatology grew out of the teachings of William Miller. When his predictions for the return of Christ to the earth in 1843 and then 1844 did not come true, many

left the Adventist group. Those who remained followed the leadership of Ellen G. White and continued to preach a return of Christ and the establishment of new earth which will be “a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning. God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will exist no more.”¹⁰ Through the years, the Adventists have experienced a number of splits and many splinter groups. The Branch Davidians which eventually came under the control of Vernon Howell (a.k.a. David Koresh) were originally one of these Adventist splinter groups.¹¹

The Adventists look to the day when Christ will come out of the Holy of Holies and come in the clouds to this earth. At this time Christ will annihilate the wicked and will take resurrected believers and transformed followers to heaven where they will enjoy the beginning of a heavenly 1000 year reign.¹² Satan will be left on a desolate earth during this millennium.

At the end of the thousand year reign, Christ will return to earth to accomplish three purposes: to destroy Satan, to purify the earth by fire, and to live with His resurrected saints (the 144,000) on a regenerated earth for eternity.¹³

The first disciples were told to anticipate the Lord’s return and they prayed that it would come soon (Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 16:22). But the early disciples did not lose time in useless speculations about when Jesus would return. They had the word of Christ about its futility: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matt. 24:36). Jesus knew the Old Testament, yet He said He did not know when He would return. Why is it believed that men can look at the Old Testament prophecies and know more than Jesus? We must accept either the word of Christ or the word of men regarding Jesus’ return!

The apostle Peter describes what will happen to the earth and what we should do to be ready for it: But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things

are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

The apostle Paul wrote, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (Phil. 1:9). In a day in which thinking, reasoning, and analyzing are divorced from religious discussion, we need to heed the apostle’s prayer.¹⁴ Otherwise, with the domination that cult leaders can have on their followers, there is a high price to pay for those who are deceived by false Messiahs. That price can be exacted in much suffering and tragedy in this life, as well as the loss of one’s soul in eternity in the next.

May the words of the beloved Apostle remind us of the importance of holding to the truth and the responsibility to test the spirits:

I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. (1 John 2:21-24).

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1).

Endnotes

¹ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985 revision): 27.

² Kenneth Samples, Erwin de Castro, Richard Abanes, Robert Lyle, *Prophets of the Apocalypse*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994): 160.

³ Samples, de Castro, Abanes, & Lyle, 29.

⁴ Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1963): 378-386.

⁵ J.K. Van Baalen, *The Chaos of the Cults* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1953 revision of 1938 edition): 15.

⁶ Hoekema, 386.

⁷ Hoekema, 67-74.

⁸ It is important to remember that cults often given arbitrary meanings to Biblical terms. Mormons believe that they, as well as the North American Indian tribes, are Israelites. Also, Zion, is not a synonym for Jerusalem but instead is the city of Independence, Mo.

⁹ Hoekema, 74.

¹⁰ "A Quick Look at Seventh-day Adventists" (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Information Ministries, Andrews University).

¹¹ Samples, de Castro, Abanes, & Lyle, 169-170.

¹² Anthony Hoekema, *Seventh-day Adventism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1963): 66.

¹³ John Gerstner, *The Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventism*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1960): 21.

¹⁴ Samples, de Castro, Abanes, & Lyle, 167.

Biographical Information

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EUTHANASIA

J.D. Conley

“ The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government...”

- Thomas Jefferson

In a country that sanctions the abortion of over 4,000 unborn children each day, it's apparent that the United States of America has hoisted her moral anchors and is ever drifting away from Jefferson's sentiments. Now, just over 200 years after Jefferson, and poised on the verge of a new millennium, our country as well as the world, are being forced to confront the other side of the abortion coin, euthanasia.

What Is Euthanasia?

When director Daugherty assigned me this topic, I informed him that I knew very little about children in China, (Youth in Asia) and we both had a chuckle. Oh how I wish my topic was that innocent. As we shall discover, “euthanasia” is no laughing matter.

“Euthanasia” is a compound word derived from the Greek: eu meaning “well”, and thanatos meaning “death”. The word could be more precisely translated “easy death” or “good death”. Other terms encompassed by the word “euthanasia” are: Mercy killing, Self-deliverance, Physician-assisted suicide, and Death with dignity. However, there is nothing dignified, merciful, humane, or good and easy about euthanasia, in short, it's murder.

It ought not to surprise us that the push for legalized euthanasia is a natural outgrowth of legalized abortion. If a woman can have her defenseless, innocent unborn child crushed and suctioned out of her womb with not only impunity, but with the aid of government funding, why can't we as a society legally discard the feeble of body and mind? The cold ¹hard terrifying truth of the matter is, if we kill unborn babies with a clear conscience, we can kill anyone, including our loved ones and ourselves! If not, why not? This mind numbing end result is what many of those opposed to abortion and euthanasia refer to as the “slippery slope”.

As a country we have already to a large degree, lost our moral traction, the only question that remains is how far will we plummet? Dr. C. Everett Koop, our former Surgeon General states: “Euthanasia forces are abroad in this land as never before...the euthanasia movement is assuming the proportions of a juggernaut.”¹ As I see it, the euthanasia movement is **THE** most sizable challenge on the horizon of the 21st century. It’s not only a challenge for the Lord’s church, but a challenge to preserve a generous portion of the human race! Therefore, the primary intent of this lecture is not so much to prove euthanasia is immoral, that is axiomatic across the brotherhood. Rather, the purpose of this study is to wake up the Christian and stir his or her awareness to the rapidly growing euthanasia movement, and the awesome challenge (threat) it presents the church on the threshold of the next thousand years.

The Different Forms Of Euthanasia

Euthanasia is divided into two major groups: Passive and Active. Passive euthanasia is a refusal to use life-sustaining medical equipment to prolong life when according to the doctor there is no hope of recovery. Often passive euthanasia is characterized by “letting the patient die”. This can be done in several ways such as: Failing to resuscitate a patient after cardiac arrest; turning off life support machinery which leads to death; taking away fluids, food and medicines when no hope for recovery is offered.

“Active euthanasia is taking purposeful action to end a person’s life”.² Both of these, this writer is convinced, are subject to biblical scrutiny.

With regards to passive euthanasia let me pose the following: As I see it, there is a big distinction to be made between one taking, or not taking extraordinary measures to prolong their life, (of which we are under no legal or moral obligation), but then once deciding to take extraordinary measures not being allowed to continue those measures. Just because a doctor says there is no hope, does that mean we can follow his directive and “pull the plug”? There are numerous cases where the doctor told a patient’s family that there was no hope, the means being used was discontinued and the patient lived on, sometimes for years!

So often those who argue for euthanasia, passive or active, bring up the fact of suffering. They contend, as did Joseph Fletcher, that suffering and pain are purposeless, demoralizing, and degrading. But who is man to make such an assertion? If suffering were a viable option for euthanasia Job was the perfect candidate (his wife probably would have helped Job with suicide) in fact Satan was forbidden to take his life. If I had my choice no one would suffer a painful death. However, the crux of the matter is man has not been delegated the authority from God to terminate life. God has informed each of us that there is a “time to die” (Eccl.3: 12, Heb.9: 27), by rescheduling death, one is interfering with God’s timeline.

In addition to active and passive, euthanasia can also be termed “voluntary”, “non-voluntary”. Of course voluntary euthanasia is where a patient asks to be killed. Non-voluntary is the case in which the patient’s wishes are unknown (due to unconsciousness, or inability to communicate) and another person requests that the patient be killed. Involuntary euthanasia involves the circumstances where the patient is killed even though he has expressly stated that he or she does not want to be killed. It goes without saying that each of these forms of euthanasia is reprehensible to God and should be to the Christian. “Thou shalt not murder” Rom.13:9 leave no room for any form of euthanasia.

What Brought About Euthanasia?

The answer to this question is quite simple: The devaluation of human life. With abortion on demand made “legal” in 1973, the floodgates of human worthlessness were swung wide open. this was made possible by the preceding decade’s enchantment with absolute autonomy (“choice”) of the individual. Since the 1960’s people of many stripes and in all walks of life have accepted the “relativity” of the value of human individuals, i.e. they believe that some humans are intrinsically superior to others. Therefore, since many in America as well as in other parts of the world believe this, it ought to come as no shock that folks (including babies), who are suffering from disease or even injury, or perhaps even nothing at all, are deemed to be of inferior quality. It is this avenue of thought that has fueled the campaign for euthanasia. The

euthanist's motto is "Good Life, Good Death". The quality, instead of the sanctity of life, is what they esteem.

Also behind the devaluation of life is the philosophy of utilitarianism. This is just a big word that means that the value of an individual is measured by his or her usefulness to society. Thus, those who subscribe to this point of view see no "usefulness in a baby (born or unborn) nor an older person who is battling health problems. Hence they conclude all such individuals only tax society and should be eliminated. However, since the euthanists is so compassionate they will contend that all such individuals be "allowed" to die against their will! How accommodating of them! Make no mistake, euthanasia is about making people die, not letting them die peacefully as the euthanists preach. Both are atrocities! Brother Trevor J. Major has written: "Christians object to a quality of life more than they object to a humanitarian death. They differ from humanists, however, in believing that the quality of life is based on the sanctity of life... The difference between these two outlooks is, therefore, that the quality of life advocates (the euthanists, JDC) believe human life has value only if it is good, whereas Christians believe human life is good because it has intrinsic, definite value".³

Genesis 1:26 declares that mankind is made in the image of God. This truth gives human life its intrinsic worth. If there is no God, then the euthanist is right, and life as he deems it (good or bad) has no built-in value.

Euthanasia's Movers And Shakers

Derek Humphry - co-founder and past president of the Hemlock Society- now president of ERGO!

Leading the pack is Derek Humphry. Humphry has by far been the most vocal and prolific advocate of euthanasia in recent years. Because of his fervor his influence has been widespread. In 1980 he and his wife Ann, co-founded the Hemlock Society, a pro-euthanasia organization that in it's 19 year history now has ten chapters in the United States (one in Pittsburgh which oversees all of West Virginia). The history behind the establishment of the Hemlock Society is sad and disturbing, but quite revealing. When Ann's aged parents both became ill, she and her husband mutually agreed to kill them. When pills didn't "do the trick" on her

mother, Ann smothered her with a laundry bag. The method in which her father was killed is not known, but he too died. Several years later in 1991, Ann was diagnosed with cancer and committed suicide. Her suicide made headlines worldwide, one reason being that she left a note alleging that she was driven to kill herself by her husband, Derek Humphry. It seems that when Humphry learned his wife had cancer he abandoned her like a kitten on the side of a road!

Now I ask, “Are these the kind of people to be preaching mercy, compassion, and dignity”? Are Derek Humphry and the Hemlock Society truly looking out for our best interest? Rubbish! Not long after his wife’s death, Humphry left the Hemlock Society and began the even more popular E.R.G.O.! (Euthanasia Research Guidance Organization). The headquarters for E.R.G.O.! are in Junction City, Oregon. Oregon is the only state thus far that has passed certain laws in favor of euthanasia under strict guidelines. Humphry has authored the number one best seller, “Final Exit”. One million copies of this book on assisted suicide have been sold worldwide. The vast majority of sales have been in the U.S. and Canada. It consistently sells over 1000 copies a month in North America. In the book Humphry declares that the only ethical parameter for euthanasia is that the person be a mature adult.

Dr. Jack Kevorkian, prisoner #284797

Kevorkian has been in the public eye since 1990. In subsequent years, Kevorkian with suicide machine in tow, has been responsible for the deaths of no less than 130 people. It is a criminal fact that many of Kevorkian’s “subjects” as he calls them, have been gassed to death with carbon monoxide and subsequently had their bodies dumped in vehicles left in parking lots (how’s that for dying with dignity?) Finally on April 13th of this year, Kevorkian was sentenced in Michigan to two terms of imprisonment for helping a man with ALS to die (you may recall the 60 minutes debacle). He will now be in prison for the next 10-25 years. Kevorkian has vowed that he will appeal to the higher courts. Currently, Kevorkian is in custody as prisoner #284797, Oaks Correctional Facility, Eastlake, MI. 49626. Not surprising, the Hemlock Society as well as E.R.G.O.! have and continue to give Kevorkian broad support. Derek Humphry said about the

conviction: “The severity of the sentence on Kevorkian will drive the practice of voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide even further underground. It will not stop it. Kevorkian is by no means the only doctor who helps people die - just the one who does so and also openly campaigns for societal acceptance of the practice”.⁴

Dr. Georges Reding

This Albuquerque, NM psychiatrist appears to be a “Kevorkian want-to-be”. There is overwhelming evidence linking Reding to the death of 54 year old Donna Brennan, an Albuquerque woman with multiple sclerosis. Bernadette Griego, Brennan’s caregiver, told detectives that she saw Brennan pay Reding \$900 just hours before Brennan was found dead. District Attorney Mike Runnels said, “We have a death here that was caused by poison that has to be administered, you can’t take pentobarbital by accident”.⁵ A two-day search of Reding’s home produced more evidence of Brennan’s death. In the search detectives found records showing that Reding had made purchases of pentobarbital at an animal clinic. Pentobarbital is of course a strong sedative that is used to euthanize animals. But there was more. Detectives also found medical records of numerous individuals, and signed assisted- suicide consent forms possibly linking Reding to deaths in Canada and elsewhere in the U.S. Detectives even found maps to these people’s homes. Reding was to appear before a grand jury in Albuquerque in July of this year.

Peter Singer

Singer is the former Monash University professor and International Association of Bioethics president in Melbourne, Australia. He has now moved to the U.S. to accept an appointment at Princeton University, where he will be the Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at the University Center for Human Values. At Princeton, Singer will be molding and shaping the views of many of the future leaders in medicine, law, education, and business. But his appointment has been met with shock, dismay, disgust, and protests. It seems Singer is a staunch advocate of infanticide and euthanasia. The April 10, 1999 issue of the New York Times had this to say about Singer: “Few in the later half of this century have enraged more people than Singer. He has

advocated for the killing of any “non-person”, including “defective babies, the senile, the comatose, and those physically disabled. Singer dismisses the ethic that all human life is equal, espousing instead a “quality of life ethic”.⁶ Also from the New York Times, September ‘98: “Killing a disabled infant”, Singer has written, “is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Very often it is not wrong at all”. (Then the NY Times quotes from his book, “Practical Ethics” p.91) “Even healthy babies lives may not be worth protecting, since babies are not “rational and self-aware”. In fact, Singer holds that parents should have the first 28 days of their infant’s lives to decide whether to kill the “non-person” newborn”.⁷

When Singer left Australia to come to the United States, the headline in the Australian newspaper read simply: “Good Riddance To A Warped Philosopher”.⁸ Later in the article with this headline were found these words, “The truth is that Melbourne has not lost by Singer’s move. America certainly has”.⁹ This is supposed to be a professor of Morals?! The words of Isaiah too easily come to mind, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter”! Isaiah 5:20

The Church Of Euthanasia

Yes, you read it right. This demented group has a website on the internet that you can log on to, if you have the stomach. They boldly claim that the four pillars of their church are Suicide, Abortion, Cannibalism, and Sodomy. They feature an on-line catalog where T-shirts, buttons, and bumper stickers may be ordered. A sampling of which read; “Save The Planet Kill Yourself, “Eat People Not Animals, and others so obscene to even mention. Their favorite logo seems to be two red circles side by side. One circle has a graphic of the earth, the one next to it has a graphic of a human with a red slash through it. They put out a quarterly magazine entitled “Snuff-It”. Considering the counter on their website, and the number of subscribers to their magazine, this group appears to be getting a following. They boast that even though the world’s population is 6 billion that the euthanists are “catching up”!

MENSA

The Los Angeles chapter of Mensa, the organization with members that claim IQ's in the top 2% of the nation, recently ran several chilling articles in their monthly newsletter. Here is a sampling: "Those people who are mentally defective that they cannot live in society should, as soon as they are identified as defective, be humanely dispatched".¹⁰

"It is not clear to me just exactly why anyone would expend time and effort on the homeless. What good are they? The vast majority is too stupid, too lazy, too crazy, or too anti-social to earn a living. Granted, there are a few people who have fallen beneath the blows of circumstances and are unable to afford any place to live, but they are few and far between. The rest of the homeless should be humanely done away with like abandoned kittens".¹¹

"We cannot continue to have population explosion. Growth has to stop. We better face that we have to kill people. There are not unlimited amount of resources."¹²

The last quotation is indicative of many that support euthanasia. They claim that the earth is getting to densely populated and must be thinned out. On Saturday, August 7th of this year, the world's population exceeded 6 billion. I've heard from reliable sources that even with this tremendous amount of people, all 6 billion could fit in the state of Texas with enough room left over to give each person a modest home, with a yard to boot?! If this is true, the population explosion has been for a long time greatly exaggerated and it is a weak argument indeed for those who favor euthanasia.

The American Medical Association?

Presently, the AMA believes that physician-assisted suicide is unethical and fundamentally inconsistent with the pledge physicians make to devote themselves to healing. They also support members of Congress who have introduced legislation prohibiting the use of federal funds, such as Medicare or Medicaid monies, for 'assisted suicide'.

However, Dr. Lonnie R. Bristow, MD, and AMA past President said on March 6 of this year, "We hear what our patients are telling us, and we care. In addition to our Hippocratic Oath to 'give no deadly drug if asked for', physicians have an ethical

responsibility to relieve pain and to respect their patient's wishes regarding care".¹³ This is too vague a statement for this writer to stake his trust in the AMA regarding their stance on euthanasia. It doesn't come down on either side of the issue. If it's the doctors' responsibility to "respect their patient's wishes regarding care" how far does the obligation go? What if the patient wishes to be euthanized?

How Widespread Is Euthanasia?

"At the present time, the state of Oregon has the world's only law specifically permitting a doctor to prescribe lethal drugs for the purpose of ending a person's life."¹⁴

In 1995 Australia's Northern Territory approved a euthanasia bill. It went into effect in 1996 and was overturned by the Australian Parliament in 1997.

"Physician assisted suicide and euthanasia have now become routine in the Netherlands, accounting for almost 10% of all deaths there in 1990. More than half of the people did not ask to be killed."¹⁵ Not only do physicians in Holland perform assisted suicide on terminally ill patients, but they also kill newborn infants and hospitalized seniors whose quality of life is judged to be poor. There is an increasing concern about involuntary euthanasia among Dutch citizens with disabilities. Many of them are joining the Dutch Patient's Association which issues a wallet-sized card stating if they have to be admitted to the hospital the **DO NOT WANT TO BE EUTHANIZED!** Can you imagine? In Holland the phrase "Don't leave home without it" takes on a very different perspective!

Even in America there is a group patterned after the Dutch Patient's Association known as N.D.Y. or Not Dead Yet. N.D.Y. is a group composed entirely of disabled citizens who are fiercely against euthanasia. They declare "Americans with disabilities don't want your pity or your lethal mercy. We want freedom. We want life".¹⁶

"On March 6, 1996 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals found in the Fourteenth Amendment a liberty interest in assisted suicide for the mentally competent, terminally ill adults seeking to determine the timing and manner of their deaths. However, Judge Roger Minor for the Second Circuit Court finds no "liberty to die"

in the Due Process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”¹⁷ The issue is and has been now for almost four years hotly debated in the courts. No decision has been reached, yet.

Even a cursory look at medical literature reveals that a rising number of health care providers are insisting that when “they” believe a patient’s life is not worth living, then they should be able to deny lifesaving treatment, even if the patient and patient’s family disagree! Consider the following excerpts from prominent medical journals:

“A nursing home study reported in the March 1991 ‘New England Journal of Medicine’, found that 25% of the time advance directives were not followed by the nursing home and medical staff. (An “advance directive” such as a Will to Live, contains instructions about medical treatment left by patients to guide health care decisions in which they are no longer able to participate). The popular myth is that patients are “overtreated”. But this study found that a full quarter of the patients were denied the treatment they had requested”.¹⁸

“In Sept. 1990, the Journal of the American Medical Association published an article arguing that when family members who direct that their relative be resuscitated have “views about suffering and quality of life that differ substantially from those of most reasonable people...then physicians should not be forced...to adhere to family preference”.¹⁹

“In January 1991 a Minnesota hospital went to court to try to cut off medical treatment for Helga Wanglie, an 87 yr. old patient with brain damage. Prior to her incapacity, she had many times made it clear that she would want lifesaving medical treatment, food and fluids if she became disabled. Her family unanimously supported her. The hospital eventually lost the court battle. But numerous doctors and ethicists writing about the case made clear it was only a pioneering first attempt to establish the principle that doctors can deny treatment against a patient’s wishes when they consider the patient’s quality of life to be too poor. Indeed similar cases have reached the courts of Georgia, Massachusetts, and New Jersey”.²⁰

“Dr. Donald Murphy of George Washington University Medical Center believes “lucid individuals probably cannot anticipate what aggressive measures they would want for

themselves should they become demented”. Therefore, he argued in the October 1988 Journal of the American Medical Association, we “should allow the health care team to make a unilateral decision to withhold CPR from severely demented patients. The reason? Their poor quality of life”.²¹

Brethren, two things are clear from the evidence that is before us:

1. We are closer to the bottom of the “slippery slope” than we may have previously thought. The euthanists have made enormous strides in the last ten years in their quest to win over the masses. Actually, the only thing the euthanists has to do is convince a handful of influential doctors, judges, and so-called “church officials” and let them propel the movement. That’s exactly what is occurring!

2. But also the campaign for euthanasia demonstrates that pro-lifers were correct when we said that euthanists would never stop at “voluntary” euthanasia. We who believe in the sanctity of life have warned all along, that the true motive of many leaders in the euthanasia surge, is to eliminate those with poor “quality of life”. That too, is exactly what is occurring!

Euthanasia’s Challenge To The Church

As the new millennium approaches, euthanasia poses some unique and complex challenges for the Christian, as well as the church as a whole. Not the least of which is:

1. To simply be allowed to exist. Obviously, euthanasia is life threatening. When one looks around the brotherhood today it’s readily apparent that many in the church are aged, many are infirmed. What’s to become of our elder brothers and sisters in Christ if the euthanasia movement is permitted to pick up steam in the 21st century? As uncomfortable as this thought is, we must face it.

2. Another problem is, how do we as God’s people effectively go about persuading two generations who have enthroned self and therefore do as they please, i.e. (euthanize, abort babies, and seek self gratification) that this is not the way to go? The Gospel has the power to change lives, but Paul also told the church at Thessalonica that because of the working of Satan that many were deceived by unrighteousness and will perish because they

“received not the love of the truth”. 2 Thess.2:10. Many simply will not receive the truth. The parable of the sower also demonstrates this sad fact.

Persuading a euthanist that his belief is morally wrong is a mammoth challenge because he has long since rejected the standard of right and wrong, God and His written word. With God aside, the euthanist and anyone else is free to do as they please. Once a person has embraced that point of view, it then becomes a very difficult point of view to uproot. Once people are convinced that they can do as they please, winning them back is indeed a challenge!

3. Euthanasia is also a challenge for the child of God who may be tempted to use it themselves, or on a loved one, at the urging of doctors, and family members who may not be Christians, and other external influences. It may very well be, (at least it seems to be the case with every other sin) that the more widely euthanasia is used and accepted, the stronger tug it will have on members of the church to relax their views. True, none of us want to see someone linger and suffer, especially a loved one, but that is no longer a problem. Pain to a large degree can now be controlled. Consider the following statement by Albert Einstein, (not the famous one) in his study entitled: “An overview of Cancer Pain Management” “Contrary to pro-euthanasia propaganda, physical pain, with rare exceptions, can be controlled if the physician knows the appropriate treatment for pain and is not afraid to prescribe a sufficiently high level of medication”.²² Today pain can be, for the most part eliminated with the use of analgesic drugs, nerve blocks, and other methods. Euthanasia is not the only answer to eliminating pain and suffering. As for emotional pain, it too can be reduced with proper spiritual counseling.

The argument of pain then becomes a moot point as it concerns the euthanist. The Christian may also be tempted to employ euthanasia to avoid high medical bills. But this would be more of an act of selfishness than anything else.

Lying at the core to the challenge of euthanasia is: Are we going to do as God directs or as man? We as Christians understand that it is never right to do something God has deemed wrong. Euthanasia is wrong because murder is wrong. Let’s leave

the question of life or death in God's hands. He always does what is right.

4. One more challenge that euthanasia presents the Christian is the one of securing a "Pro-Life" doctor. For obvious reasons it's in our best interest to have one, as well as a moral obligation. Sadly, finding one in the 21st century may prove to be a challenge.

The Solution To Euthanasia

What can we as the church of Christ do to derail this monstrous movement? We could:

- Join the International Anti-Euthanasia Task Force.
- Write letters to the AMA and Congress voicing our disgust.
- Educate ourselves not to be fooled by the euthanist's slick sounding vocabulary, which includes the following smoke screen terms for murder: Death with Dignity; Mercy Killing; Gentle Landing; Negotiated Death; Easy Exit; Terminal Old Age; Managerial Departure; and Self-Deliverance.
- Flood Jack Kevorkian's prison mailbox with letters.
- We could even go to Junction City, Oregon and protest on Derek Humphry's doorstep.

None of the above would be out of line. Neither am I discouraging doing these things. However, the first step in putting to death the act of putting to death, is by encouraging a mass return to the word of God. If we the church are going to be a viable force in the next millennium for the cause of decency, then we must somehow accomplish this.

- Preachers and Elders, this begins in the pulpit.
- Parents, for us it begins in the home and teaching our children the sanctity of life.
- Members, it means whenever called upon, we will without compromise take a stand with God against this unspeakable practice. Remember God has left specific instructions on how to care for the infirmed and elderly. cf. (Jam.1:27; Eph.6:2; 1Tim.5:8; Is.1:23;Rom.15:1;Lev.19:31). Euthanasia is not a scriptural option!

Conclusion

Euthanasia is only a symptom of a general lax attitude toward human life. “Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow weakness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed”. (Job 4:8-9). We have plowed and sown. What will we reap in the new millennium?

Recommended Reading

“A Study of Life, Its Brevity, and Uncertainty in James”, by David Miller, (Denton

TX. Valid Publications, 1990)

“Whatever Happened To The Human Race?” by C. Everett Koop and Francis Schaeffer.

“Deadly Compassion” by Rita Marker, (William Morrow, 1993; Harper/Collins, 1994; Avon, 1995)

“Final Exit” by Derek Humphry, E-mail: dhumphry@efn.org

Internet Links

- * [International Anti-Euthanasia Task Force](#)
- * [Euthanasia.com](#)
- * [National Right To Life Campaign](#)
- * [Death And Dying Issues](#)
- * [ERGO!](#)
- * [The Hemlock Society](#)
- * [Death Net](#)
- * [Ohio Right To Life](#)
- * [Life's End Bookstore](#)

Endnotes

¹ Dr. C. Everett Koop, “Living Wills: They Sound Good, But” HTML version by (Cincinnati Right To Life), 1993, p.5.

² John P. Simpson, “Euthanasia”, (*Biblical Ethics*, Sixth Annual Shenandoah Lectures), 1991, p.684.

³ Trevor J. Major, “A Christian Response To Euthanasia”, (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press) 1991.

⁴ Derek Humphry, “Dr. Jack Kevorkian, Prisoner #284797”, (www.finalexit.org), April 20, 1999, p.3.

⁵ Mike Rannels, (Associated Press), April 13, 1999.

⁶ Peter Singer, (New York Times), April 10, 1999.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Peter Singer, "The Age", April 28, 1999.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ L.C. Olson, "Euthanasia, If Its Your Life Can You End It?", (Christian Banner Exchange), April 17, 1999, p.2. World-Wide Web.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Lonnie R. Bristow, MD, "AMA Testifies Against Physician-Assisted Suicide", (Advocacy & Communications) March 6, 1999, p.2-3. World-Wide Web.

¹⁴ "Euthanasia: Answers To Frequently Asked Questions", (International Anti-Euthanasia Task Force) World-Wide Web.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷ "Government Moves To Legalize Euthanasia", (Ohio Right To Life), January 8, 1997, p.4, www.ohiolife.org

¹⁸ David N. O'Steen, Ph.D, and Burke J. Balch, J.D. , "Whats Wrong With Involuntary Euthanasia?" (Ohio Right To Life), June 5, 1996, p.2, www.ohiolife.org

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Albert Einstein, "Overview of Cancer Pain Management", in (Pain Management and Care of the Terminal Patient) 1992.

Biographical Sketch

John Darrell (J.D.) Conley - J.D. was born in El Paso, TX. July 2, 1959. He is the son, grandson, and son-in-law of faithful gospel preachers, Darrell Conley, F.F. Conley, and Denver Cooper. He and his wife Denise were married in 1979. They have two daughters, Shalyn 13, Amy 11, and four sons, Shane 10, Jesse 8, and Travis and Matthew 6. J.D. attended Freed Hardeman University, majoring in Bible and is a graduate of the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Fort Worth, TX. He preached his first gospel sermon at age 15. He has been located at Spencer, WV., and since October 1, 1996 has been preaching for the Goff Street Church of Christ in Elkins, WV.

SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Jamie Mahaney

THEME: To cause a better understanding of this great Bible theme. It is important that we know the truth in all things.

INTRODUCTION:

1. The subject of the second coming of Christ is one of the most misunderstood subjects of all the Bible.
2. Many try to predict the date of Christ's return to no avail.
3. This misunderstanding of Christ's return has caused some to have odd behavior.
4. This grand subject is not that difficult to understand.
5. We could quote person after person on what they think; and on what some have done because of the second coming. But we are only concerned with what the word of God has to say on the subject. After all, that is the only thing that matters anyway.
6. Let us take a look at the following outline of this subject.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE BIBLE AFFIRMS THAT JESUS WILL COME AGAIN.

- A. The two men in white apparel affirmed to those who were gazing upward to heaven; that this same Jesus would come as they saw Him go (Acts 1:9-11).
- B. Jesus Himself promises that He will return (Jn. 14:1-3).
 1. He instructed His disciples that in His Father's house was many mansions.
 2. He promised to prepare a place for us.
 3. He said when He does this there will be a time that He will come and receive us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also.
- C. Paul in writing to the church in Thessalonica declared that Jesus would descend from heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- D. Paul again affirms that Jesus will descend from heaven or be revealed if you will in (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

II. WHEN IS THE LORD COMING AGAIN?

- A. The Bible does not give us anything specific as to the return of our Lord.
- B. Jesus teaches us that, in regard to His return, no one knows (Mt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32).
 - 1. Jesus here states we do not know the day or hour of His return.
 - 2. Some think that they then can know the year of His return. This, of course, is a misunderstanding of the text.
 - 3. Jesus plainly states no one knows when His return will be.
- C. Dates for our Lord's return has been set time and time again, but to no avail.
- D. The Lord is coming according to the will and plan of Almighty God.

III. IN WHAT MANNER WILL THE LORD RETURN?

- A. He will come as "we saw Him go", He will come in the clouds (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- B. It is not a secret coming. Rather, the Bible states that every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7).
- C. The Lord is coming with His mighty angels in flaming fire (2 Thess. 1:7-9).
- D. The Bible teaches that Jesus will come as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:1-4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15).
 - 1. This denotes that it is unexpected.
 - 2. He comes unannounced. That is, there is no warning.
- E. The coming of Jesus is swift, and sudden, and without warning (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20).

IV. WHAT IS TO TAKE PLACE?

- A. The earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).
- B. Resurrection of the dead (Jn. 5:28-29).
- C. The Son of Man will judge all (Mt. 25:31-46).
- D. Vengeance will be rendered to those who do not know God and on those who have not obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

- E. The crown of righteousness awaits those who have fought the good fight, finished the race and have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8).
- F. We must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This is where it will be decided where we will be for all of eternity (2 Cor. 5:10).
- G. When Christ comes back it will mark the end of time as we know it. Eternity will have begun. Our fate or destiny will have been sealed. We will be in either heaven or hell.

V. HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR THE LORD'S COMING?

- A. Amos told the people in his time to prepare to meet their God (Amos 4:12).
- B. The Book of Acts is a great source on how to become a child of God.
- C. One must follow the gospel plan of salvation.
 - 1. Hear (Rom. 10:17).
 - 2. Believe (Heb. 11:6).
 - 3. Repent (Acts 17:30-31).
 - 4. Confess (Mt. 10:32).
 - 5. Be baptized (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21; Rom. 6:3-6).
- D. One then must remain faithful until death (Rev. 2:10; Gal. 5:4).

CONCLUSION:

- 1. It is foolish indeed to set a date for the Lord's return.
- 2. We know from what the Bible teaches that Christ will return.
- 3. We do not know the day or hour of His return.
- 4. What all of this ought to teach us is that we had better be ready for this DAY!!!
- 5. When Christ comes back we will receive our eternal sentence.
- 6. A better understanding of this subject, from a study of God's Word, is a must. It is vital to the salvation of our soul.

THE KINGDOM THE PROPHETS SAW

Johnny Ramsey

We have told religious folks that Isaiah 2, Joel 2 and Daniel 2 are all fulfilled in Acts 2! And, it is very true that those great prophets saw the heart of God's eternal kingdom. Remember, also, that the first time Jesus mentioned the church He called it the kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19). Members of the Colossian church were in the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13). The immovable kingdom and the church have their names enrolled in heaven according to Hebrews 12:23-28. Those folk who were in the seven churches of Asia were "a kingdom of priests unto God" (Revelation 1:6-9). Therefore, the prophets of the Old Testament clearly pointed centuries beforehand to the Lord's church, the powerful kingdom of God!

Isaiah, chapter two, proclaimed that this arrangement would be a **peaceful kingdom**. Yes, one promulgated not by weapons of carnal combat, but by the power of Truth (Romans 1:16). The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) would provide peace through the blood of the Cross (Colossians 1:20).

Daniel 2 spoke of the **enduring nature** of this spiritual kingdom as reflected in Revelation 11:15-16. In fighting the good fight of faith (I Timothy 6:12), the goal would be eternal life that never fades (Titus 1:2).

Joel 2 promised the **power** that introduced and augmented the establishment of such a powerful organism. The Day of Pentecost documented Joel's prediction (Acts 2:16-17).

The kingdom the prophets saw, therefore, was one of **peace, power and endurance**. We should constantly praise Jehovah for such a beautiful arrangement. Human hands never touched this blueprint. It was not of mortal minds or machinery. In fact, Romans 14:17, clearly, simply and magnificently declares:

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

This arrangement was in the eternal mind and purpose of our Creator. Read Ephesians 3:9-11 and 3:21. We glorify the Savior by honoring this divine mandate.

Pentecost (Acts 2) was a brilliant moment in divine history. When all the prophecies meshed, we realize what a monumental occasion had arrived, the providence and sovereignty of God, the Almighty One!

Pentecost (Acts 2) A Great:

- **Background** Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 2:4
- **Crowd** Acts 2:10ff
- **Occasion** The Law of the Lord Went Forth
- **Sermon** I Corinthians 2:1-4; Mark 16:15
- **Response** Acts 2:41
- **Emphasis** Acts 2:36; 8:5; Ephesians 3:17-21
- **Follow-Up** Acts 2:42

The kingdom the prophet's saw had come to fruition. What a glorious day!

Christ And His Church

Paul preached Christ crucified to the Corinthians and many of those who heard the message of redemption believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8; I Corinthians 2:1,2). In Acts 2:41, the day Christianity had its powerful beginning, we read that those who gladly received the glad tidings of salvation were baptized and the Lord added them to the church.

Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus in John 3:5 that a person must be born again of water and of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God. We have a perfect commentary on that passage in Acts 8:12 which says, "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

It is significant that the first time our Lord mentioned the church, He called it the kingdom also (Matthew 16:18-19). The culminating action that bring us into the church or kingdom is baptism (Acts 2:41; John 3:5). Also, in many of Paul's inspired writings, the church is referred to as the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). Therefore, the synthesis of such

teaching can be viewed in I Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit were you all baptized into one body.”

Through the message of the Holy Spirit, the gospel of Christ, God’s power to save, the Corinthians had become members of the church Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:18). Later, in II Corinthians 5:17, they were beautifully reminded that to be in Christ meant they were new creatures. It is significant that Galatians 3:27 ties all of these passages together: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth (John 16:13) and the message, thus revealed, convicted men of sin, righteousness and judgment to come (John 16:8).

This gospel teaching told the story of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

In Romans 6 we find a perfect illustration of salvation in the first century and any other age. When a man becomes dead to sin, as he is buried with Christ in baptism, and is raised to walk in a new life, he then becomes dead unto sin and alive unto God and thereby becomes a servant of righteousness. Through the message of the Spirit, as man’s body is washed in pure water (Hebrews 10:22), the new birth has been consummated. It is, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “The washing of water, by the word.”

There are those who look upon all of these passages as technical matters with no spiritual significance. However, throughout the sacred Scriptures we find the blending of God’s commands and man’s sincere obedience. Noah was commended because he explicitly obeyed “all that God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22). The exact compliment is paid to Moses for the same reason (Exodus 40).

Disciples of Jesus were told to do “whatever He tells you to do” (John 2:5). Our blessed Savior asks a pertinent question in Luke 6:46, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?” Christ straight-forwardly stated in John 8:24, “Except you believe that I am He you shall die in your sins.”

In Mark 16:16, belief and baptism are requirements prior to salvation. In Luke 13:3 we are reminded by the Redeemer that repentance is required lest we perish. And in Acts 2:38, on the very day the church became a reality, sinners were told to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of

sins.” Those who attended to these matters were added to the church by our blessed Lord.

In Ephesians 5 we learn that “Christ gave Himself up for the church.” Acts 20:28 tells us that Christ purchased the church with His own blood. He died at Calvary that we might be spiritually tied to Him and bring forth fruit to the glory of God (Romans 7:4). Therefore, powerfully and gloriously, we bow in deep appreciation for the vibrant nature of Ephesians 3:21, “Unto God be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout **all** ages, world without end. Amen.”

By far the most important organism ever established upon the earth is the church of our blessed Lord. No earthly institution even compares to the splendor of the body of Christ. But we must be a member of this grand and magnificent arrangement before we can truly gain the benefits heaven intended.

You may buy \$250 worth of warm clothing on a cold winter day, but such a purchase will not bless your life until you get in that which the money purchased. Christ died to bring the church into existence, but that act of grace will not save those who refuse to enter that blood-brought church. Let us obey the truth that gives us joy as we enter into Christ and His church where we can be free indeed (John 8:32-36).

For Christ our dear Redeemer,
For Christ, the crucified;
For the church His blood hath purchased;
The church, His holy bride.

The terms of admission into the Savior’s domain are simple and clear. Let us rejoice in the eloquent surroundings of God’s love and hasten to be faithful members of that spiritual body, the church, made possible by the blood of the Lamb.

Jesus clearly taught Nicodemus that one must be born again of water and Spirit to enter the kingdom. Acts 8:12 and 8:26-39 demonstrate this arrangement in absolute fashion. The kingdom the prophets saw and these examples of conversion illustrate the divine pattern. Praise God for such simplicity and beauty.

Biographical Information

Johnny Ramsey was born in Pampa, Texas, July 5, 1930. He was reared in Sherman, Texas and graduated from high school there. A 1952 graduate of Abilene Christian College, Mr. Ramsey majored in Secondary Education and minored in History. He was Class President twice and a member of Who's Who In America Colleges And Universities. He is married to Iris Baker and they have four children, Mark, Beth, Dan and Julie. He taught school, coached football, served as Sports Editor, led singing for meetings and engaged in local work as a preacher in Australia; Wisconsin; Colorado; Clearwater, Florida; and in Odessa, Fort Worth and Corsicana, Texas. He has taught in Sunset School of Preaching, Lubbock, and Preston Road School of Preaching in Dallas. He is now engaged in evangelistic and writing endeavors. Mr. Ramsey also works presently with the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Fort Worth, Texas.

THE FAR COUNTRY

Denver E. Cooper

“Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, who planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and WENT INTO A FAR COUNTRY. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto the husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their season. Jesus saith unto them, did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the people, because they took him for a prophet.” (Matthew 21:33-46)

Background Introduction

This parable was spoken two or three days before the death of Christ on Friday. It represents God as the householder: owner and planter of the vineyard. The householder went into a FAR COUNTRY. The Jewish leaders are the people Jesus had in mind. They were quite insincere, professing to believe in and expect the Messiah but unwilling to confess Him. In the previous parable they were represented as arrogant while the publicans and harlots, recognizing their needs were willing to repent and be baptized. The insincerity and rebellion of the Jews is vividly shown in this and the preceding parable. The situation is growing more intense by the hour and the Jewish Leaders knew exactly about whom the Lord was speaking. Like Pharaoh of old, their hearts became harder as they were determined to dispose of Jesus.

The Householder

God is the householder. As the owner of the vineyard he has well cared for all of its needs. He provided a winepress consisting of two vats arranged so that fruit pressed by the feet of the workers in the upper vat would drain to the lower vat. A tower was built so that watchmen could protect the vineyard from the thieves, foxes and other wild animals set on destroying the vineyard. God had provided the Jewish people with many advantages throughout their existence and as his seed, given them many opportunities as his chosen ones. He even made a special covenant with them spoken of in Heb. 8. He placed a protective “hedge” about them, but still they failed to appreciate his goodness. God kept them from the pagan nations. “For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: Lo, the people shall dwell alone.” (Numbers 23:9). According to Eph. 2:14,15 they were separated by the covenant which God made with them. “The middle wall of partition”.

You will notice the “other country” of Luke 20:9 points out the difference seen in the way God’s messages were delivered to Moses and Joshua. From Sinai God did not speak to them “face to face” as he had with Moses. (Deut.34:9,10). It is interesting too, that God did not send a prophet, a preacher or speak to his people

personally during the four hundred years before John the Baptist. God was in a FAR COUNTRY.

The Householder Took An Extended Trip

All things are in order, proper arrangements have been made for the care of his property, the HOUSEHOLDER went into a FAR COUNTRY. Jesus quite often represents God as giving directions to his people and then withdrawing, giving them the opportunity to be tested as free moral agents. The fact that God does not interfere with the work of his people is taken by Atheist to mean that he doesn't exist, or if he does he either cannot or will not do anything to help.

Denominations believe that God is blessing them in his absence because of his apparent physical success. They often have great numbers, financial wealth and big buildings to show for their work.

Careless and unfaithful members of God's family believe that God's continued shower of the necessities of life is evidence of his approval.

All through the Bible God's people were given every opportunity after adequate plans and preparations had been made by God. Beginning with Adam and Eve, created in a perfect environment, God withdrew to allow them the freedom of choice. For hundreds of years after the fall of the first pair, God continued to care for humanity, expecting to receive fruits of them. Receiving none, he sent the great flood. Later God called Moses to Mt. Sinai, gave the law, established the Hebrew nation and withdrew. Though it is obvious that he was "not very far away" at anytime, it might be said that he was in a FAR COUNTRY, yet close enough to carry out his plans and purposes by assuring Israel that if they did well he would bless them and if they disobeyed Him He would punish them. He kept His word in both cases.

The Harvest Time Came

Every land owner has a right to receive "his fair share of the fruits" from his possessions. The harvest of the vineyard drew near and the householder sent his servants to receive what was rightfully his. It was time that the Jews should have been showing their appreciation for all that God had done for them. When the

question of advantage came up, Paul said the Jews had advantage “much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (Rom. 3:3) Since by “the law is the knowledge of sin”, (Rom.3:20), the Jewish people should have been aware that they were unable to justify themselves by the law. They were not better and no worse than the Gentiles when it came to obeying the Gospel of Christ. (Rom. Chap.1-3)

In every age some were willing to do what God told them to do. Job, Noah, Abraham and many other great patriarchs loved God. Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Nehemiah and others listened to God and did as they knew they ought, but the vast majority failed to do what God commanded them and reaped the harvest of outcasts. Many of all nations reject him today.

Servants Were Sent

The “servants” who were sent represent the great and worthy prophets who were sent by God to teach and warn the people of God. Wouldn’t you think that the Jews would have seen the worthiness of these valiant men and have been anxious to hear what they had to say? That noble Elijah who stood so courageously on old Mt. Carmel declaring the God of Israel; Jeremiah, whom the Lord commanded, “Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. The Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord saith unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.” (Jer.1:9,10); Isaiah, Ezekial, Daniel and many others, all determined to let people know what God had commanded them. Yet, they rejected them.

Is it not the same today? Preachers train, prepare to do their best for the world, yet are often reviled, persecuted and rejected, in spite of the fact that they are sincerely exposing sin in their efforts to prepare men and women for an eternal resting place. The Lord anxiously watches for the fruit. Though more gospel is being preached in more ways today than at any time in the history of the world, we can say with the weeping prophet, “harvest is past, summer is ended and we are not saved”. (Jer. 8:20).

Then He Sent His Beloved Son

Surely enough has been said and done that all will receive him. The Master Teacher dared to be different. He spoke with authority. He was one of their own. But Jesus frequently spoke of the similarities between the prophets of old and his contemporaries. He told his disciples in Matthew 5:12, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you". Stephen preached to Jews and declared, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy host: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 5:51,52). All of these are reminders of the compassion, mercy and love of God continued to bestow upon his creation.

"They will surely reverence my son". That Jesus was different from any servant preceding him is evidenced by the comparison and confession in Matthew 16:13-20. This is deity and is recognized as such by the Father. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (Mt.3:17). He is the best and only sacrifice remaining, which is powerful enough, and righteousness enough to reconcile the world unto the Father. However, it was not a surprise to the Father that His Son was rejected.

Jesus the Son suffered unspeakable agony at the hands of the Jews. Can you imagine the things he heard, saw and felt while hanging on the cross? Of course, he was taken outside the city to die. (John 19:17).

Jesus asked, "What will he do with those husbandmen?" They answered arrogantly in a self-centered manner. Knowing that they were the persons Jesus meant, they said, "God forbid", "Never".

The pronouncement of doom upon them by the husbandmen was quite clear. They understood exactly what was meant. Predicted many times before had been the utter destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This is clearly set forth in 2Sam. 12.

Jesus then reminded them that their conduct was further foretold in Ps. 118:22. "The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner". According to 1 Pet.2:8 and 1Cor. 1:23 Christ was the stone of stumbling to the Jews and a rock of offence to the Gentiles. A wise builder, upon examining

the stone he was using, would by no means cast aside a perfectly good stone. This stone did not suit the preconceived ideas of either the Jew or the Gentile. The Jews were sure that no one could be saved, except by the law and the Gentiles were sure they could be a law unto themselves. (Rom.1-2). I fear that even among our brethren the stone often does not suit their fancy.

Christ was put to every test known to man. He was “tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin”, (Heb.4:15). The strength of the stone was more than adequate, serving to tie the wall together. (Vine) As the chief corner stone, he brought together the Jew and the Gentile, in one flesh thereby proving the mercy and justice of the Father, the householder.

Jesus pronounced the ultimate destruction on the nation of Israel. Men today have not and seemingly will not learn that the “nation” of Israel will be no more God’s chosen people. The church is now God’s chosen nation. (1Pet. 2:9) When the armies of Titus crushed the city of Jerusalem many prophecies were fulfilled which should have been known by the Jews. Josephus informs us that 1,100,000 Jews were killed at that time. Jews were scattered just as Jeremiah and Amos said they would be. (Jer. 24:2; Amos 9:9) There will be no 1000 year reign for Christ in the city of Jerusalem, Paris, London, New York or any other city. When our Lord shall appear, it will be sudden, unexpected, heard, seen by every one living on earth, regardless of where they are or what they are doing. “Hence, be ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh”. (Mt. 24:44).

Besides all the lessons mentioned in the lesson so far, we learn that God’s plans cannot be stopped. From before the foundation of the world it was his intention to give every nation, tribe and tongue an opportunity to be a member of Christ’s church, a citizen of the kingdom and be saved, all by simple obedience to the gospel of Christ. (Rom.1:16).

May God help us always to be receptive, kind, considerate and loving toward God’s servants as they attempt to help us bear more fruit for the Lord.

Biographical Information

Denver E. Cooper was born in Cairo, WV April 2, 1923, reared in Parkersburg and graduated from Parkersburg High School in 1941.

He was baptized in 1937 by bro. Charlie Taylor who encouraged him to attend Freed-Hardeman College which he entered in August 1942 and preached his first full-length sermon in September 1941. He married Florence E. Smith of Sistersville, WV in March 1945 and they celebrated 50 years together March 1995. To this union was born 8 children and they adopted one daughter. His located work include Ironton, OH; Harrisville, WV; Chester, WV; Philippi, WV; West St., Weirton, WV; Toronto, OH; Ravenswood, WV; Dewey Ave., St. Marys, WV; Weirton Heights, Weirton, WV; Timberville, VA and Hillview Terrace, Moundsville, WV (present). He has been a Bible instructor in **West Virginia School of Preaching** beginning in 1994.

COMFORTING THE BEREAVED

Don Treadway

C.S. Lewis says, “And grief feels like fear. Perhaps, more strictly, like suspense. Or like waiting, just hanging around waiting for something to happen. It gives life a permanently provisional feeling. ... The act of living is different all through.” As usual Lewis uses such powerful word pictures that those who have gone through or who are going through the grieving process can say, “Yes, that is what I have been trying to describe.” Grief - what do we mean by this term? I would like to offer the following definition as the basis of our discussion. Grieving is a universal, spiritual and emotional process that allows us to feel the impact of the loss on our lives so that we can slowly begin to make the painful, necessary adjustments. It is universal in that all go through this process, Christian as well as non-Christian. The spiritual aspect is where we all come face to face with our own mortality, eternity, and our relationship with God. Emotionally, we have to accept the reality that the one who had been meeting our needs in this area is no longer with us.

Many grieving souls are trying to deal with tragedies. John was a rambunctious little boy until the drunk drove off the road and killed him. Mary was a wife of 54 years when she died and left Sam alone for the first time in all of those years. Tom was the father of three darling children and the husband of a sweet wife who now have to carry on alone. Where was God? Didn't He hear the prayers for their safety and protection? If so, why do these tragedies happen?

Our hearts are broken when we see others struggling with such grief. But what can we do? I will try to offer some principles that may help us in comforting the bereaved. We need to realize that we will never be able to understand each and every individual instance of tragedy. But we can rely on these general biblical principles as we help others when they go through the grieving process.

First and most importantly, we must trust God's Word. Unless this is the touchstone of our lives, we may never reach a resolution of our grief. We should constantly be studying the

many examples of those who trusted the truthfulness of the scriptures. This will enable us to turn to God's Word for the strength we need in such a time. For example: In John 11:1-57, we see Jesus reaching out to a family struggling with the pain of death. Both Martha and Mary express the feelings of abandonment and maybe even some anger. Jesus does not condemn them for these emotions. As a matter of fact, He "*groaned in the spirit and was troubled*" because of Mary's weeping. We can find vindication for our grieving in this account and can come to realize it is not incompatible with faith in God. Jesus tells us that death is not the end of our existence but that we shall never die. If we lose our faith in God's Word we have compounded our problems. We now have two problems not just one!

The second principle I want us to look at is the wonderful fact that God does hear our prayers and answers them. As hard as it is to understand while we are experiencing difficult circumstances, His way is always best for all concerned. In Luke 22:41-44 we read, "*And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*" Jesus was in the garden facing the cross. With agony and sweat, He pleaded for the cup of death on the cross to be taken from Him. He knew what was going to happen and the human side of Him did not want the physical grief and pain that was before Him. Most of all He did not want the awful feeling of separation which He expressed in Matthew 27:46: "*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" But He had total trust in God's love, wisdom and justice as He said "*not My will but Thy will be done*". There was a clear understanding that there was a higher will to be fulfilled. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;*" ". If only we could develop this trust in God and His love.

Psalm 102 is another prayer of grief in which the psalmist expresses his spiritual, emotional and physical experience. Psalm 102:3-11 reads, “*For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top. Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down. My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.*” These are some very powerful words which help us to understand and sustain those involved in the painful process of grief. At the end of this psalm we see the strength that comes from trust in God. Psalm 102:25-28 says, “*Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*”

The third principle we want to examine is that God does intervene in our lives in a providential fashion to bring about His Will. If only we could part the curtains of time and see through God’s eyes that which we consider adverse and tragic, no doubt our reactions would be different. The only way to properly evaluate our existence is in the light of eternity. That is why Joseph could say to his brothers what he did in Genesis 50:20, “*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*” I am sure Paul did not have four years of prison in mind when he prayed to go to Rome as he reported his prayer in Romans 1:9-10, “*For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.*” But that is exactly what happened and it worked out for the good

of the spreading of the gospel. We do not always know when God is intervening in our lives, so we need to glorify God always.

Next, we need to realize that we are not the first to have to deal with the “ununderstandable” in our lives. From the beginning of the church, saints have had to struggle with the unknowable. In Acts 12:1-19, we find that James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod. But on the other hand, Peter was released from his cell by an angel where he had been imprisoned by Herod. Why? Surely John had to ask himself in the dark of the night, “Why was my brother killed and Peter released?” The disciples in Jerusalem also had to wonder about this question. Philippi is the place of another such incident which is recorded in Act 16. Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke were all in town to evangelize this area but only Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. Why not Timothy and Luke? We have another illustration in Phil 2:25-30 which tells of Epaphroditus being healed. But Paul also had requested that he be healed of his “thorn in the flesh” and had been told in II Corinthians 12:9, “*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*” Why? I do not know. Occasionally, we sing a song entitled, “Farther Along”, whose words might help us to accept these situations. Let us look at this song. The second verse discusses this very topic. Let us sing this song with the confidence that “we’ll understand it all by and by.” We need to have the assurance that God is working out a larger and better plan than we may be able to see.

Finally, Christianity is a religion that asks us to trust God because He has offered us overwhelming evidences of His goodness and righteousness. Romans 15:4 says, “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*” We can trust that God will do the right thing. We are told in God’s word that we are not promised a “rose garden” but a life that will have problems and grief just like anyone else. The difference is that we can depend upon God. Romans 8:35-39, asks our question and gives us the answer, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than*

conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In addition to the principles we have just discussed, there are two other passages that come to my mind when thinking about bereavement: Psalm 23:1-6 *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”* and, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*

In both of these passages we receive comfort from the knowledge that Jesus is with us even as we die. While He also is concerned that we do not *“sorrow as others who have no hope”*, He does not ask us to not sorrow. In I Thess 4:15-17 we are told that Jesus will not only receive us when we die, but will bring with Him those who died in Christ when He returns. In addition, He reassures us with the exciting and comforting news that we will be with Him forever. Psalm 23 tells us that even as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death we have the protection of God.

Besides these all important spiritual and emotional helps, we can and must also help in many physical, financial and practical ways. James describes this as pure and undefiled religion in James 1:27 when he said, “*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*” How do we put these words into action? It depends upon the circumstances of the bereaved. If we are talking of Mary, the widow of Sam after 54 years of marriage, she will need someone to help care for her home and car, maybe provide transportation to worship, the doctor’s office, etc. She will also need to know we consider her as a person of value by remembering her at anniversaries, birthdays and other special days. Tom’s widow and her three small children will need not only help with maintenance of the house and car, but the children will need a male influence in their lives. They also need to be drawn even more into the social fabric of the congregation to provide for the emotional support missing in their lives. When we assess our skills and abilities and see how we put them to use in our homes, we can better see how to use them to comfort the bereaved.

We defined grieving as a universal, spiritual and emotional process that allows us to feel the impact of the loss on our lives so that we can slowly begin to make the painful, necessary adjustments. Our job is twofold: First, to ease the impact of their loss on their lives we need to point them to the strength and support that is theirs from God, His Word, and His people. We also must help them to make those painful and necessary adjustments in their lives. May God give us the strength and wisdom to minister to the bereaved.

Biographical Information

Don Treadway is a father of four and grandfather of six, married to Sandy Seckman of Massillon, Ohio for more than 33 years. Four years were spent in the U.S. Navy, one of them in Vietnam. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1974 and Ohio Valley College in 1985 with a B.A. He has been preaching in Ohio and West Virginia for more than 25 years. The last 17 years have been spent in central Ohio, where he now preaches at the Gahanna Jefferson church of Christ in Gahanna, Ohio.

THE BEAUTY OF CHRISTIANITY

Johnny Ramsey

The grandest slogan I have ever heard is the one that challenges us to “go forward--Back to the Bible!” Truly, we must **consider the days of old as we seek the old paths** (Psalms 77:5; Jeremiah 6:16). Leaving God’s landmarks just as He set them is a wise decision (Hosea 5:10). Let us always remember that in Christianity “if it is new it is not true and if it is true it is not new” because the system of faith was **once for all time** delivered in the first century (Jude 3). We need to skip Rome, Constantinople, London--and all other earthly headquarters--and go all the way back to Jerusalem, Acts 2, Pentecost and the pristine beauty of New Testament Christianity! We shall not even desire to restore the Restoration Movement or exalt Campbell, Creath or McGarvey. Back to Christ, the Apostles and the pure Word of God will be our plea. The heart of Christianity is found in Colossians 1:27: Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Since the seed of the kingdom is God’s precious word (Luke 8:11; John 15:3), we will not search for Truth in the creed books of men or the decisions of religious synods or mandates of ecumenical councils. Human hands have never touched the eternally purposed church of the Lord (Ephesians 3:9-11). It was too much for the wicked Jeroboam to go back to Jerusalem (I Kings 12:28) and millions today are not content with the old Jerusalem gospel either! The gospel age is not dependent upon traditions and customs of men nor is our loyalty to a periodical, school, editor or pulpiter. **We are complete in Christ** (Colossians 2:10) and the blessed, inspired Scripture (2 Timothy 3:17). We are not interested in the original teachings or stance of Luther, Calvin, Wesley or Campbell but in the proclamation of New Testament oracles (I Peter 4:11). We desperately need to get back to Christ, the Bible, purity of life, zeal in evangelism, generosity in giving and a daily life of devotion and service (Mark 10:45). Our blessed Savior demands the best we possess (Luke 9:23) in a commitment to spiritual excellence.

New Testament Christianity

Nineteen centuries ago Christ and His apostles began a system of spiritual power that encompassed the earth and blessed the world. The pure religion of the Savior—once established—has never vanished from the human scene even though the darkness of the ages often has dimmed its pristine beauty. Daniel 2:44 affirmed the perpetual status of the kingdom and Matthew 16:18 promised its glorious establishment. In spite of persecution by Rome, jealousy of the Jews, economic poverty and a startling message, the gospel of Jesus swept the ancient world by storm.

The ardent zeal of devoted servants of the Lord emblazoned a noble page in the volume of ancient history. The spiritual army of the Lord made many valiant conquests for the Captain of their salvation (Hebrews 2:10). Shining as lights in the midst of a perverse generation (Philippians 2:15), early Christians took seriously the task of “living soberly, righteously and godly” (Titus 2:12). The simple organization of the Lord’s church made clear its autonomous government. Adhering strictly to divine principles of self-governing procedures set forth in Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-6; Acts 20:28-30 and I Peter 5:1-4, there was no need for earthly headquarters, bureaucracy or hierarchy.

In Philippians 1:1 we read simply of elders, deacons and all the **saints**. Worship in the first century church of our Lord was to be conducted in “spirit and in truth” as John 4:24 clearly stated. Reverently, as the Scriptures directed, the body of Christ “continued steadfastly” in the homage the apostles taught (Acts 2:42). The first day of the week was especially set aside for the Lord’s Supper and the contribution (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2). Nineteen centuries ago the church Christ established, by His shed blood, was strong in its exposure of error (II Timothy 4:2-4), as well as its proclamation of truth (I Timothy 3:15) and especially in ardent evangelism.

Acts 5:42; 8:4 and 12:24, tells us of the daily teaching that caused “The Word of God to grow and multiply.” Christians of that era prayed boldly and fervently (Hebrews 4:16; James 5:16), even as they joyously sang praises unto God (Acts 16:25; Colossians 3:16-17). Christianity was life! Paul said: “For me to live is Christ.”

Today, sadly we often live beneath the standard of New Testament ideals; we coast along with a convenient facsimile of Christianity that really does not demand much of us. A building, a pulpit, a classroom, a teacher and a preacher pretty well sum up our concept of what Jesus died for. But, conversation, conviction, commitment, dedication, loyalty and sincerity demand much more of us. A genuine life of enrichment awaits those who absolutely want to be New Testament Christians. We will never win many souls for our Redeemer until we fully surrender our wills to the Master. Then, when we submerge our identity into the greater cause of salvation, our songs will be richer, our prayers more spiritual, our influence more meaningful and our lives more heavenly. Men will then know we have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). More than anything else New Testament Christianity is just what Paul wrote in Galatians: “Christ living in me.”

The Challenge of Christianity

There is no greater challenge than being a Christian. There is no richer reward for one’s endeavor than pursuing the way of righteousness. If there were no eternity, no judgment day, nor heaven nor hell, still the best way to live upon this earth would be to live the life of a genuine Christian. The demands of the gospel make better people of us, and more valuable to those about us, as we strive to walk as Jesus directs: “For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps” (I Peter 2:21). It is not an easy way though the effort is well repaid.

When Jesus walked this earth, He marked the roadway as one of self-denial: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The apostle Paul referred to the necessity of bringing one’s thoughts and actions into subjection in order to be victorious as a Christian: “Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...I buffet my body and bring it into bondage: lest by any means after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected” (II Corinthians 10:5; I Corinthians 9:27). Some folk cannot meet the challenge of the gospel because of their lack of conviction and desire. How sad it is to realize that many who once

were loyal servants of Christ have now turned back to libertine existence because of the appeal to fleshly appetites (II Peter 2:18).

Let us notice some reasons why the challenge to live the Christian life demands our best, and is so rewarding.

The Power of the Word of God

The demanding nature of Christianity is based upon the integrity of the Bible. The depth of the sacred page is beyond the shallow pace of earthly existence, and millions are just not willing to pay the price of stalwart devotion to the Man of Galilee. It takes no effort to follow Satan. But Jesus Christ will accept only the finest devotion; “So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). It will not work to try to compromise the integrity of the Scriptures to mesh with the lackadaisical attitude of mankind. Jesus made it clear that the message of salvation cannot be compromised. “The Scripture cannot be broken...Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 10:35; 15:3).

The message of the Bible provides a richness that demands the best within us! It reveals that God gave His best for us: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Begotten Son” (John 3:16). The psalmist wrote, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalms 119:11). What a consolation the precious Book divine is to all faithful students of its delightful contents. The poet pungently reminds us:

We have traveled together,
My Bible and I,
Through all kinds of weather
With smile or with sigh;
In sorrow or in sunshine,
In tempest or calm,
Thy friendship unchanging,
My lamp and my psalm.

The Power of Jesus Christ

Christianity is challenging because it is built upon the deity of the Master. Jesus was not just a man. “In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-3; 14). In reply to the questioning Jews, He said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). To unbelieving critics who objected to His claims of familiarity with God, He further stated, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Jesus has the words of eternal life (John 6:68), a name above all others (Philippians 2:9) and a glory unsurpassed (John 14:6). To the King of kings we owe allegiance that propels us into a sojourn that people of the temporal world cannot fathom (Acts 4:13). Even Napoleon, in his famous speech to General Bertrand, admitted that “the spirit of Christ overawes me.” As another leader of men later wrote, so we believe as well, that our blessed Lord supersedes all rulers, armies, navies and heroes that ever lived in power, splendor and influence.

The Power of Evangelism

The impact of Christianity challenges us also because it is promulgated by the great commission and not by some bombastic plan set forth by mankind. The parting words of the Savior prior to His going back to heaven are so simple, yet are so profound. Jesus told the apostles, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be condemned” (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16). Jesus sent the disciples into the world with no weapons, no threats. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (II Corinthians 10:3). They had only the message of salvation. But that was enough!

Nothing could have permeated the Roman Empire so successfully as the humble servants of the crucified Nazarene pressing the claims of the Messiah upon that profligate society. The early saints “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4),

and soon the message of redemption covered the ancient world as the waters cover the sea!

Truth never dies. The ages come and go
The mountains wear away; the stars retire,
Destruction lays the mighty cities low,
And empires, states and dynasties expire,
But caught and handed onward by the wise,
Truth never dies!

The Power of a Pure Life

Christianity demands our very best because it is demonstrated by purity of life. The basic, fundamental values of the religion of Christ can best be seen in His life: “Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin...Him who knew no sin, he made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (Hebrews 4:15; II Corinthians 5:21). It was said of Jesus, “He went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). So do His followers, as they follow His steps (I Peter 2:21). The same values seen in the life of Jesus are seen in the dedicated demeanor of fervent disciples of the Lord.

Too many times the world receives a faulty impression of the way of the cross because of our failure to portray the ethics of godliness. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we learn anew of the intense value and power of a life that magnifies Christ and shares the message of the Redeemer with others (Philippians 1:12-20). Oh, what demands the gospel places upon the devotees of the Savior! There is an enthralling stanza in a seldom used gospel song that ought to ring in the ears of every dedicated Christian:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity,
May His spirit divine, All my being refine,
Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

The Power of a Living Hope

Christianity is great because it brings optimism, hope and joy into the daily walk of children of the heavenly Father. Trusting in the Creator (Proverbs 3:5) instead of earth’s vain trinkets gives us the enrichment that only the hope of heaven can bequeath to us.

Hope includes faith, but it also is assurance. We have that because of Jesus: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:3-5).

Christians never look back to a life of sin, but ever press on to the beautiful home of the soul. As parents, we choose early in life to indelibly etch into the mural and fabric of our children’s lives that we, “Look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God...look for a better country, that is, a heavenly” (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

A careful man I ought to be,
A little fellow follows me;
I do not dare to go astray,
For fear he’ll go the self-same way.

Let us all rise up to meet the challenge of Christianity. With a firm commitment and deep resolve, we will one day, by the grace of God, when the saints go marching in to glory, join in that heavenly chorus.

What Life Is All About

There are many precious things about Christianity that would not be available if the Savior had not left heaven and graced this earth with His presence. How empty and meaningless our daily existence would be apart from the richness and depth of the gospel era. We owe so very much to the resplendent beauty of New Testament Christianity. Whatever the world offers in its most glorious moment fades into nothingness when the radiant hues of the Messiah beam forth. For years faithful children of God have sung:

Take the world but give me Jesus,
All its joys are but a name;
But His love abideth ever,
Through eternal years the same.

Mankind struggles in vain to find genuine purpose in life apart from Christ. When the Lord and heaven's message enter our thinking we are transformed from a dreary pursuit of merely existing to an exciting motivation and goal. Following our blessed Redeemer provides a destiny where God "will make all things new" (Revelation 21:1-5).

Beyond the sunset's radiant glow,
There is a brighter world I know,
Beyond the sunset I may spend
Delightful days that never end.

Let us notice several key points that Jesus contributes to our sojourn upon the earth (I Peter 2:11), that we would otherwise be bereft of had He not come.

Living For Jesus: Walking In The Light

How would you explain or describe the life of a Christian? There are twenty-one epistles in the New Testament which are dedicated to this matter. Romans through Jude contain classic data on the subject of Christianity translated into human conduct. We are richly blessed with such clarity of information in practical language for daily existence in the midst of a vile world that is insensitive to holiness and purity. Not many people in our age exhibit a desire to glorify God in the devotional words of Psalm 96:1-2, "O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day." The essence of a life devoted to Christ is a grateful heart that will gladly submit to a daily walk with God (Luke 9:23; Romans 12:1-2). An old and challenging song reminds us:

I am so wondrously saved from sin,
Jesus so sweetly abides within,
There at the cross where He took me in:
Glory to His name!

Once we realize how vain and futile life would be without the loving Savior, we will seek ways to magnify Deity. The power and grace of the Lord reminds us of this bulwark verse of Scripture: **"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the**

Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). How could we be so foolish as to launch out into a dark world devoid of the sacred light of His marvelous guidance? A compelling hymn captures this sentiment perfectly

Without Him I could do nothing;
Without Him I would surely fail.
Without Him I would be drifting
Like a ship without a sail.
Without Him how lost I would be!

Perhaps no other Bible chapter better gives the gist of the solid sojourn of the Christian to the degree and depth of the twelfth chapter of Romans. This dynamic section reminds us that the followers of Jesus lead a sacrificial, surrendered, selfless and satisfying life before God and men (vs. 1-8). The high ethic of the gospel system leaves no room for conceit, laziness or retaliation (vs. 9-20). We focus on serving the Lord and helping those about us (vs. 14:21). Living for Jesus forbids self-pity and mercenary goals. The redemption of the lost becomes our magnificent obsession (II Corinthians 4:13). Trivial matters fade, and spiritual emphases naturally engulf our waking thoughts. Producing the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23) subdues the carnal activities that overwhelm the vast hordes surrounding us. We are seekers of treasure far beyond silver and gold, due to the enormous value of souls.

The rich dividend for the man who truly seeks God’s kingdom first (Matthew 6:33), is the glorious improvement it produces in his own walk on the earth. Someone wisely sated, “The highest reward for man’s toil is not what he gets for it but what he becomes by it.” The “peace of God which passeth understanding” (Philippians 4:7) permeates the pilgrimage of those who follow Christ even when persecution enters their lives. Any noble endeavor is worth the consequences which such action may bring. It is far better to endure hardship as servants of the one who died at Calvary than to escape tribulation because of cowardice (I Peter 4:16).

Living for Jesus may mean that we will someday die for Him. Revelation 14:13 emphatically tells us that will be the epitome of blessedness: **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from**

henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them.”

When We Walk With The Lord

The very first Psalm draws out the distinction between a follower of righteous principles and the man who walks the busy highway of sinfulness. Though millions traverse the trail that leads to ruin, it is actually a lonely road bereft of the providence of God and the joy of radiant folk who walk with the Lord in the glorious light of His counsel. T. S. Teddlie provided this spiritual melody:

Safe in the harbor, the weary find rest,
Free from their labors and cares that distress,
Wounds find a healing, all tears wiped away
Safe in the sunlight of heaven’s glorious day.”

True happiness comes from avoiding the pitfalls of sin and shame as we walk hand in hand with God. The progressive nature of evil is shown in the first verse of Psalms as we trace the decline of the one who finally sits down in the tragic surroundings of error and debauchery. When sin becomes comfortable we are in terrible shape. Abstaining from evil is the wisest route for all of us (I Thessalonians 5:22). An old hymn proclaims:

Hold Thou my hand and closer, closer draw me
To Thy dear self—my hope, my joy, my all;
Hold Thou my hand, lest haply I should wander,
And, missing Thee, my trembling feet should fall.

The first Psalm has several tremendous truths carefully embedded within its structure. Each point is a sterling gem of rich virtue and spiritual nobility. Here are just a few of them:

1. True Happiness Comes Not From Riches
2. Real Joy Emanates From Bible Study and Practice
3. Vain Indeed Are Ambitions of Evil Men
4. Productive Lives Center in The Lord
5. Judgment Day Will Be Sad For The Ungodly

The depth of the riches found in the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33), transcends the grandiose schemes of men overwhelmed in secular matters. The kingdom of the Lord is more

valuable, by far, than pearls and gems of great price (Matthew 13:44-45). Many will lose their souls to a Devil's hell because they were not wise enough to recognize the truth of I Timothy 6:9: "For they that would be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."

Genuine, lasting wealth consists of treasures laid up in heaven (Matthew 6:20), that will never fade away! When we walk with the Lord we use our ability of choice to decide on proper decisions in the divine realm that will lead us, one day, to the golden street of glory. We dare not go down the path of ruin that looks bright and promising and dazzling and makes no demands of us. It may look like easy street, but the dividends of such an avenue will be exceedingly hard to take when we stand before God in Judgment!

In Revelation 17, we learn how appealing the harlot city of Rome was, but how devastating indeed would be any alliance based upon the scarlet and gold that attracted shallow minds. Those with the stability and dedication it takes to delight in the spiritual power of the Scriptures and to loyally walk the unadorned path of holiness will one day bask in the sublime presence of the redeemed. Such a reunion will make "The toils of the road seem as nothing when we get to the end of the way."

Those who fail to walk with the Lord allow themselves to be overwhelmed in the throes of iniquity. Due to the progressive nature and power of sin, such folk become the alcoholics, compulsive gamblers, permanent penitentiary inmates and spiritual derelicts of society. Instead of **growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord** (II Peter 3:18), such sad ones propound the evil in their lives by becoming Satan's helpers in the midst of a pleasure-mad world.

When we walk with the Lord we meditate upon the precious treasure of His inspired message. We fill that empty vacuum of our former life with positive godliness (Luke 11:24-27), that overwhelms spiritual laziness and produces a heaven-bound life of purpose and loyalty to divine mandates. We, like Jesus, go about doing good (Acts 10:38), and the world is a better place because of our efforts to magnify the Savior in every facet of life (I Corinthians 10:31).

Walking hand in hand with Christ we busily engage in bearing much fruit for His cause (John 15:8).

While the souls of men are dying
And the Master calls for you
Let no one hear you idly saying
There is nothing I can do.

We dare not meet the Lord in Judgment empty-handed. Are we growing in Him? Do we bear fruit to His honor? Let us truly walk with the Lord in the light of His word!

Who will follow Jesus
Standing for the right?
Holding up His banner
In the Thickest fight.

It is an honor of deep delight to walk in the light divine!

Contributions To Salvation

Whatever it is that helps to save our souls is of monumental value and ought to be highly esteemed. Nothing compares to the joy of redemption. Therefore, we ought to be exceedingly attentive to anything that contributes to our eternal destiny with God in heaven. It would be beyond tragic to miss the golden shore of glory and sad to the zenith degree to be in torment everlastingly. A great song tells us;

Only faintly now I see Him,
With a darkling veil between,
But a blessed day is coming,
When His glory shall be seen.

We should be forever grateful for those things that propel us to the right hand of the Father above. Notice the following list we should count as blessings on our journey toward that land that beckons the people of God:

The Power of Truth
Godly Parents
Concern From Other Christians
Loyal Gospel Preachers
The Joy of Living For Jesus

The Emptiness of Sin
The Gratitude of Sincere Hearts
The Anticipation of Seeing Loved Ones

Motivation is a powerful tool in every avenue of endeavor. Especially is this true in regard to spiritual goals, ambition and dedication. With the friendship of those of like previous faith we can march together toward the promised land.

Truth alone can free us from the prison of evil, error and despair. But it takes faithful preaching of the glad tidings and the example of devoted parents with spiritual fervor to plant in our hearts the good news of redemption and conviction. Also, the common bonds we share with dedicated brothers and sisters in the Lord point us in the direction of steadfast devotion and commitment to the Creator. The joy and satisfaction of serving the Savior make it all worthwhile in the struggles and pitfalls of earthly life.

Be with me Lord, No other gift or blessing,
Thou couldst bestow could with this one compare;
A constant sense of Thy abiding Presence,
Where're I am, to fee that Thou art near.

Sin, with its very high prices, can beguile, mislead and overwhelm us, but it can also open our eyes as to how shallow the pursuit of evil truly is!

Nearer, still nearer, Lord to be Thine,
Sin with its follies I gladly resign.

All of these points blend into an appraisal of how grateful we ought to be that we have a choice in regard to time and eternity. How we spend our time will determine where we spend eternity. And, the glorious anticipation of being with our loved ones, who died in Christ, spurs us on toward the gates of pearls and a golden street in the sweet halls of heaven.

In view of the valuable reward awaiting the saints of God, we ought to always be willing to stand up for Christ, the gospel, the church, sound doctrine, the plan of salvation and moral purity. Appreciation for blessings demands loyalty.

Dispensational Premillennialism

W. Terry Varner

Introduction

A. Religious thought generally produces the reactions of fear, frenzy and great excitement when discussing end-time events; i.e., the second coming of Christ and its attendant doctrines.

B. Historically, this is true as each century comes to a close and our physical calendars date us in to a new century. In the year of 2000, we will not only complete the 20th century, but in 2001 we will enter a third millennium (1,000 years) of the Christian era.

C. The nearer we come to the end of the century and the emergence of a new millennium, the more religious prophetic teachers, who are in reality soothsayers, (1) create a false prophetic climate, (2) use unsound hermeneutics (interpretation) of end-time doctrines and (3) laugh all the way to the bank as they enjoy their profits.

“Be Not Soon Shaken in Mind”

A. Paul warned the Thessalonians concerning the second coming (2 Thess. 2:1-12). Some had become “shaken in mind, . . . troubled” to the extent they had quit work (2 Thess. 3:10).

B. Over the centuries men have falsely rumored the soon-coming of Christ.¹ Their movements are often a disappointment and an embarrassment to them and disillusionment to their followers. Sadly, true biblical teaching on end-time matters is confused and the truth is often rejected outright.

C. Consider the brief historical panorama of the “shaking of the mind” of religious seekers concerning end-time matters.

1. The Montanist Movement (A.D. 156).²

2. The Doomsday New Year’s Eve (A.D. 999).³

3. The Nutty Bookbinder (A.D. 1527).⁴

4. The Millerites (A.D. 1840s).⁵

D. The long centuries have produced many other individuals and groups, cults and non-cults, who have prophesied the second coming of Christ, e.g., Martin Luther, the Jehovah’s Witnesses,

Herbert W. Armstrong and the World-Wide Church of God (Adventists), The Children of God, etc.

Our Present Day Doomsdayers

A. Seeds of our present-day “doomsdayers” can be traced to the founder of the Plymouth Brethren, John N. Darby (1800-1882) of Plymouth, England. He influenced Benjamin W. Newton (1805-1898), a speculative writer of biblical prophecy. Scofield authored the famous *Scofield Reference Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917). It is premillennial from the first page to the last.⁶

B. Much of the current end-time mania can be traced to Hal Lindsey and his first work, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).⁷ This highly unscriptural and an immensely speculative prophetic work, and his other works,⁸ has had an undue impact on the religious teaching of end-time matters and spawned literally thousands of books, booklets, tracts and articles containing some of the most bizarre interpretations.

C. The *key* to Lindsey’s predictions, which are in abundance and which are followed closely by most premillennial writers, is the re-establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948, which he and others claim is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

D. Lindsey took the complex premillennial interpretations of the scholars⁹ and popularized the end-time events. The following quote from the back cover of his latest book, *Planet Earth—2000 A.D.* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, Ltd., 1994), shows the impact and import of Lindsey’s writings: “No one to date has offered a more thorough, complete and easy to understand analysis of the current world crises and where they are leading.”

E. Lindsey’s first work spawned thousands of end-time books by more recent writers.¹⁰ These writings contain some of the most bizarre interpretations of end-time events one can imagine.

Earthquaking The “Mountain Peaks” Of The Mania

A. The end-time millennial mania is built upon the claim that “Christians after the early second century spent little time really defining prophetic truth until the middle of the nineteenth century”

(Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 181). In 1994, he writes that “*Only now*, as mankind approaches the third millennium, do I feel the Holy Spirit has provided me with the proper perspective—The Big Picture, so to speak—on the mind-blowing experiences of the modern world” (*Planet Earth—2000 A.D.*, p.2, italics mine, WTV).

B. We believe that the “mountain peaks” of end-time millennial mania crumble under the earthquake of biblical evidence and understanding. Consider the following tumbling of their “mountain peaks.”

1. **Modern Israel.** The key to the end-time millennial mania is May 14, 1948 when modern Israel became a state in Palestine. This event marks *the* end-time sign starting the prophetic countdown to Armageddon and the second coming.¹¹

a. The Land Promise. Tied to the end-time mania is the contention that Israel never realized the land promise of Genesis 15:18-21; Numbers 34:1-13.

b. The earthquake of biblical evidence destroys this contention. Joshua 21:43 states, “So Jehovah gave unto Israel ALL THE LAND which he swore to give unto their fathers.” In verse 45, it “all came to pass.” (cf., 1 Kings 4:20-21; Neh. 9:23). Israel’s right to the land was conditioned upon their faithfulness to Gods covenant (Deut. 28-30; see 29:9 and 30:1-10; Jer. 22:30; Ezra 9:8). Modern Israel is not the true Israel today, but rather true Israel is the church of our Lord (Rom. 2:28-29), which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Paul makes it clear, “they which are the children of the flesh, these ARE NOT the children of God” (Rom. 9:8).

2. **The Rapture and Tribulation.** Lindsey writes that “Christians have tendency sometimes to toss out words which have no meaning to the non-Christian. . . . ‘Rapture’ may be one of those words. It is not found in the Bible, so there is no need to race for your concordance, if you have one” (*Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 137).

a. Lindsey writes that call it what you may it “makes no difference—the important thing is that it will happen” (*Ibid.*). The rapture, in premillennial thought, results from a secret, invisible coming of Christ for His saints, so that they may avoid the seven

year tribulation period, and then followed by a visible return of Christ with His raptured saints to reign on earth in Palestine for one thousand years.

Lindsey gives an entire page describing the rapture as “the living end. . . . The ultimate trip.” Speaking on the rapture occurring, he writes of an imaginary football game—“our quarterback recovered [a fumble]—he was about a yard from the goal when—zap—no more quarterback—completely gone just like that” (*op. cit.*, p. 136).

b. The earthquake of biblical evidence destroys the premillennial rapture doctrine. The main text they use is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, when at the return of Christ [invisible and secret], the faithful saints “shall be caught up together.” The word *harparzo* conveys the idea of “to seize, catch up, snatch away, carry off by force” (Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950, p. 60). The act of being “caught up together” at the coming of Christ is not to escape the seven year great tribulation [which the Bible does not teach], but rather for the purpose that “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

3. **The Antichrist.** Major in the scheme of millennialism is the Antichrist.¹² Lindsey designates the Antichrist (singular), as the “Great Dictator” or the “Future Fuehrer” (*Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 10). In discussing the Antichrist, who appears in the last three and one-half years of the tribulation and before the visible coming of Christ, Lindsey, referring to 2 Thessalonians 2:3, calls him “the man of lawlessness [sin, KJV]” and “the son of destruction [perdition, KJV]” (*The Rapture*, p. 126).

a. From these two titles, the Antichrist will (1) oppose God and exalt himself as God, (2) sit in the holy of holies in the third Jewish temple, and (3) proclaim and display himself as God (*op. cit.*, pp. 127-128).

b. The earthquake of biblical evidence destroys the Antichrist theory. The word “Antichrist” occurs only in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7. The word means “against Christ;” therefore, refers not to a single personage, but is a reference to the forces of evil at work against Christ.

John says, in contradistinction to the premillennial argument, “even now are there many antichrists” (1 John 2:18). Note, the plural term “antichrists” and the present tense, “now,” suggesting the antichrists were present and at work in John’s time not centuries from his writing. Also note, John speaks of the “spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:3).

This scribe’s understanding of the “Antichrist,” “the man of sin” and the “son of perdition” is “a personification of all rebellion and lawlessness which claims the right to change the law and commandments God gave to man” (W. Terry Varner, “Book of II Thessalonians,” *Study To Show Thyself Approved*, Fifth Annual Virginia Bible Lectureship, May 25-27, 1988, pp. 235-237).

3. **The “Third” Temple.** The “third” temple is to be built in Jerusalem in the last three and one-half years of the tribulation before the visible return of Christ. This will be done with the protection of the Antichrist (Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 152).

a. For centuries, it has been argued that the Jewish temple area once sat where the Muslim mosque now stands. This has created bitter strife between the Jews and the Arabs. Lindsey, without documentation, writes: “It has recently been discovered that the holy of holies lies approximately 100 meters north of the Dome of the Rock. This means that the third temple could now be built without disturbing the third holiest Muslim shrine” (*The Rapture*, p. 127, fn. 1).

Why a “third” Jewish temple? John F. Walvoord, a main spokesman for premillennialism, writes that the building of the third temple “would indicate also a literal interpretation of the temple ritual and sacrifices. . . . the sacrifices make it clear that it is a distinct system from the Mosaic, but that it involves animal sacrifices as well as other forms of worship similar to that provided in the Mosaic system” (*The Millennial Kingdom*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959, pp. 310-311). Which are the “sacrifices,” distinct from or similar to the Mosaic Law?¹³ Can they be both?

b. The earthquake of the entirety of the New Testament destroys the temple and sacrificial system of the premillennialists. Animal sacrifices served as atonement for sin. The book of

Hebrews devastates the need and value of *any* temple and *any* future sacrifice beyond that of Christ. Christ's sacrifice was "once" for all (Heb. 7:27). Jesus "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

Perhaps, the following series of blasphemous quotes give us insight and understanding for the need of animal sacrifices and a temple in the millennium.

It can be said at once that His dying was not God's own plan. It was a plan conceived somewhere else, and yielded to by God. God had a plan of atonement by which men who were willing could be saved from sin and its effects. That plan is given in the old Hebrew code. . . . Clearly Jesus' dying does not in any way fit into the old Hebrew form of sacrifice. . . . **the horrible features of Jesus' dying, the hatred and cruelty, were no part of the plan of salvation, and not necessary to his plan.**

There is no cross in God's plan of atonement

(S.D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks About Jesus*, New York: A.C. Armstrong & Son, 1906, pp. 114-115, 117-118, bold print mine, WTV). There is no need for additional comment!

Some Serious Thoughts To Ponder

It is our conviction that Hal Lindsay's jigsaw approach to end-time events does great harm to the cause of Christ, the gospel and the church/kingdom for many reasons.

1. His explanations cannot be defended from biblical grounds. His hermeneutic is erroneous and at odds with the Bible.
2. Such manipulations of end-time events create a secret teaching [Gnostic in nature] which is understood by only a few and which is under constant recalculation known only by a certain few. The Bible is not a riddle Book of the future and eternity.
3. Such explanations make the cross foolishness and are thoroughly blasphemous.

4. Non-Christians seeing the juggling and jigsawing the biblical texts related to end-time events are prone to reject Christianity in toto.

A Biblical Perspective Of The Second Coming Of Christ

The second coming of Christ is probably the most popular subject of the entire Bible. Why not, as it involves for the Christian, especially, matters of momentous nature; e.g., our hope, longings of eternity and our heritage of heaven. An observation concerning the millennial mania is that little is said of significance of the many attendant doctrines involved in the second coming. A brief biblical perspective of the second coming is set forth.

Biblical Injunctions Concerning The Second Coming:

1. Watch For It (Mark 13:30-37; 1 Thess. 5:6).
2. Love It (2 Tim. 4:6-8).
3. Desire It (2 Peter 3:12).
4. Wait For It (Phil. 3:20; 2 Thess. 3:5)
5. Live In Preparation For It (2 Peter 3:11-15).
6. Be Ready For It (Matt. 24:44).
7. Find Comfort And Hope (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Biblical *Fact* Of The Second Coming

1. He “shall appear” (Col. 3:4).
2. He “shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28).
3. He “shall come in like manner as he went away” (Acts 1:11).

Biblical Purposes For The Second Coming

1. Raise The Dead (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15).
2. Judge Mankind (Acts 7:30-31; 24:25; Matt. 25:31-33; Rom. 14:12).
3. Reward Mankind, both righteous and unrighteous (Rev. 22:12; Matt. 25:34, 41, 46; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2 Cor. 5:10).
4. Destroy The Heavens And The Earth (2 Peter 3:10-11).
5. Death And Hades Cast Into Hell (Rev. 20:11-15).
6. Usher The Faithful To Heaven (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

7. Vindicate His Saints (2 Thess. 1:10).

Biblical Manner Of The Second Coming

1. Public—"every eye shall see Him" (Rev. 1:7).
2. In the clouds (Acts 1:11).
3. In fire (2 Thess. 1:8).
4. Glorious in contrast to His first coming as Saviour (Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Rev. 20:11-15; Acts 17:31).
5. With His angels (Matt. 16:7; 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7).
6. Unexpected, sudden, unheralded by signs (Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:40; 2 Peter 3:10).

Biblical Time Of The Second Coming

1. Time of His coming is not known (Acts 1:6).
2. Unknown to Christ when on earth (Mark 13:32).
3. He will come "as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Peter 3:10).

Conclusion

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20)

Endnotes

¹ For a brief survey of date-setters over the centuries, see Robert G. Clouse, "The Danger of Mistaken Hopes," *Dreams, Visions and Oracles*, Carl E. Armerding and W. Ward Gasque (eds.), (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 27-40.

² Norman Cohen, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), revised and expanded edition, pp. 9, 14, 21. This is the only book discussing the tradition of revolutionary millenarianism and mystical anarchism as developed in western Europe between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. Valuable for its insight into the development of the end-time heresies of these centuries.

³ James J. Brookes, *Maranatha or the Lord Cometh* (Saint Louise: Edward Bredell, 1878), p. 364. C. Marvin Pate and Calving B. Haines, Jr., *Doomsday Delusions* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 19-20.

⁴ Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

⁵ William N. Alnor, *Soothsayers of the Second Advent* (Old Tappan, NJ: Power Books, 1989), pp. 57-59.

⁶ An important work along the line of Scofield is William E. Biederwolf, *The Second Coming Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972) and originally

published as *The Millennium Bible*. Two study guides by W.J. Krutza were published to be used with the Baker Book House edition in 1973.

⁷ In 1988 this work entered its 100th printing and had sold in excess of 25 million copies in 30 languages (*Moody Monthly*, May 1988, pp. 30-31).

⁸ Lindsey is the author of eleven books with a combined world-wide sales of over 35 million copies. His other works of import are: *The World's Final Hour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), also published as "Homo Sapiens." He edited, with five other writers, *When Is Jesus Coming Again* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1971). *Satan Is Alive And Well On Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972). *The 1980's: Countdown To Armageddon* (King of Prussia, PA: Westgate Press, Inc., 1980). *The Promise* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1982). *The Rapture* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983). *Planet Earth—2000 A.D.* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, Ltd., 1994).

⁹ The writings of Gaebelien, Pentecost, Feinberg, Ryrie, Hoyt, Price, Pache, Anderson, Talbot, Lovett, Koch, Sauer, Payne, Tatford, Bullinger, Peters, Schulyer, Walvoord, Bloomfield, et al.

¹⁰ Salem Kirban, Tim Lahaye, Elizabeth Claire Prophet, Harold Camping, Edgar C. Whisenat, Charles Taylor, N.W. Hutchings, Constance E. Cumbey, Mary S. Relfe, R. Henry Hall, R.E. Dunlop, C.F. Deal, Chuck Smith, Pat Robertson and the cults of David Koresch, the Order of the Solar Temple of Switzerland and Canada, Aum Supreme Truth of Japan, et al.

¹¹ Lindsey's prophetic date setting begins with his claim that "the most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel" [14 May 1948, WTV] (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 53).

His conclusion is drawn from the Parable of the Fig Tree (Matt. 24:32-34) which is applicable to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and not the establishment of the modern state of Israel. He defines "generation" 40 years in which "all these things could take place" (*op. cit.*, p. 54); i.e., all the prophecies of Christ's return will be fulfilled. The "rapture" could begin in 1988 and Christ's return would be seven years later in 1995. WELL?

Typical of date-setters, Lindsey began to recalculate the second coming. In 1979 in Toronto, Lindsey gained another 19 years by re-examining the "budding fig tree" to include the repossession of Old Jerusalem in 1967 (Stanley D. Waters, "Hal Lindsey: Recalculating the Second Coming," *The Christian Century*, 96 [September 12, 1979]:839). By 1994, Lindsey redefines "generation" to mean "somewhere between 40 to 100 years" (*Planet Earth—2000 A.D.*, p. 3). What is his next definition of "generation"?

¹² The Antichrist rises to power immediately after the rapture, coming out of the European Common Market. He will make peace with the state of Israel and permit the rebuilding of the temple. The Antichrist will then turn on Israel and desolate the temple for the last three and one-half years. Identifying who is the Antichrist of I and II John has produced much speculation.

Historically, there are four basic views of the Antichrist: (1) he is the *personification of evil* and opposition to God, (2) an *institution of evil*, (3) an *evil person* (political as well as religious), and (4) the *dynamic view* which combines the previous three viewpoints. An excellent and thorough biblical discussion of the Antichrist has been written by Goebel Music, “The Man of Sin and the Antichrist,” “Premillennialism, True or False?” Wendell Winkler (ed.), *The First Annual “Fort Worth” Lectures*, (Fort Worth: Winkler Publications, 1978), pp. 172-183. For a premillennial approach, see Walter K. Price, *The Coming Antichrist* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974).

¹³ Premillennialists are divided as whether the word “sacrifices” are literal or otherwise. George N.H. Peters writes that we ought “not to press the word ‘sacrifices’ [i.e., whether they are literal or not, WTV] which is associated with the temple” (*The Theocratic Kingdom*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978, III:90).

Biographical Sketch

W. Terry Varner – Terry received his education at Abilene Christian University; Waynesburg College; West Liberty State Teachers College; West Virginia State College; National Christian University; and Alabama Graduate School of Religion. He began preaching in 1961 at Shadyside, OH and has preached for churches in Dunbar, WV and North Canton and Dayton, OH, prior to moving to Marietta, OH in 1978 where he labored with the Harmar Hill congregation.

He has spoken on numerous lectureships throughout the brotherhood and participates in teacher training schools on a regular basis. He has authored for books and writes regularly for Firm Foundation and Therefore Stand, of which he is owner and editor. He speaks on a daily radio program in Marietta, which is the oldest continuous radio program of brethren in Ohio.

Terry is married to the former Lillie Garrison and they have four children and 11 grandchildren.

GENETIC ENGINEERING

Jody Apple

Introduction : A Current Overview of Genetic Engineering

Dolly

Two years ago the scientific community, and the world at large, was amazed to learn of the successful cloning of a Finn Dorset ewe named Dolly. Dr. Ian Wilmut, an embryologist, and his research team at the Roslin Institute near Edinburgh, Scotland, successfully used the process of nuclear transfer to genetically clone Molly using adult somatic (mammary) cells, a process that had been thought impossible. Though recent criticisms have suggested that her apparent age (telomere cell structures appear to be older than a sheep of her age should be) is suspect due to the process — and though critics have declared that she isn't really a complete, or exact, clone of the original cell — still the world was aflutter with the allegation, at least, that a substantial life form (other than amoebae, paramecium, and other minute life forms) was genetically manipulated to reproduce some semblance, if not an actual clone, of the original.

American Cell Technology & The Cloning of Human Embryos

In November 1998 American Cell Technology (ACT), a private biotechnology firm in Worcester, Massachusetts, successfully cloned a human embryo. Because some scientists believe that an embryo becomes human when a developing nervous system is detected — usually after the fourteenth day — the embryo was destroyed at twelve days, though it could have lived longer. Previous attempts by others failed within six days.

American Cell Technology engaged in this experiment as a means of “therapeutic,” not “reproductive” cloning. Reproductive cloning is for the purpose of creating a new being, as in Dolly's case. Therapeutic cloning is done simply for the replication of parts, limited to cells presently, but perhaps organs and limbs someday. These parts can then be used in the treatment of diseases that are now considered incurable.

While therapeutic cloning is considered to be part of the inevitable future of disease retardation and control, scientists have already been engaging in the use of “human parts” for the treatment of diseases. In addition to the frequent organ transplants from one human to another, unborn children are subjected to the morally reprehensible practice of partial birth abortion. Their brain stem cells are summarily “harvested” to be used in the treatment of Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s diseases. If therapeutic cloning proves successful, both from a technical and commercial viewpoint, scientists won’t have to kill unborn children to get their parts — they will simply grow the parts they need in their laboratories. Though seemingly less repugnant than slaughtering innocent children, therapeutic cloning and the genetic manipulation machine is still fraught with moral consequences.

Such scenarios are, or at least should be, cause for concern. They are not science fiction from the past, or the science fiction of the future — they are present reality.

The Patents of Life

In June of 1999 the United States Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) rejected an application filed by Patrick J. Coyne, an attorney hired by Jeremy Rifkin, noted anti-biotechnology advocate, and Stuart Newman, a developmental biologist at New York Medical College. Though eighty percent of patents are routinely rejected after their initial application, the specifics behind this particular rejection are interesting both with respect to the application itself and the reason for its denial.

Rifkin and Newman applied for patents for a variety of chimeras. In ancient Greek mythology a chimera was a fire-breathing monster usually depicted as a composite of a lion’s head, goat’s body, and serpent’s tail, but the term also applies to any “imaginary monster made up of grotesquely disparate parts.” (AHD) What sort of “monsters” did Rifkin and Newman seek to patent? These gentlemen were hoping to patent a series of human-animal hybrids, including any combination of humans with chimpanzees, pigs or other animals typically used in laboratory experiments.

Rifkin and Newman were not, however, interested in actually creating these humanoid chimeras in the laboratory. They were

intent on obtaining the first patent for hybrid human-animal life forms so that — by owning and controlling the patent — they would limit anyone else from engaging in such experimentation for the next twenty years, the standard life of patents. Their pursuit of this patent is being taken very seriously and is being aggressively pursued simply because the present realities are that someone, somewhere, with or without approved funding and permission to proceed, will attempt to do what they are hoping will not be done. [Note: It is the opinion of some legal experts that current law does not prohibit genetic experimentation with life forms that are totally funded by private parties.]

Rifkin's and Newman's proposal was considered to be beyond the range of patent law by the Patent Office because patenting any human, or even anything partially human, is considered to be a violation of the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States. That amendment abolished slavery in this nation.

But as Animal Rights News has noted, the Patent Office has "already issued several patents for animals that *contain* human genes or organs," and one company, SyStemix, has "obtained a patent for a process of obtaining a *modified* version of human bone marrow stem cells." New Scientist similarly observed that *trans-species experimentation* has already been completed with mixtures of cells from goats and sheep.

The history of patents suggests that future grants will allow for the patenting of similar, if not the exact, life forms applied for by Rifkin and Newman. In 1978 the Patent Office rejected the initial application for a patent on a bacterium that was engineered to digest oil spillage. Two years later the Supreme Court overruled the decision, declaring that living beings could be patented if they met standard measures of patentability. Later, in 1987, the PTO granted the first ever patent of an animal, a genetically engineered mouse. Since that time 79 other animal related patents have been granted, as well as more than 1,800 for genetic materials alone. Several of the animal patents have included animals *with minor human components*, including laboratory mice engineered with human cancer genes or immune system cells.

Rifkin and Newman have contended that their application is not substantially different from these other patents already granted which use human materials. Why don't bacteria, sheep or cows

that contain human genes imported into their systems constitute humans? These, and other, animals have been genetically altered to include human genes for the creation of products used in the treatment of cystic fibrosis or to enhance the immune system.

Pointing to a patent application made by Advanced Cell Technology, Rifkin argues that the PTO has been inconsistent. ACT applied for a patent on embryos they created by fusing human cells with cow eggs that were stripped of their chromosomes. Though only the generic material from the cells were used, and though such might not differ widely across species lines, the basis of the experiment still merged parts of two cells from diverse species. That no nuclear, mitochondrial or DNA transfers occurred does not negate the fact that scientists are readily using technology to engage in trans-species experimentation and manipulation.

In light of their first application's rejection, Rifkin and Newman have already reapplied for a patent. If their application is denied again they can take their concern to the Patent Board of Appeals for a ruling. If rejected at that point they intend to petition the federal court system for permission to patent chimeras. Even if their appeals are consistently rejected, they know that no one else will be able to obtain similar patents in the interim.

Biblical Principles

Where do such scenarios leave the Bible-believing Christian? In a quandary of despair and dismay? From one perspective, perhaps that is a legitimate response. But from a Biblical perspective there are several principles that we know hold true that have application and impact on the future of genetic engineering. Consider the following topics: the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of the world:

The Nature of God

1. God exists

The Bible succinctly declares that the physical creation demands God's existence (cf. Ps 19:1; Rom 1:18ff). Unlike naturalists who assume that this world is all there is, Christians know and understand that this world depends for its existence upon

a really existing God. God, the “unmoved mover,” exists necessarily. His very nature is to exist. Unlike everything in the physical universe which owes its existence to God, God owes His existence to nothing above, below or beyond Himself — He is because the essence of His nature is being. God is the eternal “I am” (cf. Ex 3:14).

2. God is infinite

God’s necessary existence demands that He be understood as infinite in all of his attributes. God is infinite in knowledge, in power, in love, in mercy, in grace, in truth, in justice and in every other characteristic of His nature. In no aspect of the inherent and essential traits of the person of God is there any deficiency.

Because God is infinite in love, for example, He wants what is ultimately best for all mankind. Commensurate with that infinite love He has told us all we need to know in order to be saved, because that is what is best for us. Because He is infinite in power He has the ability to reveal to us what we need. Because He is infinite in knowledge God knows what we need. In principle, and often in very specific “do’s and don’ts,” God has addressed everything we need to know and do (cf. 2 Tim 3:14ff; 2 Pet 1:3ff). This is only one aspect of his infinite nature. But even having examined every aspect of his boundless nature we would only know “a portion” of his true character (CF Job 26:14).

3. God is Creator

As we briefly addressed the nature of God’s existence we noted that “unlike everything in the physical universe which owes its existence upon God, God owes His existence to nothing above, below or beyond Himself...” God is self-existent and the source of everything outside of Himself that exists. God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1; Is 40:28; 1 Pet 4:19). Only God can bring into existence that which had no prior existence (Heb 11:3ff). Only God can create life. Only God can create matter. Only God can create.

4. The authority and laws of God

The very nature of God entails principles of authority, which in turn are demonstrated by laws, patterns and principles consistent with the perfect nature of Deity. Intrinsic to the very character of

an infinite God is the Divine right (a.) to exercise power for the origination and enforcement of laws, (b.) to demand obedience to those laws, and (c.) to execute judgment on the basis of law.

The laws and authority of God are demonstrated throughout the word of God: (a.) in the garden, God gave a prescription for Adam's life, and rules proscribing his behavior (Gen 2-3); (b.) under the Mosaic dispensation God gave detailed requirements for the nation of Israel to follow (Ex 20ff; Deut 5); and (c.) under the law of Christ there are certain "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" that we are expected to submit to (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:16-26; Col 3:5).

Further discussion under the heading of "the nature of the world" will present material about God's authority as it applies to creation.

The Nature of Man

1. Man exists

Though seemingly obvious to most, it is nonetheless imperative to affirm that man exists. Skepticism, which encourages a doubting and questioning perspective about anything and everything, might encourage a denial of an absolute claim for man's existence in order to move toward some semblance of relative certainty. Nihilism, an extreme form of skepticism, denies all existence, asserts that all values are without foundation and suggests that nothing is known or subject to communication. Even solipsism, the idea that only the self can be known and demonstrated, might deny the reality and existence of other "selves."

All three of these viewpoints have elements that are inherently self-defeating. The Cartesian "cogito ergo sum" ("I think therefore I am") axiom demands that we recognize the existence of that which is producing thought and self-recognition, and even skepticism and doubt. We really are here.

2. Man was created

Once we progress to the obvious realization that man really exists, we must face the question: where did he/we come from? In our brief discussion about the nature of God we noted that God exists independently. Man, however, exists dependently. This

simply means that man's existence is such that he is not eternal and is not the reason for his own existence.

The only other viable option is that man owes his existence to something outside himself. Though evolutionists would affirm this, they conclude that it is due to mindless, material evolution. Evolution, however, is inadequate to sufficiently explain the existence and nature of man. Man was created.

3. Man was created by God

Because man exists contingently, and because man has not evolved from the matter-to simple life forms-to complex life forms model suggested by evolution, we are forced to conclude that man was created. When nothing material existed, there was still God. Because everything outside of God owes its existence to God, we deduce that God created man (cf. Gen 1:25ff).

4. Man was created in the image of God

The specifics of man's creation are chronicled in the opening chapter of Genesis. Of particular import is the affirmation that man was created in "our image" (Gen 1:26-27). The Godhead determined (note that a plan existed before man was created) to make man in their image (vs. 26), and then, consistent with that determination, man was created in the image of Deity.

Man, though composed of body, spirit and soul (1 Th 5:23) is most "in the image of God" in soul. The body goes back to the ground (Eccl 12:7), the animating spirit goes back to God (Eccl 12:7), but the soul is immortal — it continues to live beyond the grave (Mt 16:26; Jn 5:28-29).

The soul of man is such that it possesses faculties that reflect the nature of God: (a.) in intellect; (b.) in emotion; (c.) in volition; (d.) in morals and (e.) in the ability to act consistently with the will, word and work of God. (See 1997 WVSOP "Grounding the Church in Logic" for further details.)

5. Man is subject to the authority and laws of God

Because man was created in the image of God, according to the likeness (or pattern) of Deity, it necessarily follows that man is subject to God's authority and laws. We do not have to read very far into the book of Genesis to note that God directed man — not vice versa. (a.) In Genesis 1:26 God gave man dominion (cf. v 28);

(b.) in 1:28 God told man to be fruitful and multiply, to replenish the earth and subdue it; (c.) in 2:15 God instructed Adam to dress and keep the garden; (d.) in 2:16 God allowed man to eat of every tree in the garden; (e.) in 2:17 God restricted man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and (f.) in 2:21-25 God gave husbands and wives responsibilities in the marriage relationship. We know, of course, that a study of the remainder of the word of God would yield thousands of instances where God directed man (cf. Jer 10:23; Pr 3:1ff).

It is critically important to note that man's subjection to the authority and laws of God are always for man's best interest. God, who is infinite in love, never has, is not now, and never will direct man to submit to His will in a way out of harmony with that most perfect of all concerns (1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 Jn 2:1-2; 1 Cor 10:13)

The Nature of The World

1. The world exists

Without repeating the complete line of argumentation presented with reference to man's existence, let us simply note that man, who really exists, lives in a really existing world. That world is subject to man's sensory and mental faculties and can be really known.

2. The world was created

For the same reasons we affirmed that man was created, we likewise affirm that the world was created.

3. The world was created by God

For the same reasons we affirmed that man was created by God, we likewise affirm that the world was created by God.

4. The world reflects the nature of God

Though the physical creation was not created "in the image of God" as was man, it nonetheless reflects the nature of God in its essence. The Psalmist declared that God's existence was seen in creation (Ps 19:1). Paul told the Christians in Rome that the invisible nature of God was reflected in the visible nature of our world (Rom 1:20). At Lystra Paul declared the benevolence of God was manifested in creation when he said that "he left not himself

without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with good and gladness.” (Acts 14:17; cf. Jer 10:13)

5. The world is subject to the authority and laws of God

Man, created in the image of God, is subject to God’s authority. The laws of God, however, are not restricted to man’s civic, moral and spiritual domain. The physical world, though not created in the image of God, but still reflective of the nature of God, is also subject to God’s authority and laws.

The scriptures repeatedly refer to the “ordinances” of God. Sometimes the term has application to God’s moral laws, sometimes to customs, but occasionally it refers to the “laws” by which the universe is governed. It is in this sense that passages like Job 38:33 (“the ordinances of the heavens”), Jeremiah 31:35-36 (“ordinances of the moon and stars” and “those ordinances”) and Jeremiah 33:25 (“ordinances of heaven and earth”) use the term. Other verses allude to the same principle when they speak of the decrees God has made which keep the physical creation functioning as it is (Ps 148:6; cf. Ps 74:17; 104:19).

Scriptures teach that the world was not only created by the power of the word of God (Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6-9; Jn 1:1-3; Heb 1:1-3), but that it also continues by the power of that word (2 Pet 3:7; Col 1:17). Implicit within these passages are two crucial principles: (a.) the physical world was created according to God’s plan, pattern and law; and (b.) the physical world continues according to God’s plan, pattern and law.

6. The world is subject to man’s dominion

As mentioned previously, God gave man the authority to have dominion over the world. Man has both the right and ability to exercise dominion over God’s creation. Man, created in the image of God, is of greater importance to God than the world God created. The world was created for man — man was not created for the world. Man is the pinnacle of God’s creation, not just another life form in the world equal to the rest of the vegetable, animal and inanimate creation.

7. The world exists for a purpose

God never acts without purpose. Though He does what He does according to His pleasure (Is 46:10; Rev 4:11), a thorough investigation of what it is that brings God pleasure yields the conclusion that there is purpose inherent in what pleases God. Consider Ephesians 1:9 which states: “having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself..” (cf. Job 42:2; Eccl 3:1, 17; Rev 17:17; re Jesus cf. Mk 1:38; Lk 4:43; Jn 12:27). Note that there is both pleasure and purpose inherent in God.

God’s word does not go forth in vain (Is 55:8-11; Mt 24: 35). His will and purpose for salvation are declared (Eph 1:3). His purpose is to bring all men together in Christ (Eph 1:10-11). When God intends judgment, it cannot be stopped (Is 14:25-27). All of these passages explicitly affirm that God has a purpose in mind when he speaks and acts, and that His purposes are unyielding.

With reference to God’s plan and purpose for man, the word is abundantly clear: God wants mankind to be saved. The will of God (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8; Titus 2:11; 1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 Jn 2:1-2); the will of Christ (Mt 1:21; Mt 18:11; Lk 19:10; Jn 4:34); and the will of the Holy Spirit via the role of the inspired word of God (Jn 6:63; Acts 11:14; 13:26; Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 15:2; Eph 1:13; 2 Tim 3:14ff; James 1:21) all focus on this singular purpose — the salvation of the souls of men.

If the salvation of man is an emphatic Divine focus revealed in scripture, then we can only assume (because the word implies it), that this world is suitable for the purpose that God intends. If He intends and purposes for man to be saved, then this world must be consistent with that purpose. John Hicks, the British philosopher and theologian, referred to this world as a “vale of soul making.” This simply means that it is within the confines of this physical existence that man engages in his search for God (Ps 14:2; 53:2) and it is within this physical existence that God declares He can be found (Ps 14:2; 53:2; Acts 17:22-31, esp. v 27-28; Acts 15:17; Ps 19:3).

In summary: God, characterized by all that is His nature, has created man in His image and placed him in a world that also reflects His attributes. All this was done so that (a.) God, “governed” by his own seity, (b.) has made man to be subservient

to His will (via authority and laws), (c.) in such a way that man lives in a world also governed by the laws of God, (d.) so that God can be found by man, (e.) in order to be saved my God.

Though the science of genetic engineering doesn't appear to have import concerning man's salvation, further study will yield the conclusion that a connection does exist.

The Implications of Genetic Engineering

In order to fully understand the nature of genetic engineering and some of its consequences, let us turn to an examination of the laws of nature. Having done so, some of the implications of genetic engineering will be more evident.

The Laws of Nature

1. Life begets life

Though it is obviously one of the most hotly contested areas in science in recent generations, the notion that only life begets life was at one time a truism that science formerly defended.

The experiments of Lazzaro Spallanzani and Louis Pasteur, for example, demonstrated that life begets life. Spallanzani's first work, published in 1767, was a critique of the theories of George Buffon and John Turberville Needham. These two gentlemen maintained that all life contains inanimate matter as well as what they called "vital atoms." These "vital atoms" regulated all physical activity and, at death, returned to the soil. They said that the small objects in motion in pond water were not alive, but rather "vital atoms" escaping from that which was alive.

Spallanzani debunked this notion. Along with Leeuwenhoek, who was noted for his microscopic innovations as well as the intricate studies of minute life forms, he concluded that various forms of microscopic movement were caused, not by "vital atoms," but rather by living organisms. He demonstrated by means of a series of experiments with gravy, which when boiled and placed in vials that were immediately sealed yielded no detectable motion of "vital atoms," that Buffon and Needham were in error. He concluded that the objects moving in pond water were introduced from elsewhere, probably from the air.

In like manner, Louis Pasteur demonstrated that life begets life. Francesco Redi, in the late 1600's, had already proven that the maggots in meat came from the eggs of flies that were deposited on the meat and not from the meat itself. But the concept of spontaneous generation, though slowly but surely disproved on a larger scale, was still held as it applied to the minutia of living organisms. Covering meat with a fly proof net kept flies and subsequent maggots from the meat, but covering grape juice with the same netting did not keep the juice from fermenting. Pasteur showed that even the smallest of creatures come from germs that are in constant floatation in the air. By providing suitable filtration small enough to inhibit these micro-organisms, Pasteur proved that only living things produce living things. Life was not then, nor now, being spontaneously generated.

Abiogenesis, that is the origin of life apart from life (either from matter or simply spontaneously from nothing) is not subject to the scientific method, is not consistent with the observable world, and thus flies in the face of objective and verifiable data. It is also fraught with numerous philosophic (i.e., non-scientific and anti-scientific) assumptions. Some scientists have argued in defense of abiogenesis as follows: though we can't prove it, it must be the case, because our theory (the general theory of evolution) demands it.

Even within the discipline of genetics, life begets life. Dr. Ian Wilmut, the embryologist that headed the research team that produced Dolly, did not begin with lifeless matter in the lab. He began with living cells — living components of living sheep. He did not create an oocyte or mammary gland cell from scratch and fuse them together. He began with living material in order to produce living material.

Every genetic experimentation conducted in every lab always entails the manipulation of living organisms. No scientist can create life from non-living materials.

2. Mind begets matter

In addition to relying on the assumption that non-living materials can produce living beings (abiogenesis), evolutionary science has also relied on the assumption that matter itself can be produced by other matter, or that it can arise out of nothing. Big

bang theories of the origin of the universe begin with primordial matter — its specific content often presupposed, as with Stanley Miller’s 1953 experiments.

Biblical principles affirm that such is not possible. The only way that something can be created from nothing is if God does it (cf. Heb 11:3). God can speak and create light (Gen 1:1ff). God can bring all that exists into existence by means of His spoken word (Ps 33:6-9). But God is “mind” and not matter (Jn 4:20ff). He is not “nothing.”

All experimentation engaged in which attempts to disprove this principle, fails of its own accord. The very nature of scientific experimentation involves design, purpose and mind, qualities that do not reside in rocks and dirt. There is no way for scientists to proceed in demonstrating anything, let alone the creation of life, without innately involving mind. Science demands knowledge and knowledge demands mind.

3. Time is powerless

Evolutionary theory demands eons of time for the numerous infinitesimally small increments inherent to the theory’s notion of change. This demand for vast expanses of time is the necessary requirement to replace mind and purpose. Mind can direct vast changes simultaneously, but mindless, directionless evolution relies upon chance changes that occur ever so slightly, ever so rarely over millions and billions of years, which, when viewed from a cumulative perspective, allegedly accounts for the substantive changes of life forms from start to finish.

There are numerous problems with this line of thinking: (a.) time has no intrinsic power. Things happen “in” time, or “across” time, but not because of time. Iron oxidizes over extended periods of time, but it is the exposure to oxygen that produces the chemical composition we know as rust, not time itself. Time may be considered as a vehicle, a vacuum, or some other entity, but regardless of the typology associated with it, time remains powerless; (b.) what cannot occur due to inherent impossibilities in a brief span of time, does not automatically become possible given a great span of time. This corollary simply restates the first principle. Time has no power. What is literally impossible does not become possible due to the passage of time. Time does not make the

“undo-able” “do-able.” Though what was not subject to accomplishment at one point in time may, because of technological advances and increased knowledge, become subject to accomplishment at a later date, it is not the passage of time per se that brought this about. In the passing of time someone developed new techniques and acquired new data that ultimately lead to new achievement; and (c.) the assumption that time has power is unscientific. What is the standard of measurement that would be applied to time in order to determine its power? Why might some evolutionary changes occur in species over thousands of years, others over millions of years, and yet others over billions of years? Those who contend that things occur over the process of time are forced to realize that different changes occur at different rates. Is this because time has the ability to regulate its power as needed? No, but in an attempt to remove mind and purpose from the equation, evolutionary theorists have scrapped the mental and relied upon the physical.

4. Life reproduces after the principles of law

As our earlier discussion noted, owing to the very nature of God, authority and law are inherent in all of God’s creation. These principles of law have application within the physical world, especially within the living organic world. Biblically speaking the plant and animal creation reproduces after its “kind.” (Gen 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25; 6:20; 7:14; Lev 11:14-16, 22, 29; Deut 14:13-15). The term translated as “kind” does not correspond in a one to one fashion with the modern taxonomic classification of living things today. But the term is consistent with the principles that inhere in God’s creation, and consistent with what is truly known in the scientific world today.

To say that things reproduce “after their kind” is simply to say that there are limits to the extent of cross-breeding or trans-species experimentation. “After their kind” does not mean that new species cannot develop. Dog breeders, for example, were recently celebrating the 100th anniversary of the introduction of the German Shepherd. But the nature of “dogness” is not such that it does not allow for the development of new species within the boundaries of “kind.” Life that belongs to the same “kind” descends from the same genetic ancestors. Through the course of

time that gene pool might be partitioned to allow, due to isolation and inbreeding for example, the development of subclasses within the original “kind.” These subclasses would not be a new “kind” but would rather be a subset of the existing “kind” they derived from. Our discussion of the “limitations” and “boundaries” that God has established with regard to humanity generally (cf. Acts 17:24ff), also has application in the pursuit of biological inquiries, genetics included.

To be sure, future experimentation may demonstrate that some living material from one species may be used in auxiliary fashion in another species in a way not currently known. Animal valves, for example, are already used in human heart patients. But the presence of animal tissue, cells, parts, etc. does not necessarily cause other animals/humans to become like those parts, that is like them in “kind.” The principle of life reproducing after its “kind” is not necessarily violated through the introduction of animal/human cells or parts into other species. It would seem however, that the actual germ reproduction of these species is counter to the principle.

Does the Bible address the specific limits of genetic engineering? Careful consideration of the scriptures yields principles and practices consistent with truth, both spiritual and scientific. It seems that some semblance of limitations is presented in 1 Corinthians 15 when Paul notes that “all flesh is not the same flesh” (vs. 39). He goes on to say that “there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.” Paul’s point of emphasis in this chapter is to note that there exists a fundamental distinction that exists between the earthly and resurrected bodies of Christians. Even though there might be numerous similarities between them, they remain fundamentally different.

It seems that this principle has roots in the distinctions that exist between the four types of flesh that Paul lists. The classification of life as men, animals, fish or birds does not sufficiently address the thousands of life forms existing today, but it does indicate an awareness of some recognizable distinctions. Is Paul saying that no living combination of men with animals, fish or birds will ever be genetically engineered? Certainly that is not the thrust of the chapter — but even so, is there a principle inherent in

the distinctive examples Paul cites that has some application today? The text indicates clear distinctions between four types of flesh, but it does not elucidate further.

Though it may not be possible to determine the exact “boundaries” of scientific and genetic inquiry from this passage, if the realm of genetics is part of the natural world and governed by laws pandemic to the rest of creation, there must be laws and patterns inherent in this discipline.

5. The limits of science

Though geneticists are engaging in what we might describe as radical experimentation, we must recognize that the laws and patterns evident in all of creation impose a natural limitation on what even the most brilliant of scientists can develop. Recognition of this principle follows from the prior discussion about life begetting life, mind begetting matter and life reproducing according to law.

Alchemists of the middle ages were frequently engaged in attempts to turn lead into gold. On a physical and chemical level, there are numerous similarities that we could enumerate between these two metals: (a.) both are part of the naturally occurring metals; (b.) both have similar component parts — nuclei, protons, electrons, etc.; (c.) both have electrical charges measurable within them; (d.) both contain peculiar chemical bonds that make them what they are; and (e.) both might react to other substances/elements in ways similar to the other. Though we might enlarge the list of similarities that exist between lead and gold, we must face the inevitable conclusion: the differences that exist between the two are such that lead simply isn't gold and gold just isn't lead. Though there are numerous substances/elements that react with one another to produce yet other substances/elements, no chemical reaction imposed upon lead turns it into gold.

Chemically speaking, there are patterns and limits delineated within the periodic chart of elements. That table separates known elements into families that share similar characteristics. Dmitri Mendeleev did not impose these distinctions when he devised the periodic table — he simply recognized and organized what was already there. Recurring patterns are unmistakably seen in the properties of elements when they are coordinated in order of

increasing atomic number. These patterns include periodic divisions involving electron structure, chemical properties and physical properties.

Though there exists no known counterpart to the periodic chart of elements for living life forms, we must recognize that pre-existing patterns and laws that determined what will and what won't combine in elemental fashion may also be discovered that will determine what will and won't "combine" in a biological and genetic fashion.

Because of the trial and effort experimentation of geneticists, alterations are occurring that cause cells to function outside of their natural realm. But it is obvious, by the fact that they are functioning at all, that some of these experiments are not going beyond what is biologically possible. There are, no doubt, boundaries inherent in genetics that scientists have not yet considered that will curtail some of their work.

Some surmised that cloned animals would not be able to reproduce through normal means. But in the two years since Dolly was cloned Dr. Wilmut and his team have bred Dolly at least twice leading to conception and birth each time, the second time yielding three offspring. Scientists are concerned, however, that telomere (the ends of chromosomes) deterioration in Dolly reflects a shortened life span. Because there was no natural germline reproduction, the telomeres reflected the attained age of the cloning material used in the process. Rather than starting from zero the age of cloned animals seems to reflect the attained age of the materials used to produce the clone, plus their accrued age from that point forward. Cloned animals, in effect, begin with the aging of their components already built in.

Though there is no way of knowing whether or not this limitation can be overcome, it is just the sort of inherent boundary that scientists will ultimately face sooner or later. The road to producing sustained and healthier lives seem to be filled with potholes and detours.

6. Summary of the laws of nature

The point of this brief and general discussion is simple: There are boundaries placed by God within the confines of physical creation. A brief examination of Paul's preaching in Acts 17

reveals this: (a.) God, who is not confined to/by this world, made the world and everything in it subject to law (17:24); (b.) God created all things, both living and non-living (17:25); (c.) He made all of humanity from “one blood” (17:26); (d.) He has placed humanity on His earth to dwell (17:26); (e.) God has determined man’s boundaries with reference to time, ability, location, etc.; (f.) God’s boundaries are such that they allow man free course to seek Him (17:27); (g.) within those limitations, God can be found (17:27); (h.) ultimately, God is “not far” from us (17:27); (i.) we live “in Him” (17:28); (j.) we are God’s “offspring” in that we are descended (via creation not evolution) from God (17:28 - from genos, trans as kind 5, kindred 3, offspring 3, nation 2, stock 2, born 2, etc.); (k.) because we are thus “God like,” we should not look for God in what is “made” (either by God or with our own hands) as if the creation is God (cf. Rom 1:18ff; Acts 17:29); (l.) because of the “kind” of creature that we are (made “like” God), we are made to engage in moral behavior (17:30 - implied by the command to “repent”); (m.) all of this is essential within the time of this existing world’s existence because one day the world will be judged (i.e., end; 17:31; cf. 2 Pet 3:11ff); and (n.) the standard (law) by which we will be judged is Divinely ordained — it is that of the righteousness of the resurrected Christ (17:31).

Each of the stages presented above entails limits, laws and patterns. There are extreme boundaries beyond which no one can go regardless of their desires or abilities. David knew that his dead child could not come back to him, but he also knew that he could go to be with that child (2 Sam 12:15-23). Though Paul’s address on Mars Hills does not detail the divinely imposed limitations of modern scientific pursuits, the pervasiveness of pattern, and limits inherent within pattern, presented here (and elsewhere) should lead us to believe that God has created limits in all areas beyond which no man can go.

The Implications of Genetic Engineering

The issues surrounding genetic engineering are understandably complex and intricately detailed. When you are dealing with the very building blocks — the basic blueprints of life — there is a tremendous amount of information that needs to be digested and processed. Within the confines of our present

endeavor, complete discussion is impossible. Consider briefly, however, the following implications of genetic engineering:

1. Making things better

The purpose of genetic engineering seems to be directed toward making things “better.” Exactly how the “betterness” is to be determined is one matter of concern (see “the issue of standards”) — the other, almost equal in importance, is determining how such is to be accomplished, that is the scientific execution of it all.

Biblically speaking, the world is tainted by sin. After Eve and Adam sinned, all parties involved (Eve, Adam, the serpent - Gen 3:14-19) were punished. But the physical creation was also cursed (cf. Gen 3:17). Romans 8:22 indicates that the entirety of creation was even then (at the time of Paul) affected by sin.

The genetic emphasis on making things better, while laudable in that attempts will be made to save lives, has far greater ramifications as it attempts to change the world in a way out of harmony with God’s original purpose for making it as it is.

In an attempt to create better lives and a better society, bioethicists and geneticists may be determining who (individually and in groups) will and will not be acceptable. There is a danger that racial and class prejudice may develop because of this sort of determination. If it can be demonstrated through science that a certain class of people having a particular kind of genetic makeup (as a class) poses a threat to the rest of society because of that “anomaly,” then why not genetically engineer the class to “correct” the problem, euthanize those who have it, or eradicate the “problem” in some other way.

Some anti-biotechnology advocates, like Rifkin, worry that classism (the haves versus the have nots) may result. Those who can afford the best plastic surgery now will be able to afford the best cosmetic geneticists in the future. The rest will have to settle with the (inferior) way they look.

Even parental control may be usurped by the genetic engineering machine. It may impose restrictions, saying (a.) you can’t bring this child into the world because it has Down’s syndrome; (b.) you can’t have children because you have hemophilia; (c.) if you want to have children, let us engineer one

for you (thus forcing us to deal with the ethical problems of sperm donors, egg donors, pre-screening implantation, surrogate motherhood, etc.); and (d.) if you want to have children, we will create one for you with the genetic behavior patterns we deem acceptable. Though these models may seem far-fetched, note that some oppressive governments are already imposing restrictions on reproductive behavior and that numerous government, social and educational entities are already determining what behavior is and is not acceptable.

2. The issue of standards

Moral standards: Our discussion of genetic engineering may not seem to have anything to do with morals, but a firm relationship can be established between the two very quickly. Peter said that the world would “pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.” (2 Peter 3:10) In the immediately following verses he urged his readers to consider how, based upon the knowledge that this world was temporary, they would continue to live: “what manner of persons ought you to be...?” (2 Peter 3:11ff)

These verses indicate that the temporal nature of the world, specifically its ultimate destruction, should cause us to live in a way that shows consideration of these certainties. We should live in a way that evidences “holy conduct and godliness” in our lives. Decisions relating to right and wrong, morals, conscience, etc., are within the purview of Scripture, not genetic engineering.

The modern genetics machine seems to have a split personality when it comes to morality: On one hand they want to better and improve man’s physical lot in life via engineering, but on the other hand they are willing to kill unborn children and destroy human embryos in the pursuit of giving life to others. The issue of who does what for whose benefit seems to place some genetic engineering attempts in a moral conundrum. What is the standard of life and morality that science will follow?

Physical standards: Jeremy Rifkin has warned that the norm for physical appearance and beauty will be changed because of genetic engineering. The emphasis on “eugenics”—Rifkin’s term meaning, not just genetics, but good and beautiful genetics—will prompt science and pseudo-moralists to say that it is better if all

people were tall, or blond, or muscular, etc. Over emphasis on physical traits will encourage de-emphasis, and therefore prejudice, against those not having those traits.

Behavioral standards: Recent experimentation has already seemingly proved that mice can be made “smarter” via genetic engineering, a claim which was quickly disputed. But others are already campaigning to use genetics to alter genes that affect human behavior: crime, introversion, and other anti-social behaviors. Some might argue that we should change everyone’s genetic coding to counter these ills. Daniel Koshland, editor of *Science*, has used the homeless as an example of a “class” of people that might require our attention in this regard. Because many homeless people are afflicted with mental disorders, we might consider addressing these issues at their “genetic roots” and thus prevent future problems from occurring.

3. The issue of purpose

The world around us is often referred to as “Nature” with a capital “N.” The thought seems to be that “Nature” has an independent existence all its own, which necessitates that “Nature” has purpose, mind and direction. To the evolutionary scientist functioning under the umbrella of Darwinian evolution “Nature” must be random. The world only appears to have mind, purpose and direction because, out of the sheer number of evolutionary possibilities (i.e., incremental genetic mutations, survival of the fittest adaptations, etc.) that have occurred through the eons of time, a sufficient number of them have “worked,” thus creating the illusion that they are all causally related. But no mind or purpose was required.

In much the same way David Hume attacked the principle of cause and effect. Because of the sheer number of occurrences and their apparent contiguous nature, we assumed that certain actions produce specified reactions — but they are nothing more than assumptions. No causal actions ... no reactive effects. As a result, the randomness of events is mindless.

Contrary to each of these scenarios, nature, with a lower case “n,” does react as if mind and intelligence is involved, but not an intelligence inherent within nature itself. Nature is *reflective* of intelligence. Mandelbrot patterns, Fibonacci numbers, physical

laws and their associated constants all found in nature, demand that mind and purpose is behind the material creation.

Purpose presupposes that there is “mind” and that there is “direction.” If, however, we are dealing with those who advocate the use of genetic engineering from the perspective of evolutionary theory — there is no sense of “mind” and “direction” that is compelling to follow, for without a standard there is no reason, other than I want to do this or that, to engage in one line of progress as opposed to another.

God always acts with purpose, but genetics theory often acts counter to God’s will. Indeed, science often functions without any purposeful worldview in mind, preferring to judge what will and will not be done on a case by case basis.

4. The emphasis on life at all costs

The pursuit of all means of life extension technology — cloning, cryogenics, gene therapy, etc. — is consistent with the basic contention of naturalism: this world is all there is. Corollary facets of that alleged (but false) naturalistic truism are: (1) live life to the fullest; (2) live as long as you can; (3) there is no tomorrow (i.e., no life beyond this one); (4) there is no moral order (anything goes); (5) there is nothing beyond the physical (no God, no spirit, no soul, no heaven, no hell); and so forth.

The emphasis on this life only, without a reason to live in such a way as to affect a life beyond the grave, is such that all sorts of moral and ethical corruptions might follow.

Though Paul was hard pressed to choose between living or dying (Phil 1:23), there was never any contention on Paul’s part that he wanted to live for ever, or that he did not believe in a future eternal life in the presence of God (2 Tim 4:4ff). His willingness to continue life was not for the sake of life itself, but rather for the preaching that would benefit others while he continued to live (Phil 1:21, 24; 1 Cor 9:16; Rom 1:14).

5. Might makes right

Evolutionary theory’s “survival of the fittest” and Nietzsche’s “ubermensch” (superman) mentality seems to dominate the thinking of modern science. If we have the ability to do it — if we *can* do it, then we *must* do it. The “oughtness” is inextricably tied to ability which necessitates action. Micah warned of those who

devise evil in their beds and then awake the next morning to practice it simply “because it is in the power of their hand.” (Mic 2:1) Might, the ability to perform, does not make something morally right. If this were the case then murder, rape and stealing could be justified purely on the basis of ability. Add Joseph Fletcher’s situation ethics mentality to the mix and almost anything becomes the “right” thing to do.

6. We become “gods”

When Jesus said “I and my Father are one” the Jews were prepared to stone him (Jn 10:30-31). He asked them which of his good works prompted this (vs. 32), and was told that they were not stoning Him because of His good works, but rather because “You, being a man, make yourself God.” (vs. 33) Jesus responded “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” (Jn 10:34, quoting Ps 82:6). Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater in order to demonstrate that he really was the Son of God (cf. Mt 7:11ff - “if you then being evil...how much more will your Father”). Elsewhere the scriptures clearly equate Jesus with the Godhead (Jn 1:1; 8:58; Col 1:10ff; Heb 1:3, 8).

Some aspects of genetic engineering seem to place man in a position of being his own “god.” We have the ability to alter the genetic blueprints of life. We can determine height, weight, sex, hair color and other physical characteristics. We are hoping to be able to alter attitude, intelligence and all forms of behavior. There seems to be the assumption that we can make this world better than it is, not from a moral/spiritual perspective, but from a purely physical one, and having done so, everything will be better. Though there are restraining voices, the ability to pursue these goals will drive science until they are reached.

Sadly, in becoming our own “gods,” we shut out the God and Creator of the universe (Is 40:28).

7. All life is the same

Genetic pursuits seem to assume that all life, in some way, is the same; that it is all interconnected in some grand way that will allow them to piece together the essential components to prolong and improve human existence. In our earlier discussion of the limits of nature we cited 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul alluded to four types of flesh: man, animal, fish and bird. Though similarities

exist within classes of biological families just as similarities exist within chemical families (see periodic chart discussion), there are notable differences.

From one perspective it would be incredible if all life was the same. If we could use animal tissues and organs in order to mend human beings, we would call that medical progress. But what if, assuming that all life is the same, we begin to use human tissues and organs (necessitating the death of humans) to mend animals. If all life is the same physically, genetically and axiologically, then what difference is there in using humans to mend animals versus using animals to mend humans.

Once some overriding semblance of similarity is established on a physical basis, there will be those who will strive to prove there are no differences ethically. There are already academicians who will argue that (alleged) homosexual tendencies in animals show that homosexuality is normal and acceptable in humans. It is not a big step to argue that we might have to give up some of our (human) rights for the benefit of the animal world at large. Indeed, one radical animal rights and eco-centric activist actually suggests that it would be better for the world at large if there were no humans inhabiting the planet.

8. The color of money

Genetic engineering advances show that there exists a danger of making moral and societal decisions based upon dollars and cents. If we can engineer cattle and sheep to produce more milk and meat, then on the basis of economics alone, we should do it. If we can alter species in such a way to limit or eradicate disease, thus saving money, we should do it.

These economic decisions sound reasonable when we are dealing with livestock (overlooking for the moment the physical pluses and minuses humanity might suffer via genetically engineered food products), but what about when we begin to make biological decisions that affect humanity based upon economic data alone?

Insurers have already denied applications for insurance based upon family genetic history. Even if an individual fails to evidence those disorders himself, insurers say they have the right to exclude coverage based on genetics alone.

Politicians are already contending that how we spend our money — or, more appropriately, how we let *them* spend our money — will affect our society for generations to come. Based on what we perceive to be the needs of future generations, we are making political and economic decisions today. Scientific progress will be viewed no differently. If we can alter germ line development now, rather than somatic cells in the future, we can correct problems for future generations, thus saving millions and billions of dollars.

The willingness to make these decisions is easy when clear and simple solutions are suggested for the eradication of diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Down's syndrome, hemophilia, and so forth. But what will we do when there is just as much willingness to decide that behavioral and attitudinal changes are necessary in order to obtain future economic prosperity and/or savings?

Ultimately, the fear that the color of money will influence such decisions is real.

9. Free will versus determinism

Ingrained in much of the discussion about the possibilities and prospects of genetic engineering is the naturalistic assumption that this world is all there is (cf. Col 2:8 re “basic principles,” “rudiments” of the world). As mentioned in our discussion under the fourth heading in this section (“the emphasis on life at all costs”), naturalism has consequences. In addition to those mentioned under that heading, there is another worthy of consideration: the naturalistic assumption that this world is all there is implicitly entails scientific and behavioral determinism. Though there are numerous aspects of scientific philosophy and evolutionary theory that assert chaos and randomness, there yet remains the underlying assumption that the genetic code contains the key to all human behavior. Alter the genes, they contend, and the entire character of the resultant human is forever changed. The assumption is that genetic makeup irrevocably determines behavior.

There are problems with this assessment. (a.) It is unproved. No evidence exists which conclusively demonstrates that genetic changes guarantee behavioral changes. (b.) There is evidence to the contrary. Identical twins, like my cousin's two boys, may

contain identical genetic makeup, but even after being raised together for 19 years, their behavior is not identical. And (c.) it denies the Biblical affirmation of the free will of man (Josh 24:15; Is 55:1; Mt 11:28; Rev 22:17).

Conclusion

Scientists that study the mind have asserted that there is no limit to the ability of the human brain to learn. As long as we live, we are capable of learning. Certainly, due to time constraints and the inability of the mind to be directly connected with every form of immediate sensory perception, we must admit that no one, regardless of how diligent a learner and how long life has been lived, knows everything. Though our ability to learn may be ever ongoing, the amount of data to learn far exceeds our human capacity to learn in this lifetime.

In like manner, the assumption with reference to some scientific pursuits seems to be that given sufficient time, every thing necessary to eradicate illness of every kind will be discovered. There are, no doubt, many major scientific discoveries that mankind will achieve in coming years. Many beneficial discoveries that will enhance and prolong the duration and quality of life will be welcomed. But surely there is a limit to the extent of these successes, a limit beyond which we will be unable to go.

Man's ability to know, while seemingly engaged in worthwhile pursuits to live ever longer and with greater quality is, by these very pursuits, distracted from concerns that are far greater. Minds are directed to the physical at the expense of the spiritual. Concentration is made on the body, and the soul of man is neglected. Even if it were theoretically and practically possible to cure every known physical malady, a world of healthy and aged people continually mired and lost because of slavery to sin is certainly not the perfect world. If the world were rid of every conceivable disease, but lying, cheating, fornication, covetousness, pride and hatefulness continued to prevail — mankind would ultimately be no better off.

Given the current successful scenario of ultimate life extension possibilities, souls will exist for 150 to 200 years disease free — but still sin-stained. Even if man discovered the imaginary

“fountain of youth” and lived forever— he would still be living with both sin and guilt.

God, however, has decreed that it is not His desire for man to live forever stained by sin. He cast Adam and Eve out of the garden and prevented them from returning to the garden of Eden and partaking of the tree of life so that they would not live forever having been soiled by sin. God wants man to live forever — but not in this earthly existence. He wants man to live forever in a world without the ravages of sin (Rev 21:4) and in the very presence of the Godhead (Rev 21:3; 22:1ff).

The over emphasis on the pursuit of life at the expense of the search for eternal life will only leave man empty-handed and lost throughout eternity.

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RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Steve Stevens

INTRODUCTION:

1. The subject of the resurrection of the dead has always generated a lot of controversy. It still does even in our modern times.
2. The modern errors being taught on this subject find their roots in the history of religious thought.
 - A. The Sadducees of Jesus' time denied the resurrection of the dead outright (Mt. 22:23-33; Acts 23:8). Even the Lord, himself, did not succeed in turning them from their error to the truth.
 - B. The philosophers of Athens (Acts 17:32) lived for the lively discussions of intellectual fodder of current news. However, even these open thinkers mocked and procrastinated at the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.
 - C. Even some of the Corinthian Christians espoused the denial of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12) because it was difficult to reason this fact from human experience.
 - D. Some of the politicians and government officials gathered to hear Paul's defense before Agrippa thought it incredible to believe in the raising of the dead (Acts 25:23; 26:6-8)
 - E. Heretic preachers, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, taught the error that the resurrection is past and not future (2 Tim. 2:17,18) causing some to leave the faith.
3. The errors about the resurrection of the dead find their roots in two things (Mat. 22:29).
 - A. IGNORANCE OF PLAIN BIBLE TEACHING
 - B. IGNORANCE OF THE POWER OF GOD
4. Our handling of these unholy errors should follow the example of Jesus and Paul in setting forth and contending for the truth about the resurrection of the dead without regard for the religious, intellectual, or political tendencies of the audience we have opportunity and occasion to address.

I. THE PROVEN PROMISE TO RAISE THE DEAD!

- A. It is an age old question: "If a man die shall he live again?" (Job 14:14)

- B. Promise to raise Jesus from the dead.
 - 1. John 2:19-22 First cleansing of the temple in the early Judean ministry.
 - 2. Mat. 16:21; Mk. 8:31; Lk 9:22 Confession at Caesarea-Philippi.
 - 3. Mat. 17:23; Mk. 9:30-32 In Galilee during last year of ministry
 - 4. Mk. 10:32-34; Lk. 18:31-34 On way up to Jerusalem by way of Jericho.
 - 5. Mt. 26:32; Mk. 14:28 During the last supper in the upper room.
- C. Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God.
 - 1. Mt. 28:6 Angel at the tomb.
 - 2. 1 Cor. 15:3-8 Host of resurrection witnesses.
- D. Promise to raise all men from the dead at the same hour (John 5:27-29).
 - 1. Promise to raise all men based on the same word and power that raised Jesus.
 - 2. All believers will be raised from the grave (John 6:39,40,44,54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

II. THE PROVEN POWER TO RAISED THE DEAD!

- A. Old Testament Evidence.
 - 1. 1 Kings 17:17-23 Widow of Zarephath's son.
 - 2. 2 Kings 4:12-37 Son of the Shunammite woman.
 - 3. 2 Kings 13:21 Dead man touching bones of Elisha.
- B. Evidence from the New Testament.
 - 1. From the life of Jesus.
 - a. Mark 5:41-42 Daughter of Jairus.
 - b. Luke 7:11-18 Son of the widow of Nain.
 - c. John 11:38-46 Raising of Lazarus of Bethany.
 - 2. From the lives of the apostles.
 - a. Acts 9:40 Peter raising Dorcas from the dead at Joppa.
 - b. Acts 20:9-12 Paul raising Eutychus at Troas.
- C. The Bible plainly teaches a bodily resurrection of the dead in practice, principle, promise, and power.

III. THE PARTICULAR PROBLEMS OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD!

- A. If there be no future resurrection of the body it is necessary to conclude that Jesus is not risen from the dead (1 Cor. 15:13).
1. Robert Taylor, Jr. in his book “The Bible Doctrine of Final Things” states on pages 145,146: “The resurrection of Christ and our future bodily resurrection are so intimately linked that the one cannot be denied while allowing the other to stand....If there is no future resurrection, Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is vain, your faith is vain, we are found to be false witnesses, ye are yet in your sins, those who have fallen asleep in Jesus are perished and if hope only persists in our early moments of existence, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Corinthians 15:13-19).
 2. The view which denied the resurrection of the dead was wrong at Corinth in the first century and it is still false doctrine in our day.
 - a. It impeaches the power of God.
 - b. It impounds the hope of all Christians.]
 - c. It impairs the Biblical concept of God and His Son.
 - d. It impinges the veracity of the Bible.
 - e. It impedes daily Christian living.

CONCLUSION:

If there is no bodily resurrection for mankind in the future, then Christ cannot be risen from the dead, the promises of God are worthless, God is proven to be powerless to do what he promised, sin is prevalent and pervasive without remedy, and all mankind is hopeless, helpless, and hereafterless! The bodily resurrection of the dead is a basic doctrine of Christianity. To deny it or reject it will only lead to the overthrowing of the faith of those who are not grounded in the truth. May we live like those with the hope of the bodily resurrection of the dead and the certainty of the judgment which will follow it (Heb. 9:27).

Biographical Information

Steve Stevens is a native to the state of West Virginia. He preached his first Gospel Sermon at the age of nine at Daybrook, WV. He was baptized by his father, Earl Stevens, in January of 1967 at the Dewey Avenue congregation in St. Marys, WV. He began conducting Gospel Meetings and Vacation Bible Schools in June of 1970 at the Norway Church of Christ near Fairmont, WV. He began preaching on a regular basis in October of 1970 for congregations in West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. His first full-time located work was with the Norway Church of Christ from 1975-1981. He moved to his current work with the congregation in Hundred, WV in April of 1981. He has been a faculty member of the WVSOP since its inception in August of 1994. He teaches the courses on The Life of Christ, Marriage and The Family, and New Testament Greek. He is married to the former Karen Barnhart of New Freeport, PA. They are the proud parents of six children: Rebecca, Melissa, Jonathan, Stephanie, Victoria, and Roy.

THE MESSIAH THE PROPHETS SAW

Johnny Ramsey

Jesus claimed He was the Messiah several times in the accounts of the gospel. In John 4 and 9, the woman at the well in Samaria and the man born blind both heard the Nazarene declare:

I that speaketh unto you am He!

Christ was the One born of a virgin (Genesis 3:15). In fulfillment of Micah's prediction seven centuries earlier our Savior clearly passed the test of time.

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

Born of woman and born under the law, Jesus was, indeed, Messiah (Galatians 4:4). Yes, in due time the Redeemer came (Romans 5:6).

Moses looked down the stream of time to **the Prophet** to whom men must submit or be condemned (Deuteronomy 18:15). Peter in Acts 3 and Stephen in Acts 7 declared Jesus Christ as that Prophet.

Isaiah and Zechariah join in the refrain that becomes a resounding chorus to sing the praise of Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 tell of the One born of a virgin who will be Prince of Peace, and "God with us." Matthew 1:21-23 and Luke 2:14 proclaim such matters were consummated in the man of Galilee! The Lord is the **person of passion and principle and purpose** who is altogether **powerful** with a **platform** that certainly challenges our spiritual attention.

In Isaiah 25:9 we read a thrilling and demanding prophecy that came to fruition in Christ. The parallel, in I Corinthians 15:54-57, tells how the Savior became our Deliverer over death and the grave. Chapter 40 of Isaiah tells of the forerunner of Jesus who carefully paved the way for the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

But, the bulwark of all Messianic passages is Isaiah 53, concerning the One on whom Jehovah laid our sins. It was the

section the Ethiopian was reading in Acts 8:26-39, when Philip preached unto him Jesus. What a sacrifice the Father and the Son made on our behalf!

In Isaiah 59:20 we not only have a brilliant prediction, but a glorious clue to a difficult passage. In Romans 11:26-29, we are challenged by a statement many people stumble over.

And, so, all Israel shall be saved. The next passage quotes 59:20 of Isaiah, which was future tense, when the prophet foretold it and present tense when Paul used it seven centuries later. The word “so” is an adverb of manner. In this manner or **way** shall all who are saved to be saved...through Christ...the Redeemer!

Also, in Zechariah 13:1 and 7, we put the icing on the cake. In prophecy and fulfillment we find powerful material in the priestly prophets work. Back in 9:9 of Zechariah we clearly find history written before it happened concerning the triumphal entry into Jerusalem according to Mark 11. In chapter 10-14 in vivid order we read of:

Christ’s Betrayal By Friends

30 Pieces of Silver

The Potter’s Field

The Blood Shed At Calvary

The Shepherd Smitten and Sheep Scattered

The Savior on Mount Olivet

In Mark 14:26-28, Christ quotes verbatim from Zechariah 13:7 and applies these prophecies to Himself!

Daniel 7:13-14, told of the Son of Man passing through the clouds unto the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom, power and glory. Passages in the New Testament documenting this can be clearly shown in Romans 15:12; Acts 2:30; Ephesians 1:20-23 and I Peter 3:22. Yes, the everlasting doors of heaven opened wide to receive the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 5:12ff and 17:14.

These beautiful and enthralling and majestic verses all proclaim the Messiah the prophets saw!

Application

Should we not gladly obey and serve the Savior Who released us from the bondage of iniquity? The events at Calvary form the

most important moment in the history of the world. There is, indeed, power in the blood of the Lamb. L. O. Sanderson has blessed us with the words of this great song:

I am free,
I am rich,
I am happy,
For the Lord has been mindful of me.

The Power In The Blood of Christ

His blood is **Essential**. Acts 8:32-33 contains a marvelous reference to Isaiah 53, and the One Who was willing to do that which was necessary to release us from the clutches of Satan. God “laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6), allowing Christ to bear our errors and blunders and have them cleansed by His stripes: “By his stripes we are healed” (I Pet. 2:24). The necessity of that sacrifice is clearly stated: “Apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission...It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

His blood is **Efficacious**. A beautiful and impressive verse of Scripture promises cleansing, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). The high cost of low living demands a price so high that only the death of the Lord could atone for mankind’s enormous blunders.

His blood is **Enduring**. In Revelation 15:3 we rejoice to read that the redeemed host was standing on the sea singing, “The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.” The anthem which Israel sang after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15), declared that Jehovah would fight for them. Add to that the victory in the Savior’s blood (Colossians 1:20) and we are truly “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:35-37).

His blood is **Enabling**. Romans 12 begins by telling us that it is by our spiritual service, based on the unfathomed mercy and love of God, that we are empowered to fight ardently and actively, and win the “good fight of faith” (I Timothy 6:12).

His blood is **Enriching**. In Jude’s brilliant benediction, we find the fruition and culmination of our life in Christ and His

cleansing blood. “Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Savior” (Jude 24-25). Due to our relationship with the Redeemer, the Father above is able to:

1. Keep us from falling
2. Present us faultless before Him
3. Grant us glory and joy
4. Now and forever.

The Hope Of Israel

Due to the Zionist movement, the false doctrine of premillennialism and the incessant errors of Herbert W. Armstrong via radio, we must clarify the issue of the hope of Israel. So many denominational people are confused on this religious subject because they fail to rightly divide the Scriptures (II Timothy 2:15). Thousands never study in context nor do they allow the Bible to be “its own best commentary”, by taking all that the good Book says on a single subject. An additional factor that is confusing rather than enlightening concerning Israel, Jerusalem and their proper place is the misguided emphasis of the “Battle of Armageddon” in the minds of millions. Let us, in this article, attempt to clear up several untruths on this captivating area of study. Perhaps the following three points will shed light on the major topics involved in “The hope of Israel.”

A. The Land-Promise To Abraham

In Genesis 15:18-21 we have recorded the exact location and boundaries of the land Jehovah promised to Abraham’s seed. In Genesis 12 the provision of Canaan was mentioned by God, but Chapter 15 delineates exactly where the promised acreage would be. This was such a beautiful hope for Abraham’s posterity that Joseph made the children of Israel promise to take his bones from Egypt to the land of Canaan (Genesis 50:22-26). It is very significant that Joshua 24:32 records this touching scene centuries later.

Some preachers today try to overlook the significance of the absolute fulfillment of the land promise to Abraham and his seed

recorded indelibly in Joshua 21:43; 23:14, and especially in Nehemiah 9:7-8. Notice the exceedingly plain words of those passages: “And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it and dwelt therein...Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.”

After Babylonian Captivity, under the restoration of the Jewish nation in Israel, the book of Nehemiah informs us that the exact land area mentioned in Genesis 15 and promised first in Genesis 12:1-7, had been given to Abraham’s seed. This took place 500 years before Christ. It is not future tense but past history. The hope of Israel has nothing to do with land in Palestine, Mecca, Salt Lake City or Independence, Missouri! Centuries before Christianity Nehemiah 9:8 recorded plainly that God had performed His words in regard to the land promise to Abraham.

Jesus made it clear in John 4:23-24 that no earthly ground was holy any longer. Acceptability with our Creator comes not by location but by devotion. Temporal property is an indifferent matter; spiritual commitment is now the key to inheritance. Stephen seconded the motion by bluntly telling ardent Jews that “God does not dwell in Temples made with hands” (Acts 7:48-50). Historically, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., foretold graphically by Christ a generation earlier (Mark 13), echoed the same sentiment. Since this earth and the works therein shall be dissolved (II Peter 3), it is not only foolish but highly unscriptural for brethren today to speak of “Tours To The Holy Land.” In fact, such terminology plays right into the hands of religious error. Biblically, the hope of Israel, which Paul preached, referred to the gospel plan of redemption (Acts 28:20-31). The blessing that came through Abraham’s seed (Genesis 22:18), had nothing to do with real estate, but it had everything to do with our spiritual state (Galatians 3:16-29).

B. New Testament Meaning of “Israel”

All Bible students are aware of Genesis 28 and the change of Jacob’s name to Israel. According to a careful study of Hosea 12:1-4, we learn that Israel means “prince of God” or “one who

has power with God". In John 1:49-51, the apparent lesson has to do with one's relationship to the Lord as King of Israel. In other words, those who have power with God have constant contact with the Savior (v. 51). Perhaps this suggests that a prince of God today is an integral part of the royal priesthood mentioned in I Peter 2:9! Before someone suggests insanity on my part, let us notice Roman 2:28-29 and 9:4-7, which emphatically set forth the premise that outward, fleshly, physical ties have nothing to do with the New Testament concept of Israel. Truly, when we are scripturally baptized into the Christ, we become Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise and there is no Jew nor Greek in Him (Galatians 3:26-29)!

C What Was The HOPE Of Israel?

No one who has studied the Bible or history denies that the Jews had a misconception of the Messiah. They wanted to be delivered from the rule of Rome instead of the bondage of sin. That is exactly why Jesus disappointed them. They were prepared for an earthly empire (John 6); He had a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36). They desired temporal power while He established a spiritual reign in men's hearts (Galatians 2:20). According to Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment the hope of Israel was:

1. The Lord, Our Righteousness--Jeremiah 23:6
2. A Redeemer Who Would Come Out of Zion--Isaiah 59:20
3. A Fountain For Cleansing--Zechariah 13:1
4. A New Covenant--Jeremiah 31:31-34
5. The Suffering Servant--Isaiah 53
6. An immovable Kingdom--Daniel 2:44
7. A Precious Corner-Stone--Isaiah 28:16
8. The Prince of Peace--Isaiah 9:6
9. A Humble King--Zechariah 6:12; 9:9

Loyal children of Jehovah waited for Him (Isaiah 25:9; Luke 2:25-32) and suddenly the Lord came to His temple (Malachi 3:1). In Luke 2 we find aged Simeon who lived long enough to see Jesus who was "the consolation of Israel" and a light to the Gentiles. In that same setting was the godly woman, Anna, who "gave thanks

unto the Lord and spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

Since there is one hope (Ephesians 4:5) in Christianity and because God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11 and 10:12), it is anti-scriptural to accept the Zionist movement as being God-approved. The gospel is God’s power to save everyone (Romans 1:16-17). Therefore, those who have power with the Father shall all be saved the same way--through the Redeemer that came out of Zion, by the gospel, in harmony with the New Covenant and its teaching (Romans 11:26-29).

Christians, as pilgrims and strangers in this life, look for a city whose builder and Maker is God because our citizenship is in heaven (I Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:10; Philippians 3:20). This place, not made with hands, is eternal--in the heavens (II Corinthians 5:1; Titus 1:2).

Jesus Christ was and is the hope of Israel. The consummation of the glorious longing is to walk the golden strand of bliss with Him forevermore!

END TIMES PARABLES

Dan Kessinger

As we open our Bibles in study, we are sometimes blessed to see individual facts coalesce into grand themes. Frequently, we find such themes developed in a single chapter. For instance, the most immature student knows that faith is the subject of Heb. 11, while I Cor. 13 is the love chapter. On such occasions, we see the volume of discussion as a signal of importance, demanding our intense and complete understanding. Of course, we must study and obey all those Biblical topics, but a continuous and weighty discussion of a Bible theme arrests our attention, and rightly so.

So it is with Mt. 25, a judgment chapter. The Bible discusses the end of time at great length. Whether it be the visible appearance of Jesus, the preparation He has made for his children, the bodily resurrection, the destruction of the earth, the state of the dead presently, or a host of eschatological issues, there is no ambiguity on either the doctrines or the importance of last things to us. We are impressed with the importance of judgment since the bulk of Mt. 25 is devoted to this grand subject. Beyond acknowledging that judgment is an important issue, we are here challenged to learn the issues and criteria of the Judgment Day.

Mt. 25 is part of the famed Olivet discourse. Jesus had just made his triumphal but bittersweet entry into Jerusalem, and had already cleansed the Temple. Though Jesus was teaching in the city each day, his nights were spent at Bethany lodging with Simon the leper. His daily commute brought him over the Mount of Olives, the very best vantage point from which to gain a panoramic view of Jerusalem.

On the day in question, evidently Tuesday before His death, Jesus had just pronounced some of his most strident condemnations in Mt. 23, had just despaired over the lost city of Jerusalem, saying

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under {her} wings, but you were not willing! (Mt. 23:37)

With a heavy heart our Lord tours the Temple complex; he knows the impending fate of these building; he knows the lives and souls which should be lost. It is here he tells his disciples

And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” (Mt. 24:2)

He then retreats to the Mount of Olives. When the disciples found him on that mountain with their famous three questions, it is reasonably assumed that he was pensively and privately mourning the fate of that unsuspecting but doomed city. Though Jerusalem had no recollection of it, the eyes of Lord yearned for them that evening.

As Jesus answers the questions of Mt. 24, he combines the notion of his coming with the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, Jesus came in judgment against Jerusalem through the armies of Titus in 70 A.D. He further combines his coming again with the “end of the age,” and so the latter half of the chapter deals with a literal coming again which would signal the end of time as we know it. The major distinction between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world is that the one would be accompanied by subtle but certain signs, while the other had no signs whatsoever. “But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” (Mt. 24:36)

Since this is the case, the command is “watch.” There are no signs of the coming, so watch. The thief gives no warning, so watch. The master will return, so watch. Mt. 24:45-51 provides a wonderful springboard to the parables of Mt. 25. In effect, we are told the Lord is coming, so prepare.

Mt. 25 consists of three sections, each dealing with the judgment. The Parable of the Ten Virgins, introduces judgment by the need for preparation. The Parable of the Talents specifies preparation by investment and the day of reckoning these accounts. We shall address the third section of Mt. 25, though in strictest terms it is not a parable. However, the metaphorical image of sheep and goats fits the theme and the lesson completes the lesson of preparation for judgment. Mt. 25:31-46 has a very simple theme: the separation of the prepared from the unprepared.

Preparation for a Day of Finality

Let us turn our attention to the general theme of preparation found in Mt 25:1-13. Here, the parable consists of a wedding, and the preparation and waiting which took place. There are several items in this parable which seem strange to the Western mind, such as the midnight wedding, the celebration of the bridegroom and the separation of the women from the men.

I had the opportunity to see parts of two weddings in the Middle East, one an elaborate Egyptian wedding, the other in a very poor section of Israel. In both instances, it still held true that the bridegroom was much more celebrated than is typical in our culture. In the Egyptian wedding, an midnight affair which took up the entire lobby and second floor of the Nile Hilton, (at an estimated rental of \$10,000) the groom approached bride to the strains of Arabian trumpets and Scottish bagpipes. In the other humble wedding, a large group of men (no women were present) were firing rifles into the air as they surrounded the groom who was mounted on a donkey.

As we explore the meaning of the parable, we first notice the simple difference between the virgins awaiting the bridegroom: some were wise while others were foolish. It is interesting to contemplate the vitality of wisdom and foolishness. Some excuse poor decisions if it is believed the decision maker is not venomous and spiteful but “only” foolish. The Bible certainly discourages us from being spiteful, but it does not provide a pass for those who insist on being fools; neither should we. An entire book of the Bible was written so that we might not be fools, and we should heed it. According to Jesus, fools are just as lost as those who care nothing about the bridegroom’s coming.

As we continue to read we are impressed with the notion of perseverance. We suspect there are many who will eventually be lost eternally, not because of a misunderstanding of scripture, not because of a lack of morality or desire, but because the burden of time was too great to bear. It takes character to patiently plan for the future; it takes faith to persevere when the expected is delayed.

It is interesting that Jesus deliberately uses the word “delayed,” anticipating this problem. There was nothing wrong

with the supplies brought by the five foolish virgins, but they were too few. What is called a “lamp,” by the KJV and NKJV et. All., was “probably a short, wooden stem held in the hand, with a dish at the top, in which was a piece of cloth dipped in oil or pitch”¹ such devices were neither efficient or self sufficient, requiring constant attention. In a sense, they were no less prepared, but their preparation did not anticipate the possible passing of time. As we apply this principle, we admit our focus fails and we search for the quick and easy salvation. We have all noted examples of converts who would have done well to have drowned in the baptistry, for this was seemingly the last occasion they were faithful to God. But the problem cuts deeper than this; it is not just the passing of time which has doomed them, but the total lack of preparation to stay faithful for as long as it takes. It is not lack of commitment, but a lack of preparation for eternal commitment.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares {us}, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (Heb. 12:1)

When I was a boy, I frequently was assigned the job of weeding the garden. Usually, my goal was to get done as quickly as possible and do something more enjoyable. Frequently, my work was shoddy at best. To correct this situation, my Dad adopted a new policy for the weeding: instead of assigning a certain number of rows which should be weeded, he would give a time frame, and I was to weed until the time for weeding was up. This saw to it that I didn't just hurry through and half do a job.

In a sense, this is what the Lord demands of us. Our service to Him is not goal oriented, it has not the kinds of peaks and valleys typical of other kinds of service, it is tough-minded commitment. There must be a stubborn clinging to what is right because it is right for as long as it takes.

In this parable, the return is at “midnight.” This is not to suggest there is any preference for or indication of a night-time advent of Christ, but rather to leave the impression that his return, though promised, was still a surprise to all concerned. Even those who were perfectly prepared had no way to know that midnight

would be the time of his return, but that is the very essence of the parable, isn't it? Adam Clarke relates the advice of Rabbi Eliezer who said

Turn to God one day before your death. His disciples said, "How can a man know the day of his death?" He answered them, "Therefore you should turn to God today, perhaps you may die tomorrow; thus every day will be employed in returning."²

There is also the issue of personal preparation. It may seem hard-hearted for the wise virgins to refuse to help out their less-fortunate counterparts. However, this is part of the lesson: they were not less fortunate, they all had the same opportunity to prepare. In truth it makes no difference whether we feel the wise virgins were less than compassionate, for compassion is not the theme of this story. In order to teach the point of this parable, the wise virgins could not share. Why? Because what they refused to do is in the application impossible. Preparing for others is not an option, but it is revealing that some would object to the actions of the wise, instead of learning the need for personal responsibility and preparedness.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things {done} in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (II Cor 5:10)

Just as surely as preparation is needed by each individual, preparation must take place in the given time. Life is the time to prepare to meet God and those who fail to do so may see their lack when the Lord comes, but it is too late. Jesus concludes this parable with the sobering word "watch."

Preparation for a Day of Reckoning

In the second parable, investment is the theme. In particular, we learn how and why our opportunities come, we learn what the Lord expects of us in order to be pleasing to him, and we learn that Judgment Day is a day when accounts are settled. For our own sakes, we are encouraged to make the proper investment.

As the parable begins, the master departing into a far country. There will evidently be a lapse of time between his departure and return, but this is not the real import of this action. Jesus has

departed into a country farther than any we can imagine; he is not interested in micro management of our affairs, but has given us responsibility for our actions.

Each servant is given talents according to abilities. We generally refer to this monetary dispersal as opportunities, but they are more than this: they are responsibilities. This principle speaks directly to the heart of judgment. It answers the questions “What do I owe the Lord?” The answer is in the gifts we have been given.

There is an element of risk involved in the actions of the servants. A small part of virtually every student sympathizes with the evil servant who failed out of fear. But the opposite of fear is faith, and this is the very kind of fear condemned in Rev. 21:8. “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Certainly, there is much at stake when we endeavor to work for the master, but failing to try is the ultimate failure. In this parable, everyone who tried was blessed with grand success. Do we trust the one who said “...I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Heb. 13:5)

The day the accounts are settled seems to have been quite an event. The Lord returns and immediately requires answers of his servants. Little is said of extenuating circumstances, but results are given a high priority. The extenuation is found in the limiting of the talents given. This Lord already knew the capabilities of his servants and was careful to not overload. The question was not what they might have done, but if in fact they had done it at all. No one may claim on the day of our giving account that we failed because we were burdened; we fail because of unfaithfulness.

Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. (I Cor. 4:2)

“But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Lk 12:48)

For if there is first a willing mind, {it is} accepted according to what one has, {and} not according to what he does not have. (II Cor. 8:12)

This parable is humbling, as we recognize the most talented servant of all is “faithful over a few.” Even if we are tremendously blessed by God, we are still unprofitable servants.

This point is underscored by the treatment given to the second servant. Though his abilities and production were less than one half that of the first, his commendation is precisely the same, down to the word. We stand in danger of over-emphasizing great works over humble ones, but Jesus does not think this way. He is just as pleased when one with limited ability is faithful as with great abilities and success, because faithfulness is the key.

When the third gives his answer, he has prepared excuses. I was afraid etc. etc. One is forced to reflect if in fact he worked harder to keep from working for the master than he would have in faithful service.

Is God a “hard man”? Evidently, this is true in a sense, or he would not have admitted to it. This is not to say that God is unethical, but to give us a sense of all that God has the authority to require of us. The servant seemed to believe that because of the great power and authority of the master, to invest and lose would be disastrous. But though the servant’s description of the master was accurate, this understanding should have made it clear that the master would not tolerate such actions. Failure is not the issue, but faithfulness.

In this parable, the consequences of unfaithfulness are more explicit than in the parable of the virgins. Here they are not just locked out of a great celebration, but they find themselves in darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There is no sensible way to understand this verse other than a brief description of hell. How can there be flame and darkness at the same time? I know not, care not to find out personally, but I trust that it is true. Hell is a place of darkness, crying, and pain.

Preparation for a Day of Separation

The third section of Mt. 25 deals with the actual judgment. In this scene, he speaks clearly of himself as the “son of man,” and is seated on a glorious throne. This is not just a throne of authority or honor, but a judgment seat.

Before him will be gathered “all nations.” It is interesting to compare this phrase with that found in the great commission. Who should hear and obey the gospel? All nations. Who will be

judged? All nations. By what standard will all nations be separated?

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is {the Book} of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (Rev. 20:12)

Even if we did not have this in our possession, the importance of obedience to the gospel is clear here.

From here on, the theme is separation. There are sheep and goats, their actions are different, and thus their destiny is different as well. This separation is the natural conclusion to a life of separate deeds. Separation is no accident, it is the life commanded by our Lord. The words of Jesus fly in the face of every doctrine taught by Calvinists and pseudo-Calvinists in the church. Though obedience is surely not the only issue in judgment, here, it is the only one mentioned.

There is an inheritance reserved for those who have obeyed the Lord, particularly to those who have been benevolent. It is easy to remember the application to those Pharisees with whom Jesus has so recently disputed. They, so certain of their own place with God had no inheritance because of hard-hearted refusal to be kind to their fellow man.

We must observe the wording used in the final verse in the chapter. What is the difference between “everlasting” and “eternal”? They are precisely the same. Those who doubt the eternal nature of hell do so on absolutely no scriptural grounds. If the punishment of hell is limited, so must the reward of heaven. Therefore, watch and prepare for eternal separation. How are we to do this? By current and continual moral separation.

Endnotes

¹ Vincent, Marvin R., *Word Studies in the New Testament* “MacDonald Publishing Company, McLean, VA, 1888”, p.131

² Clarke, Adam, *Clarke Commentary Vol. Press, Nashville 5*” AdbingdonPress, Nashville, 1824”, p. 237.

Biographical Information:

Dan is 36 years old, and the son of a gospel preacher. As a boy lived in several locations when I was a boy, though having been in West Virginia since 1973. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West have two sons, D.J., who was born in February of 1994, and Jared Thomas, who was born April of 1999.

Dan graduated from Walton High School in Roane County, and received the A.S. and B.S. each in Biblical Science from Ohio Valley College.

Dan preached his first gospel sermon in the spring of 1982. Since then, he has been located with congregations in Belle, Long Valley, Gandeeville, and Proctor, and since February of 1994, with the Dewey Ave. church of Christ St. Marys. He holds gospel meetings, contributes to religious publications, and writes for *WV Christian* magazine, conducted local TV and radio programs, and lectures. He has worked with WV Christian Youth Camp since 1984, and WVSOP since 1995.

DEALING WITH TERMINAL ILLNESS

Steve Snider

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble, He comes forth like a flower and fades away; He flees like a shadow and does not continue.” Those words were spoken by God’s faithful servant Job. It would seem to me that even though they were spoken at a time when Job was dealing with a lot of tragedy in his life, the thought is still true.

Sickness is an issue that runs throughout the Bible. We read of Naaman fighting the disease of leprosy, of the death of David’s newborn child, of Job being covered with boils from head to toe. We come to the N.T. and we read of Timothy, Epaphroditus, Trophimus and others who were sick. Paul told the Corinthians that the outward man is made so that it will eventually decay. (2 Cor.4:16ff) The Hebrew writer makes it plain that man is destined to die. (Heb.9:27) Suffering and afflictions are unfortunately things that must be endured by both the Christian and the non-Christian. Because sickness and dying are an unavoidable part of this world there are some basic truths that we should understand. **First**, as already stated, sickness and dying are a part of this life and if we hope to deal successfully with those who are terminally ill we must be prepared to accept this truth. **Second**, sickness and dying are not respecters of persons. Luke chapter 16 teaches this in a powerful way as we read about Lazarus and the rich man. While their lifestyles were miles apart, and while the rich man no doubt meant more to society than the poor man, they still both died. Job had terrible tragedy in his life, David had a newborn child die, Jesus Christ was crucified. In order for us to deal with terminal illness, especially within our own families, we must get beyond the idea that it cannot or should not happen to us or to someone we love. **Third**, we need to understand that sickness, sin, and faith are not necessarily related. While all death could be ultimately traced back to the sin that was committed in the garden, it is not the case that all sickness and death today are a direct result of an individual’s sin or a lack of faith on their part or the part of those that love them. **Fourth**, sickness,(especially terminal illnesses) and death can raise a lot of difficult questions concerning

God, the goodness of God, death, the afterlife, etc. If we are going to deal effectively with terminal illness we must come to grips with some of these issues in our own minds and be prepared to discuss them with those who are also struggling with these issues. **Fifth**, in dealing with those who are terminally ill the Christian should demonstrate care and compassion. Our Lord and Savior set the example for us by repeatedly demonstrating during his earthly ministry that He had a genuine compassion for those who were sick. Paul told the Romans that they needed to “ rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those that weep.” (Rom.12:15)

In the rest of this lesson I would like to offer some practical suggestions that might help us as we deal with those who are terminally ill. I am not writing as an expert in medicine or medical technology. I am not writing as an expert on death and dying. I am not a psychologist or even one who has had any training in how to deal with the terminally ill. The suggestions I am about to make are purely things that I have learned as a result of having to deal with those who were terminally ill. This lesson takes on a very personal note for me due to the fact that on March 24th, 1999 one of the finest men I have ever known, and one of my dearest friends passed from this life. That man was my father. From the moment the doctor informed us that dad had lung cancer, to the moment I watched him take his last breath almost two years later, I found myself dealing with the problem of terminal illness on a level that I had never dealt with it before. It was now personal and for the first time in my life I was going to be challenged to see if whether or not the things I had told others over the years were things that I truly believed myself. So what I offer are my own experiences, my own observations, and hopefully some things that I know to be true because they are based on the word of God. The order that these suggestions appears is not important. These are thoughts that I jotted down immediately after my fathers death, and I hope that you will find some of them helpful.

In dealing with the terminally ill it is important that we be able to accept that they are indeed terminally ill. In this lesson I am talking about our dealings with those that we know have little or no chance of surviving the disease that has attacked their body. I am talking about those who have been told that there is really nothing else that can be done for them and that it will only be a

matter of time before death takes them. If we refuse to accept or acknowledge this then we will find it difficult if not impossible to deal with the terminally ill and will certainly not be in a position to think about what is best and most helpful for them. This is of course very difficult, especially if it is someone that is very close to us, but denying the reality of their illness will not help us and will certainly not allow us to help them as we could.

In dealing with the terminally ill it is important that they have a significant voice in what kind of treatment they pursue. (I am assuming of course that the person is an adult or at least one who is old enough and in a frame of mind to make such decisions.) This can be very difficult for family members because many times our love for them is so strong that we can not bear the thought that we might lose them to this disease. Many times we want them to take the most aggressive approach, maybe even experimental approaches, and yet if we were honest we might have to admit it is because we can't stand to think about our world without them in it. I genuinely believe, however, that one of the most loving things we can do is to assure them that we will stand behind any decision they make (that is right and moral) and will support them and be there for them, even if it isn't the route we want them to take. The one who is battling the disease must have (in my thinking) the right to choose how they want to deal with their illness.

In dealing with the terminally ill we must be prepared to answer some difficult questions. Questions dealing with why this is happening, am I being punished, does God not hear my prayers, do I not have enough faith, etc. can be fairly common. I feel it is very important that we strive to give Bible answers where they are present, and admit that we don't have the answers when the Bible doesn't answer the question. I feel that quite often we do more harm than good when we start trying to guess why a person has developed a terminal illness when no clear reason is known. As stated earlier we need to teach what the Bible teaches about sickness and death but we need to be extremely careful in assigning to God actions or motives that may not be His at all.

In dealing with the terminally ill don't be afraid to talk with the person about their disease. In most cases that I have been involved in the patient wanted to know what was going on. They wanted to know what the doctors were saying about their

progress, their chances of survival, and any other matter that related to their condition. I believe they have every right to be informed,(if they want to be informed) and my experience has been that they appreciate the honesty and being able to be involved in the decisions that affect them. Don't be afraid to ask them to explain to you what the doctors are doing or saying. This should not be done in a prying manner, but simply to show that you are concerned and are willing to let them talk about it any time they need to. You will be able to tell if they don't really want to talk about it and if that is there desire then it should be honored.

In dealing with the terminally ill continue to treat the person in the same way you have always treated them. (This is assuming, of course, that you have been treating them in a manner that is right and good.) If it was your custom to joke with them and “ pick at them” a little, continue to do so. Most people that I have dealt with do not like people who come to see them and act as though they are dead already.

In dealing with the terminally ill allow them to do as much for themselves as they possible can. Again, most of the patients I have dealt with resented people who tried to treat them as invalids before they actually were. They resented people trying to do things for them that they could still do themselves. It make take them a lot longer to do the same things they have always done, they may have to do it “ in hitches” resting every now and then until they get it done. It may tire them out and we may hate seeing them that tired, but it allows them to continue to feel useful and alive and is important to their mental well being.

In dealing with the terminally ill try (as best you can) to put yourself in their place. I have watched family members get angry with someone terminally ill because they would not eat, or would not drink, or would not get up and try to walk a little. As important as all of those things may be for good health, try and remember that you are dealing with someone who is terminally ill and it may be a terrible burden for them to do even the simplest things. Try to remember times when you weren't hungry, or had a bad sore throat and it hurt to swallow, or when you were so tired you could hardly move a muscle. Try to remember those times and then just multiply your experience by several times and maybe you can begin to imagine how bad they feel. Here again, is where

we must be careful that our desire for them to live does not override what is best for them and what may be reasonable for us to expect from them.

In dealing with the terminally ill look for opportunities to talk with them about eternity. If the person who is sick is a Christian remind them of the great promises that our Lord and the inspired writers made concerning the future of those who die in Christ. (John 11:25,26; 14:1-6; Rom.8:18; II Cor.4:16-5:1) One of the things that my father and I talked about was the truth that regardless of the outcome he could not lose. If he beat the cancer he was a winner, if the cancer beat him he was still the winner! If the person is not a Christian you need to try and lovingly, and gently talk with them about their need to get ready to die. This can be difficult but we need to make this effort. It has been my practice to try and find a time when no one else was around or to even to tell the family that I would like to talk to them privately if at all possible. Sometimes people who know they are terminally ill will give careful thought to the condition of their soul.

In dealing with the terminally ill keep in mind the other members of the family. Look for ways to help them. We are normally very good at saying, "Is there anything we can do?" Most families are equally good at responding, "I can't think of anything." Learn to look around and see what needs to be done. Does the house need cleaned, do they need food brought in, do they need transportation, do they need a little spending money at the hospital, etc. I believe it is important to keep all members of the family informed who are capable of understanding and dealing with the information.

(Small children for example may not be able to digest all that is going on.) I encourage those involved to keep other family members informed so they can have the chance to say or do things that they might like to do for the one that is dying. Let me suggest here that we also remember to keep in touch after their loved one has died. So often we give them so much attention and care during the illness, then the person dies and we soon forget that those left behind are still struggling.

In dealing with the terminally ill families need to decide whether or not the person will be kept at home or in some other facility. If the person would like to be at home I would like

to recommend Hospice as something you might want to check into. They helped us with the care of my father and were wonderful. It is important that you understand the philosophy of Hospice but it is (in my opinion) a wonderful organization that allows someone to die in their home with dignity, care, and their loved ones around them.

In dealing with the terminally ill be willing to talk with them about their funeral. This can sometimes make us feel uncomfortable, again especially if it is someone close to us and we don't like to think about them dying. However, in some of the situations that I have been involved in this has been very important to those who were dying. They had definite ideas about what they wanted done, what they wanted said, or not said, and it can really be very helpful to those who might be conducting the funeral later. I have been amazed at the calmness that people, especially Christian people, have demonstrated in talking about dying and in what they would like to happen at their funerals. I have also been amazed at how humble and unselfish they normally are by requesting that little be said about them and more emphasis given to encourage the living to be right with God.

In dealing with the terminally ill make time (make time) to talk with them about anything that is important to you. Tell them how you feel about them and what they have meant to you. Tell them how you feel about their passing. Tell them anything that you want or need to tell them, and don't keep putting it off thinking that you will have plenty of time to get it done. I almost missed the chance to tell the man who has influenced me more than any man in this world how I felt. I am so grateful that his life was spared a few more days and I got to tell him how much I loved and admired him and what he had meant to me as a father. I will cherish that memory for as long as I live.

In dealing with those who are terminally ill and in dealing with their families one of the things that has helped me most is simply realizing that there are no simple answers, no magic formulas, that will make them feel better. In fact, when I go to visit my goal is not to make them feel better but to simply let them know that I care and try to see what there is that I might do to help them bear their burden. Many times the most important thing you can do is simply be there to give them a shoulder to cry on, to give

them a hug and let them know you care, hold their hand, pray with them, and offer any support or encouragement that you can. Once death has happened understand that it is right for them to grieve and mourn. Don't feel the need to constantly cheer them up or make them laugh, but be there for them and allow them the time they need to properly deal with the loss of someone they have loved.

Please understand, that these are simply my suggestions. I did not learn these from attending seminars, or reading books, but are simply things that I have practiced that have been helpful for me as I have dealt with people who were terminally ill. I hope these simple suggestions might help you.

Biographical Information

Steve Snider was born in Clarksburg, WV in 1954. He is a graduate of the East Tennessee School of Preaching. He is married to the former Diane Hatcher of Duluth, GA, and they have a daughter, Stephanie and a son, Aaron. Steve has preached in Georgia and has been the located preacher for the Barracksville, WV congregation for the past seventeen years. He is a member of the faculty of the **West Virginia School of Preaching** and has completed seven missionary trips to India.

The Value Of Life

Denton Landon

Consideration of the topic above must begin with some definitions. Value is defined as follows: “1 the worth, desirability, or utility of a thing, or the qualities on which these depend”¹ The word “utility” is defined as “1 the condition of being useful or profitable.”² For life we find the following:

1 the condition that distinguishes active animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, functional activity, and continual change preceding death. 2 a living things and their activity. b human presence or activity. 3 a the period during which life lasts, or the period from birth to the present time or from the present time to death. b the duration of a thing’s existence or its ability to function; validity, efficacy, etc. 4 a a person’s state of existence as a living individual. . .³

Which life does this paper deal with? Several, but first attention is turned to the origin of life.

The Origin Of Life.

All life, plant, animal, and human has worth because it originated from God. Genesis 1 tells the origin of all life, verses 11,12 plant life, verses 20,21 aquatic and bird life, verses 24,25 land animals, and in verses 26, 27 mankind. Because all life originated with God, all life, man and animal, is valuable. God is responsible for “the condition that distinguishes active animals and plants from inorganic matter.” Man was given “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26). Verse 28 has the command for man to subdue the earth and exercise this dominion.

As Creator of all life, God has the right to instruct mankind in the proper attitude toward life. In Genesis 9 Noah offered sacrifices upon an alter which he built after leaving the ark. God gave the command to replenish the earth. He also then gave them a new food source, meat. God said,

Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat (Genesis 9:1-4).

Note carefully the stipulation of eating meat: they were not to eat the blood which is “the life thereof.” This indicates the respect for life which man must show toward animals, even those he is about to eat. H. C. Leupold commented that the animal “is a thing divinely created, the medium in which it lives and has its being is almost identical with it and should be respected.”⁴

Value Of Life.

The value of animal life is established by the passage from Genesis 9. Mankind is to treat animals, even those about to be eaten, with respect. All life thus has value. Some in the late twentieth century have taken this idea to an extreme, suggesting it is wrong to eat flesh at all. God clearly grants permission to eat animal flesh, but with the understanding the blood, which is the life of the animal, is not for eating. The life of animals is thus valuable, and worthy of respect.

The life of humans is of greater value as created in the image of God. God continued in Genesis 9:5,6 “And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” The American Standard Version reads, “And surely your blood, the blood of your lives, will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it: and at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man’s brother, will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” Anyone killing a human being, animal or another human being is condemned to death by God for taking the life of one created in the image of God.

The death penalty for taking the life of another must be undertaken according to the law of the land. God does not sanction the vigilantly approach used by some in their opposition to abortion. The murder of an abortionist is as wrong as the murder of any other person. A young man attending a youth rally a few years ago attempted to argue from Numbers 25:6-9 that the killing of an abortion doctor would be justified. This is not true. Moses, God's inspired spokesman, "said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor" (Numbers 25:5). We have no inspired Moses today to instruct us similarly. Paul's words to the Roman church are applicable here. He wrote,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.
For there is no power but of God: the powers that be
are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth
the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they
that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the
evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do
that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the
same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good.
But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he
beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister
of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that
doeth evil (Romans 13:1-4).

God has established the government to "execute wrath" in bearing "the sword" against evil doers, not the citizenry. The creation in God's image is what distinguishes human beings from the animal world more than anything else.

The creation in God's image is first mentioned in Genesis 1:26,27 where we read, God said,

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:
and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,
and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and
over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that
creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his
own image, in the image of God created he him;
male and female created he them.

This creation in the image and likeness of God makes humans different from, and of greater value than, animals. What is this image and likeness of God? It must be something which differs from the rest of creation, for God only says this about man. These involve “attributes such as a moral consciousness, the ability to think abstractly, an understanding of beauty and emotion, and, above all, the capacity for worshiping and loving God.”⁵

Moral consciousness is not a part of the animal kingdom. There are no court systems for settling disputes, no trials for murder, no code of conduct expected, no concept of right and wrong. The “law of the jungle” is might makes right, survival of the fittest. Among humans, however, there is a very different law. The law among man involves right treatment of our fellow man. Not everyone agrees with what the proper treatment may be, but all have the idea there is a right and wrong way to treat others. This idea is expressed very early in life. Listen to small children at play as they discuss whether something is “right” or not, “fair” or not.

What about abstract thinking in the animal world? Abstract is defined as “1 a to do with or existing in thought rather than matter, or in theory rather than practice; not tangible or concrete.”⁶ Animals do not exhibit this type of thinking at all, but humans do all the time. Consider all the wonders of modern life brought about in part because someone was able to think of a concept not then a part of reality, and bring it into being.

When have you ever noticed an animal stop and admire the beauty of the sunset? Or the sunrise? Or anything else? Humans do. We do not always agree on what is beauty, but we all agree such a thing exists. This is why people spend hours at a time working in their flower beds preparing the soil, planning which plants to put where so the colors and sizes compliment each other. Once planted these flower gardeners spends time pulling out weeds, watering, and fertilizing the flowers. And once the flowers are blooming people enjoy passing by, even stopping to admiring the beauty of the flower bed. Businesses spend a lot of time and money researching what layout for their shops is visually pleasing for the customer.

What animal ever contemplated the origin of the world, acknowledged the Creator God as responsible, and then sought to worship Him. Again it does not happen. But mankind is different.

Throughout history humans have worshiped God. At some point the worship was corrupted by idolatry, but these still recognized something higher than themselves, and sought to offer worship.

A Life of Value.

The way one lives is also defined as life. The life of every human being has value because it is made in the image of God. But what about the way one lives? What kind of life in this sense has value? Far too many people go through life with a sense of incompleteness. They yearn for something, but can not find it. Where do people look? People should look to Jesus who came “that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). But far too many look in all the wrong places.

For many people the accumulation of material wealth and all it can buy is the life one values. You may have seen the bumper sticker which reads: “Whoever has the most toys in the end wins!” The question is, “wins what?” You will not be able to take it with you. Some of the wealthiest people in history appear to have been the saddest. The Doris Duke story appeared recently on television. Doris Duke was the daughter of the founder of the American Tobacco Company, and was very wealthy. The movie depicted her as unable to live a normal childhood for fear she might be kidnaped and held for ransom. As an adult she could not form friendships, for most who tried to get close only wanted her money, even the men who married her. She died alone, except for the hired house servants, and a personal attendant who had a drinking problem. All her money could not buy happiness, or satisfaction.

Others seek satisfaction in pleasure. For some the pleasure is in entertainment such as movies, concerts, sporting events, and such. Another group may seek solitude in camping, or the excitement of traveling to various places both home and abroad. A third group seek fulfillment in life from the “eat, drink, and be merry” philosophy, and thus turn to sinful conduct such as alcoholic beverages, drug abuse, and fornication. These “pleasures of sin for a season” leave them empty and unfulfilled.

Others still turn to their work for fulfillment. It may be the power they wield there, or the product they turn out, or the good

they can do for others. They pour themselves into their work until it becomes the center of their existence.

A reading of the book of Ecclesiastes shows this is not recent development. Solomon tried everything he could think of to bring lasting satisfaction, but could not find it apart from God. His conclusion was this: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc. 12:13).

Isaiah offered similar advise to Judah when he wrote,

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,
and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat;
yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and
without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for
that which is not bread? and your labour for that
which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me,
and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul
delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come
unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will
make an everlasting covenant with you, even the
sure mercies of David (Isaiah 55:1-3).

Why should Judah continue to rebel against God, spending their energies on lives without God which brought no satisfaction. She needed to turn to God and enjoy the blessings of fellowship found in covenant relationship with God.

It is the conviction of this writer that the longing experienced by so many is the longing for fellowship with God. The only way to find that is through Jesus Christ as taught in the New Testament. There is where the hungry soul finds satisfaction (Matt. 5:6), the weary soul finds rest (Matt. 11:28-30).

Most people will not find God without help. The Ethiopian Eunuch needed some guidance in properly understanding the Scriptures (Acts 8) and so do most people today. Jesus gave the church the commission to carry the gospel message into the world teaching every creature (Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16).

We must also remember the power of the gospel. It creates new life. Paul wrote, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we

also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3,4). Paul said we were raised from the waters of baptism to “walk in newness of life.” He wrote the Corinthians “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (1 Corinthians 5:17). Lives presently lived seeking life in all the wrong places can be changed into godly, productive lives through the power of the gospel. But we must see the value in each and every human life, and then guide them in learning of Jesus, accepting His yoke, and receive the life abundant He came offer.

Endnotes

1. *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, p. 1701.
2. *Ibid*, 1698.
3. *Ibid*, 866.
4. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), p 331.
5. Henry Morrison, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p 74.
6. *Oxford*, p. 7.

Biographical Information

Denton Landon was baptized in March, 1980 by Emanuel Daugherty at the Alkire Road church building in Grove City, Ohio. In February of 1981 he married the former Jo Ann Leach. In August of that year they left for Memphis, Tennessee to attend the Memphis School of Preaching graduating in June of 1983. He earned a B. A. in Bible from Alabama Christian School of Religion, now known as Southern Christian University, and an M. A. in theology with an emphasis in apologetics from the Cincinnati Bible Seminary. He has preached for churches in Alabama, Ohio, and North Carolina. He presently preaches for the Warners Chapel church of Christ in Clemmons, North Carolina where he has preached since February 1995. Denton and Jo have been blessed with four children: Luke, 15, Lydia 12, Matthew 9, and Joshua 6.

ANNIHILATIONISM

Steve Fuchs

An-ni-hi-late – “to reduce to nothing, to cause to cease to exist” – Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1969.

Annihilationism – the teaching that punishment for the wicked at death will be annihilation. God will destroy them. God will reduce them to nothing or cause them to cease to exist.

A faulty concept of the nature of man is at the root of this doctrine. Man was created immortal, but those who continue in sin and reject Christ are by a positive act of God deprived of the gift of immortality and are ultimately destroyed. Another view is called “conditional immortality.” Immortality is not a natural endowment of man, but is rather a gift of God in Christ only to those who believe. The person that does not accept Christ is ultimately annihilated and loses all consciousness.

On the fifth day of creation God made animals that inhabited the waters and birds that flew in the skies above. On the sixth day he created the land animals (Genesis 1:20-25). Then God said something that he had not said about any of his creation to this point, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” (Genesis 1:26) What did he mean? Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that the human soul is the person himself and when the person dies, it is the human soul that dies. (The Truth That Leads to Life, p. 37) “The spirit is simply the life force that enables that person to be alive. The spirit has no personality... It cannot speak, hear, see, or feel. At death the life force eventually leaves the body cells and the body begins to decay. All conscious thought and actions end (Psalm 104:29).” (*The Truth That Leads To Life*, pp.39, 40) With this definition of soul and spirit man is no different than the animals, a point which Jehovah’s Witnesses emphasize. “Because they all have this same life force or spirit, man and the animals die in a similar manner.” (*The Truth That Leads To Life*, p. 39) They quote Ecclesiastes 3:19,20 as proof that there is no difference between men and animals in death. How do they explain Ecclesiastes 12:7- the dust returning to the earth as it was, but the spirit returning to God who gave it? “The spirit (life force) returns to God in the sense that now the future life prospects

of the person rest entirely with God. Only God can restore the spirit, causing the person to live again.” (*The Truth That Leads To Life*, p. 40)

But God made man in his image, after his likeness. There is something about the nature of man that is different than that of the animals. Jehovah’s Witnesses are adept at defining “soul” and “spirit” to mean nothing more than “person” and “personality-less life force.” What is lacking in their definition? I submit to you, a Biblical, contextual, and revealed, definition is lacking.

What is uniquely in man by creation, distinctive as the image and likeness of God? The Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated *soul* can simply mean: the animal life, or that principle by which every animal, according to its kind, lives; hence life, vital principle, animal spirit. (William Wilson, p.406) Genesis 2:7 - “... and man became a living soul.” Leviticus 5:2 - “...Or if a soul touch any unclean thing...” The Greek word *psuche*, translated *soul*, can also simply mean the natural life of the body. (Vine, p. 54). Revelation 16:3 b - “...and every living soul died in the sea.” But there are times when *nephesh* and *psuche* mean much more than just a living being. In Deuteronomy 11:18 - “Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul.” The obvious meaning for *nephesh* here is mind. In Matthew 10:28 - “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” It is obvious that *psuche* here is something that lives beyond the body. It is something that cannot be killed by man. Moses records in Leviticus 26:11 and 30 that God has a soul. See also Isaiah 1:14, Matthew 12:18, and Hebrews 10:38. Since God is a spirit (John 4:24) he has no animal breath. So, the soul of God must be the same thing as his spirit.

The Hebrew *ruach*, and the Greek *pneuma*, translated *spirit*, at times mean more than just life or breath. Sometimes they can mean heart or attitude. In Deuteronomy 2:30 it is said of Sihon, king of Heshbon, that God hardened his spirit (*ruach*). In Matthew 26:41 Jesus said of his disciples, “... the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The preacher of Ecclesiastes shows a difference between the “spirit” of man and animal in that the spirit of man ascends and the spirit of the beast goes downward (Ecclesiastes 3:21). *Ruach* and *pneuma* can refer to that eternal,

identifiable, personal spirit of man that lives after its separation from the fleshly tabernacle. Zechariah reveals that the Lord of Israel “formeth the spirit of man within him.” (Zechariah 12:1) Hugo McCord observes:

“It must be that God spoke of Abraham’s spirit (invisible, made in God’s image, the “inward man” 2 Cor.4:16), when, after his body laid in the cave of Machpelah 330 years, God used the present tense, saying, “I am the God of Abraham” (ego eimi ho theos Abraam, Matt. 22:32). If Jesus was correct in saying that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matthew 22:32), something about Abraham was living long after his body had decayed.” (*Spiritual Sword*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 16)

“What is the image, the likeness of God in man (Gen. 1:26)? It cannot be flesh and blood, for where God lives, they cannot go (1 Cor. 15:50). Since God’s nature is spirit (John 4:24), then he cannot be flesh and bones, for a spirit being does not have them (Luke 24:39). Furthermore, since God is invisible (2 Cor. 1:15), his image in man must be invisible. Man’s spirit (invisible, without flesh and bones), formed in man by the Lord (Zech. 12:1) must therefore be God’s image, God’s likeness. God alone is the source of immortality (1 Tim. 6:16). His spirit is eternal (Heb. 9:14), and it has pleased him to make man’s spirit likewise eternal (John 11:25-27). (McCord, *Spiritual Sword*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 16)

Since man is created in the image of an immortal, eternal, spirit being, can God, by definition annihilate an immortal, eternal spirit? The very concept implies contradiction! Can immortality mean anything less than being exempt from oblivion, imperishable? Though man’s living fleshly body can die (Genesis 37:21), his spirit, his immortal soul cannot die (Matthew 10:28). An attempt is made to define the word “destroy” in Matthew 10:28, to mean extinction. The word translated “destroy” in Matthew 10:28 is the same as translated “lost” in Matthew 10:6; Luke 15:32; 19:10. Defining *apollumi*, Vine states, “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being.” (W.E. Vine, p. 302)

Some try to explain death as extinction. Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that Adam simply did not exist before being created by God. So when Adam died he simply returned to that previous lifeless, non-existent state (*Truth That Leads To Eternal Life*, p. 34). A

number of scriptures show that one can be dead and yet not annihilated: Matthew 8:22; Luke 15:32; Romans 6:11; 7:4,6; Galatians 2:19; 1 Timothy 5:6; and Revelation 6:9,10. McCord concludes that death is simply the absence of life, whatever kind of life is being considered. Thus the prodigal son could be dead in one sense, but alive in another (Luke 15:32). There are those who will suffer the “second death” (Revelation 20:14), but the victims will be alive forever and ever (Rev. 14:11). (*Spiritual Sword* Vol. 6, NO. 1, p. 17)

Many who believe the doctrine of annihilationism do so because they cannot see a loving God torturing disobedient souls eternally. Therefore, the concept of an eternal hell is not acceptable to them and they seek to annihilate passages in the scriptures that clearly teach such. One such passage is Matthew 25:46: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” It is argued that eternal annihilation is punishment enough. But if one ceases to exist, how can it be said that his punishment is eternal. Must not one exist in order to suffer punishment? There are two destinies being considered in this passage - one is everlasting punishment, the other is life eternal. If life is eternal, then punishment must be eternal as well! The same Greek word *aionios* is translated “everlasting” with reference to punishment, and “eternal” with reference to life. Could one deny that for one who is suffering extreme pain, the extinction of his or her consciousness would actually be a blessing – not a punishment (cf. Luke 23:30-31; Revelation 9:6)? The Greek word *aionios* translated “eternal” with reference to God in Romans 16:26 is the same word translated “everlasting” with reference to punishment in Matthew 25:46. The punishment of the wicked is just as eternal as the eternal God!

Hell is described in various passages as a “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10,15), “fire that shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43, 44, 45, 46, 48), and “eternal fire” (Matthew 18:8, 9). If punishment for the wicked is annihilation, then why is the fire said to be “unquenchable” and “eternal?” Why would there be any need for eternal fire if the wicked simply ceased to exist? It stands to reason that it takes an eternal fire to punish an immortal soul or spirit!

Can one believe in the reality of hell and believe that hell is something other than continuing, conscious burning? Brother F. Lagard Smith in his book, "Who Is My Brother," says that it is illogical to force a connection between the nature of eternal punishment in hell and the reality of hell itself (p. 196). My question is this: "Is hell really the hell revealed in scripture if it is not a continuing (everlasting), conscious, burning? Can one believe in the reality of God and believe that God is something other than eternal and just? In this case there are specific characteristics revealed in the nature of hell that defines what hell is, just as God is defined by specific characteristics of his revealed nature. Brother Earl Edwards makes this observation:

"Jesus said that after the division of the final judgment the righteous will go "into eternal life" (obviously a "continuing conscious" enjoyment of blessings in God's presence) and, in the same verse, he said the unrighteous would "go away into eternal punishment" (obviously a continual conscious punishment) (Matthew 25:46). And that "punishment" is described by the Lord in the same passage as being "eternal fire" (Matthew 25:41). (Who is My Brother? By F. Lagard Smith, Book Review by Earl D. Edwards in *1998 Annual Freed-Hardeman University Lectureship*. P.72.

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Biographical Information

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1971 A.A. Freed-Hardeman University
1972 3rd Year Bible Certificate Freed-Hardeman University
1973 B.A. Harding University
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FAMILY:

Steve is married to the former Marsha Mullett of Beallsville, Oh. They have been married 26 years. They have three children: Sarah Thompson of Selmer, Tennessee, Stephen Glenn Fuchs of Columbus, Ohio, and Selene Fuchs of Little Hocking, Ohio.

PREACHING EXPERIENCE:

1972 Associate Minister, Edgewood Church of Christ, Jacksonville, Florida
1974 Minister, Bethel Springs Church of Christ, Bethel Springs, Tennessee
1978 Minister, Acton Church of Christ, Michie, Tennessee
1982 to present Minister, Little Hocking Church of Christ, Little Hocking, Ohio

BENEVOLENT WORK:

1975-1978 Steve and Marsha were foster parents to a total of sixteen foster children in a home built by the Bethel Springs Church of Christ in Tennessee.

RADIO AND TELEVISION WORK:

1975-1978 Daily five minute Radio Program – Selmer, Tennessee

1978-1981 Two thirty minute programs Sunday morning and evening, Corinth, Mississippi

1982 – 1986 Open Bible TV Program – WTAP Parkersburg, WV (guest speaker)

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GOSPEL MEETINGS: Florida, Tennessee, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, (3 to 4 per year)

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EVANGELIZING THE WORLD

Rod Rutherford

Two thousand years ago, on a mountain in Galilee, the sinless Son of God met with His little band of apostles. For the past three and one half years, these eleven men had lived with Him. They had shared His food, enjoyed His fellowship, and listened eagerly as He taught the multitudes. They had looked on in amazement as He restored withered limbs, gave sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf. In awe, they beheld the dead come to life again at His spoken word. Indeed, they had come to accept that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16).

When the Lord was arrested, tried, condemned and crucified, the disciples’ hopes were dashed to the ground, only to be revived again when He arose from the dead. For the past forty days, He had appeared to them on various occasions instructing them in the truths concerning His soon coming kingdom (Acts 1:3). Now they wait expectantly as He begins to speak: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:18-20).

This short statement of our Lord, couched in the simplest of terms, constitute the marching orders of the disciples of Christ in every generation. So all encompassing is it that man has dubbed it “The Great Commission.” The Great Commission of Christ has never been canceled, suspended, or modified. It remains ever in force, and will remain so until every soul in every generation has heard the Gospel and had opportunity to obey. The Great Commission will cease when, and only when, our Lord returns to bring human history to its final conclusion.

How well have we, the disciples of Christ, done our Master’s bidding? Have we fulfilled the Great Commission in each generation for the past two thousand years? A brief overview of history will suffice to answer our question.

Shortly after His ascension back to heaven, the Lord poured out His Spirit upon His apostles thereby empowering them for their

task as the ambassadors of His kingdom (Acts 1,2; 2 Cor. 5:20,21). The Gospel was proclaimed with power on Pentecost and three thousand souls, their hands stained with the blood of the Savior, believed, repented, were baptized, and rejoiced in the remission of their sins and membership in His church (Acts 2:36-47).

The apostles continued their work of proclaiming the crucified, resurrected Lord until they had filled all Jerusalem with their teaching (Acts 5:28). Soon the number of believers had grown to 5,000 (Acts 4:4). Then, it seems the Holy Spirit stopped counting, and simply related that multitudes were added to the Lord including a great company of the priests (Acts 6:7).

Not even persecution could stop the onward progress of the Gospel. When Saul “made havoc of the church, entering into every house and haling men and women committed them to prison,” the disciples were forced to flee from their homes (Acts 8:3). However, they carried the Gospel with them. The Holy Spirit records: “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). These were not the apostles for they remained behind in Jerusalem. It was the rank and file of the saints, the “ordinary members,” who were committed to Christ and wanted their fellow men to share in the blessings of salvation through Christ. Like the ripples caused by a stone thrown into a pond, so the Gospel went forth in ever widening circles until all Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria had heard (Acts 1:8).

Following the conversion of Saul, persistent persecutor of the saints, who became Paul, ardent apostle to the Gentiles, the Gospel was carried to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 9, 22, 26). This peerless apostle could not rest until every tongue had opportunity to confess Christ as Lord. It was his stated aim to “preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (Rom. 15:20). No amount of difficulty, danger or discouragement could deter him from this goal.

To the church at Rome, Paul penned: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that

preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, **Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world**" (Rom. 10:13-18). Just thirty short years after the Gospel was first preached on Pentecost, Paul reminded the church at Colossae that the Gospel "was preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23).

The Great Commission was fulfilled in the first century, but what about the nearly nineteen centuries which have followed? Within a relatively short period of time after the death of the apostles, a great falling away from the faith engulfed the church in error, thereby obscuring the purity of the Gospel, and plunged the world into the dismal period of history known as "the Dark Ages." The corrupt apostate body which arose out of the ashes of the Lord's church made disciples, not to Christ, but to a human system devoid of salvation. I am sure that during this thousand years of darkness, here and there, unknown to the rest of mankind and perhaps even to fellow believers in other locales, little bands of Christians met according to the apostolic pattern. The Word of God is the "seed of the kingdom" (Luke 8:11). As long as the Word exists, the kingdom exists, and wherever it is planted in good and honest hearts, the Lord's church will come into being.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century put the Bible back into the hands of the common man. Even though men began to form denominations based upon human teachings and traditions and enshrined their human dogmas into creeds, the Bible was still available for sincere seeking souls to "search the Scriptures daily whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). In England and Scotland devout believers began to plead for a religion based upon the Bible alone. However, it was in the New World, in the free and open spirit of the frontier, that the great movement to restore New Testament Christianity came to full fruition. From Pennsylvania and West Virginia across the Midwest and into the South, the Gospel was preached in its pristine purity. Thousands responded to the Savior's invitation, obeying the Gospel plan of salvation, and were thereby added to the Lord's church just as on Pentecost day. As pioneers continued to trek

westward, they carried the primitive Gospel with them and New Testament Christianity spread like a prairie fire across the frontier.

Once again, apostasy reared its ugly head! Men soon became disenchanted with the simplicity of New Testament work and worship. In October 1849, a group of influential preachers met in Cincinnati, Ohio. They formed the “American Christian Missionary Society” to supplant God’s missionary society, the local church (1 Tim. 3:14,15). Along with other innovations in the worship of the church, they sought to change the blood bought body of Christ into the likeness of the denominations around them. Evangelism soon took second place to open warfare between the advocates of primitive Christianity and the agents of change. Eventually division came with the majority choosing to go in “the way of Cain” (Jude 11).

The faithful remnant sought to rebuild. Extensive evangelism was done the New Testament way. Preachers pioneered the faith into new areas of our nation as saints at home sacrificed to support them. In the period from 1930 to 1960, the churches of Christ grew astronomically. Christians carried their faith with them into their everyday activities of life and countless souls were won. During this same period new nations were entered with the Gospel, and soon the number of converts in these fruitful fields exceeded the number being won at home. It appeared that the evangelization of the whole world was within sight.

Satan will not leave the saints alone for very long especially if they are busy winning souls. Once more, apostasy became a reality! A movement within the church away from the New Testament pattern and into the darkness of denominationalism began, flourished, and sadly, seems to have gained a majority of the church. Battles have been fought, and will continue to be fought for some time, but it is now apparent that a division exists within the body.

Perhaps it is premature to attempt to predict the future, but I think I see a mighty army forming. It is smaller, less affluent, and less educated in the wisdom of the world than the forces of the church before the present apostasy, but it is purified and toughened by the trials of conflict. Somehow we must motivate this army to “lift up its eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4: 35). If we do not, I fear it will turn on itself.

Constant bickering and infighting can so decimate our ranks that neither we nor our children will have any hope of taking the Gospel to the whole world. We cannot allow this to happen!

May I plead that as we, the Lord's redeemed people, stand on the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, we rededicate ourselves to the task of world evangelism, that we resolve that our Lord has not died in vain, that we renew our commitment to the Great Commission, and truly go into the whole world, every nation, and to every creature and teach them the way to eternal life through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Only by doing this can we save the lost souls of sinful men and insure the salvation of our own souls as well!

Our Savior still commands: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Will we be obedient to the heavenly imperative?

Biographical Information

Rod Rutherford is a native of Indiana. He was educated in the Washington County schools, David Lipscomb College, Memphis School of Preaching, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He was baptized at the age of 14 and began preaching at the age of 20. He has served congregations in Tennessee, Florida and Arkansas and done mission work in Africa and Australia. He has taught in three schools of preaching and now works with Truth for the World, a media mission work sponsored by the church of Christ in Duluth, Georgia. He and his wife, Brenda, have three children and four grandchildren. Their two sons, Kevin and Brett, are preachers of the Gospel.

HEAVEN: THE HOME OF THE SAVED

Skip Andrews

It Will Be Worth It All

There is a promised land made for all the free
When our race on earth is run.

There no broken dreams will mar our memories —
It will be worth it all when we get home.

There no sad farewells — There no tear-stained eyes,
There no heartache, grief, or woe,
There no shattered hopes will ever cloud the skies,
It will be worth it all when we get home.

Chorus

It will be worth it all just to see His face
When He claims us for His own.

Then ten million years to sing “Amazing Grace” —
It will be worth it all when we get home.

(Unknown Author)

If there is no heaven, then what does it matter that we learn the Bible, live by it, love Jesus, treat people right, honor father and mother . . . ? If there is a heaven, then all of that does matter. It matters so much that we should go to any lengths in service and suffering to get there safely someday.

In this lesson, we are studying about the most glorious place in existence. It is a place already inhabited by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have been invited to live there, and if we please Jesus Christ in this one short life, He will welcome us home with the simple word, “Come” (Matthew 25:31-46; John 14:1-3).

Studying about heaven should make us want to go there even more than ever before. Let us notice six characteristics of

“The Home of the Saved”

I. It Is Glorious.

It is glorious because of the presence of God the Father. Psalms 113:5 says, “Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on High?” Isaiah had a vision of His glory in Isaiah 6:1-13, helping him to understand something about the glory of that

place. Isaiah 33:17 says, “Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.” Others had glimpses of the glory that is in heaven due to the presence of the Lord of hosts (Ezekiel 1; Revelation 4). Let us learn to be filled with awe and reverence by these things so that we can be changed for the better every day. “Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of the holiness and of thy glory. . .” (Isaiah 63:15).

It is glorious because of the presence of Christ the only begotten Son of God. Songwriters frequently refer to the time and place when we shall see His face. Surely this is one of the most frequently used factors in the decisions we make to keep on walking in His steps. The return of Jesus to heaven was observed by witnesses (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11). But His departure did not take place until He had promised to return and take the faithful to be there forever (John 14:1-3). Stephen observed the Lord in His present location while being martyred for Him (Acts 7:55, 56). The fact that Jesus has successfully returned to His former glorious home serves to anchor us (Hebrews 6:19, 20). John describes the glorious Son for our benefit (Revelation 1:10-18; 5:1-14). Yes, heaven is glorious because Jesus is there (Psalm 24).

It is glorious because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We should desire to see Him someday, too, for His devotion to our welfare led to the production and preservation of the only book that gives the story of heaven perfectly — the Holy Spirit-inspired Bible. John wrote of “the seven Spirits which are before his throne”. . . “And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (Revelation 1:4; 4:5; see also 5:6).

It is glorious according to Biblical descriptions of it (Revelation 21, 22). The Bible ends with these descriptions of that next element of our existence – the eternal element – to leave us wanting more, wanting to go there, wanting to do His commandments so that we may have “right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (22:14).

It is glorious because of the heavenly beings who dwell there (Matthew 18:10; Revelation 5:11-14).

It is glorious because of the throne that is there (Psalm 103:19; Hebrews 4:16).

II. There Are Many Blessings There.

Let us note eight blessings of heaven. First, there is fullness of joy and everlasting pleasures (Psalm 16:11).

Second, there is righteousness and satisfaction. Psalm 17:15 says, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (see also 2 Peter 3:13).

Third, the tree of life is there. One writer made the point that the Bible is the story of “the tree of life: lost and regained.” Revelation 2:7 and 22:2, 14 speak of this tree of life in a way that can draw us to it and its blessings.

Fourth, victory is there. Revelation 3:21 says, “to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my father in his throne.” One new Christian who read Revelation is reported to have said, “Guess what? *We are going to win!*”

Fifth, according to Revelation 7:13-17, robes and purity are there. The blood of Lamb that cleanses in baptism provides this eternal purity for the redeemed.

Sixth, we shall have relief from the pain, temptation, trials, struggles, and evil people of everyday earthly life (Revelation 21:3, 4, 8, 27).

Seventh, there is a crown. 2 Timothy 4:8 teaches that this is for Paul and *all* who love His appearing. It is a crown of life (James 1:12).

Eighth, Revelation 14:13 teaches that rest is a blessing of heaven. It is the rest that “remaineth” (Hebrews 4:1-13). It is for those who are in the Lord and who labor for Him.

III. It Is Our Hope

“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). This is a singular hope: ONE (Ephesians 4:4-6). All other hopes are either false or temporary. No other hope is worth pursuing with respect to the eternal needs of the soul. Economic, educational, social and religious hopes that take our eyes off this hope, that contradict this hope, that minimize this hope — all such “hopes” are the work of Satan. They will

only serve to ruin the one hope and seal our doom. Colossians 1:5 says, “For the one hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.” This hope is reserved for us. 1 Peter 1:3-5 has one of the longer statements on this subject in the Bible. Peter connects this hope to the resurrection of Christ and teaches that heaven is our inheritance. Let us use all the power that this hope can provide (Romans 8:24, 25).

IV. It Is Eternal

The promise of this eternal hope was known by those in the Old Testament (Hebrews 11:13-16; Psalm 23:6). Jesus promised this eternal life to the faithful (Matthew 25:46). Our resurrection is the event that will precede the reception of this eternal inheritance (John 5:28, 29). The resurrection of the faithful is spoken of by Jesus in John 5 as “the resurrection of life.” this resurrection will provide us with the fulfillment of 2 Peter 1:11, which says, “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” This eternal life and home is not on earth, for this earth will be destroyed and be no more (2 Peter 3:9-14).

V. It Is An Undeserved Inheritance

It was prepared for the faithful — those who love Him enough to keep His commandments (Matthew 25:34-40). It behooves us to find out what it takes to please Jesus so that we can be on the right side at the judgment. At that time, we will be joint-heirs with Christ. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16, 17).

What could be more clear? We will be joint-heirs with the Saviour? Yes — we will, but it surely is undeserved! Hebrews 10:34 reminds us that this heavenly gift is to be better and enduring (in comparison to earthly things). 1 Peter 1:4 gives these characteristics of that inheritance: incorruptible, undefiled, fades not away, is reserved. This inheritance will be from, and with, Our Father (Revelation 21:7).

VI. It Is A Reward To The Faithful.

God has always made it the ultimate goal for His people. He has always provided motivation for us to get ready for this place. This is one of the main messages of Hebrews 11 — “faith is the substance of things **HOPED** for.” This reward is yet to come. Hebrews 13:14 says, “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” Earthly cities are not like this, for they are always changing, for good or bad. Jesus said He was going to prepare this place for us (John 14:1-3). But faithfulness is required on our part. John 12:26 says, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.” Revelation 2:10 says, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

*Heaven is a wonderful place,
Filled with glory and grace.
I want to see my Savior's face,
Heaven is a wonderful place.*

Are you preparing for that place? Will you follow His footsteps so that you can go home someday?

Biographical Information

Skip is married to the former Helen Burch of Middlebourne, West Virginia. They have a daughter and a son; Lori is a high school science teacher in Newman, Georgia, and Michael is in medical school in Pikeville, Kentucky. Skip is from the Detroit, Michigan, area. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and Southern Christian University. He has made mission trips to India and the Dominican Republic. He is co-editor of *Ready! Set! Go!*, a monthly paper for evangelism. Skip and Helen live in Duluth, Georgia, where he is the preacher and serves as an elder.

THE JUDGMENT THE PROPHETS SAW

Rod Rutherford

The prophets of the Old Testament were God's spokesmen to His covenant people, Israel. They were given a two-fold task by the Lord: (1) to preach to their contemporaries rebuking them for their sins and; (2) to pull aside from time to time the veil of the future and reveal the coming of the Christ and His glorious kingdom.

Prophets of Doom

While we generally think of the prophets as foretellers of the future, in actuality much of their preaching was directed against the sins of Israel and their heathen neighbors. It was in regard to their task of rebuking present sins that the prophets spoke most often of God's judgment. They ceaselessly warned God's people that He would judge (punish) them for their wickedness and apostasy. Sometimes God's judgment was manifested by means of a great natural calamity such as the plague of locusts mentioned in the book of Joel. Often God judged His people by using another nation such as Assyria which led the Northern Kingdom into captivity in 721 B.C. or Babylon which led the Southern Kingdom into captivity in 606 B.C.

By looking at the judgments of God in the Old Testament, we learn some things about the nature of God and how He deals with man which are still applicable today (Mal. 3:6; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). First, we see that God is a moral Being, the moral Governor of the universe. In order to be true to His nature, God must reward righteousness and punish disobedience. Second, we see that sin has consequences which carry on into eternity. Third, we learn that ultimately truth will triumph over error and justice will finally, fully be done. Fourth, we see that both men and nations are responsible for their deeds, and eventually will be called to account for them.

The Old Testament also teaches there is a day of personal judgment coming for every individual. In this teaching it foreshadows the fuller revelation of the New Testament. After making diligent search for man's purpose on this earth, Solomon came to the conclusion: "Fear God and keep His commandments:

for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13,14).

The New Testament Teaches Judgment

The New Testament teaches that God will judge man personally and individually. Near the end of His personal ministry, our Lord spoke of God’s coming judgment upon Jerusalem and the Jewish nation for rejecting His Son (Matt. 23:34-24:35). He followed this with a series of parables emphasizing His sudden and unexpected second coming to judge the world (Matt. 24:36-25:46). Jesus concluded with the parable of the sheep and the goats: “When the Son of man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth His sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left....Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....Then shall He also say unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:31-34, 41, 46).

Paul warned of the Judgment when he preached to the pagan philosophers in ancient Athens: “And the times of this ignorance God winked at: but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness....” (Acts 17:30,31 a). A general judgment at the second of coming of Jesus Christ is clearly taught throughout the New Testament.

Everyone Will Be Judged!

A common misconception in today’s religious world is that saints will not be judged. However, God’s Word teaches differently! Paul wrote to the saints in Rome: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). To the church of Christ at Corinth, Paul pointed to a time when all mankind, including the saints, will be judged: “For we must all

appear before the judgment seat of Christ: that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Judgment will be both universal and personal. No accountable being will escape, nor will anyone be able to hide behind another. Daniel Webster, the great orator and statesman, was once interviewed by a journalist who asked him: “Senator Webster, what is the most serious thought you have ever had?” Without hesitation, Mr. Webster, a believer in God and the Bible, replied: “The most serious thought I have ever had is that one day I shall stand before my Maker to be judged!”

Christ Will Be the Judge

Certainly, God is “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25). He will judge every man, but it will be by His Son as His representative: “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). On Mars Hill Paul spoke of the appointed day in which God “will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained: whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

Is it not fitting that Jesus Christ Who has lived on this earth as a man and was “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin” should be our judge (Heb.4:15)? He alone can be a true and impartial judge because He partakes of the nature and experience of both God and man (John 1:1-3; 14).

The Bible Will Be the Standard

There must be a standard of judgment which applies equally to everyone in order for fair and impartial judgment to take place. In our nation’s courts, the laws of our communities, counties, states and nation constitute the standard by which we are judged. On that last, great day of Judgment, all men will be judged out of the same Book, God’s inspired, inerrant guide for mankind. Jesus said: “He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not My words hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day (John 12:48).

Skeptics and modernists will be judged out of the very Book they have ridiculed and rejected! The story is told of two farmers

who lived in the same county. They were friends, but one was a devout believer in the Bible and the other was an agnostic. Often the two farmers heatedly discussed their differences.

One year, the Bible believer did not do well. Pests destroyed his wheat crop, and an infection nearly wiped out all his livestock so that by the fall, he was deeply in debt and his survival as a farmer was in jeopardy. His agnostic friend, however, had a wonderful year. His wheat harvest was above average, market prices were up for his hogs, and he anticipated ending the year with a healthy balance in his bank account. He could not resist the opportunity of taking a jibe at his God fearing friend. He wrote a letter to the county newspaper in which he pointed out the differences between him and his friend over the question of God's existence and the Bible's inspiration. He boasted that he, an unbeliever, had had a very successful year while his believing friend had had a disastrous year. "Surely, if there is a God," he reasoned, "He would not allow such to happen." The editor printed the letter in full. At the end, he added these terse words of comment: "God does not settle all accounts in October!"

We may wonder why the wicked seem to prosper while those who are trying to live godly lives have so many troubles, but we must remember, "God does not settle all accounts in October." There is a day coming in which all wrongs will be righted, unbelievers and evildoers will be punished, and the righteous will be rewarded!

All Will Be Revealed

Doubtless, countless crimes have been committed without the perpetrators being brought to justice. Likely, many people who are outwardly respectable are guilty of lying, stealing, cheating, envy, hatred, etc. One thing is certain, however. We may be able to hide our sins from man, but nothing is hidden from God (Prov. 15:3; Heb. 4:13). Every sin which has not been repented of and forgiven by the blood of Jesus will face us on the great day of Judgment! The wise man said: "For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14). The apostle Paul wrote of the day of Judgment as "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men..." (Rom. 2:16).

Surprises at the Judgment

Some of the verdicts at the Judgment will surprise men. Some will be surprised that humble servants of Christ who have quietly labored under difficult circumstances will receive greater honor than those men regard as great in the kingdom (Matt. 19:30). Others will be surprised that good, moral people will be lost. No matter how good a citizen, neighbor, husband and father a man is, he is a sinner and cannot be saved without the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:23; Rev. 21:8, 27; Eph. 2:8,9; 1 John 2:1,2).

Some will be surprised that many religious people will be lost. It is not enough to be religious, one must be right religiously, in order to be saved. Man's will is no substitute for God's (Luke 6:46). Our Lord taught the majority will choose "the broad way which leadeth to destruction" (Matt. 7:13,14). Then the Lord warns of the coming of false teachers who are "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matt. 7:15-20). He concludes by pointing out that some would even argue with Him at the Judgment: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:21-23).

Many will no doubt be surprised that only members of the Lord's church will be saved. The Bible clearly teaches that the church is the body of Christ, that Christ has only one body, and that He is the Savior of the body (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4; 5:23). Further, the Bible teaches all spiritual blessings are in Christ and there is but one way to get into Him (Eph. 1:3; John 14:6; Gal. 3:26,27). When Christ comes, He will "deliver the kingdom (the church) back to God, the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24). Unless one is in that kingdom, he will not be among those presented to the Father!

The Judgment Will Be Final!

It is possible to appeal the judgments of our courts on earth. Appeals are allowed because men may err in their judgment and frequently do. However, the Lord does not make mistakes. Therefore, no appeals to His judgment will be needed or made. No

where does the Bible teach a second chance (Heb. 9:27). Heaven, hell and eternity follow the Judgment (Matt. 25:46).

Are You Ready?

What about you? Are you ready for the Judgment? Don't be like Felix who trembled when he heard Paul reason of "righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come," but delayed his obedience to the Gospel, saying: "Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). How much better it is to heed the warning of the Apostle Paul: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 5:2 b). A crown of life awaits the the righteous on that last, great day (2 Tim. 4:6-8)!

REVELATION 20— THE MILLENNIUM CHAPTER

Charles J. Aebi

We are entering the millennium. Y2K signals the end of the present order. When computers fail, God can no longer get His E-mail out, so He sends Jesus back to earth as His personal messenger and also to take a personal hand in running things. Affairs are in such a mess in all the first-world and second-world countries that Jesus starts in the Middle East—in fact, in Jerusalem. He will try again to straighten out the Jews. He failed the first time, but this time will be different, for He will enlist the help of Yasser Arafat and the thousands of Premillennialists who have flocked to Jerusalem to reign with Christ 1,000 years. The Jews will immediately abandon their agnostic views, and through them and the Arabs (who are also, they say, children of Abraham) the reign of Christ will be extended to the whole earth easily, because Satan has been bound, if not gagged. The Moslem Dome of the Rock will be replaced by a rebuilt temple replete with Levite priests and animal sacrifices. The secular humanists, communists, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and animists will all either submit or become buzzard bait, and no more zoos will be needed, because lions and other predators will become vegetarians and peacefully coexist with lambs, fawns, and their other former food sources.

So begins Revelation 20 as some would have it! But more sober reflection suggests a rather different scenario. Many themes present themselves in this chapter—Satan's deceptive manipulations, his imprisonment, his temporary escape, his final war, his final destiny, persecution, idolatry, reigning with Christ, resurrection, spiritual warfare, the end of the universe, judgment, the book of life, the book of deeds, the book of standards, the lake of eternal fire—and sermons could be preached on each of them. But before examining any of these themes, it would be well to look at the context of the chapter: at the book, at the New Testament, at the whole Bible, and at prophecy and how it has been used by inspired interpreters, and at the many approaches to Revelation that color how any given passage is understood by its readers.

If one takes the approach of Lindsey or Walvoord, he might see in Revelation 20 something not terribly far from the first paragraph above; he would at least see the events in the chapter as just about to happen, and in the materialistic premillennial fashion. On the other extreme, Max King would have us see this chapter as describing the end of the Jewish system in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 68-70. Not so extreme but along somewhat similar lines, the approach of McGuiggan forces one to see Revelation 20 as history, a description of what took place in the fourth century A.D. when Christianity was made the state religion of Rome. Hinds and Johnson take still another view, holding that part of the events of Revelation 20 refer to a time of perfection on earth followed by the return of Christ and the judgment. Several writers like Wallace and Roberts and Hailey split Revelation 20 up, assigning verses 1-10 to the church after the Edict of Constantine as the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the rest of the chapter to Christ's second coming to judgment.

Several things seem evident in Revelation: (1) There is an emphasis on judgment through the whole book, and the judges are God and Christ. (2) The book concentrates on the war between good and evil, Christ and Satan, the church and Satan's agents. (3) Satan attempts to hurt Christ by persecuting His people. (4) Satan uses world powers, governments, and false religion to persecute and kill Christians. (5) In the final analysis, Christ and Christians win, and Satan loses. These things, at least, seem evident regardless of the interpretative plan one takes.

Revelation 20 is one place which details the eternal punishment of Satan as well as the judgment of Satan's agents. It is not the only place in Revelation nor in the New Testament that we are told of Satan's ultimate defeat, and his final defeat is merely the last in a long series of defeats, some of which are spelled out specifically while others are implied but not detailed for us. For example, when Satan's demons were cast out by the power of the Holy Spirit given by Jesus to the seventy to certify their message, Jesus said, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:17, ASV); He told us specifically that Satan suffered a defeat, limited though it was. But when Satan led Judas and the Jews and Romans to crucify Christ, Satan suffered a defeat

of gargantuan proportions: his stranglehold on mankind through sin was broken. Satan's ultimate downfall was certain once the atonement was made. Surely if he had known what the cross would accomplish, Satan would not have had Jesus crucified. By that event and the gospel that tells about it, Satan was bound for a thousand years and destined for ultimate total destruction. In the meantime he is restrained in his ability as a predator seeking whom he may devour; he can do nothing to destroy us unless we submit our wills to him and do as he pleases. I heard a lecturer recently insist that we are helpless to do anything about sin (Satan?) that dwells in us, but I find that teaching in Calvinism, not in Scripture. If we submit to the gospel of Christ, Satan has no hold over us beyond what we give him. If we repent and acknowledge the truth, we can recover ourselves out of the snare of the devil and be his captives no longer, not doing his will but God's. We can reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ by dying to sin, being buried with Christ in baptism, and being raised to walk in newness of life in which Satan has no dominion over us through sin, for we walk in the light and are cleansed from all sin.

You may be in for a surprise if you have not studied the New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy; it may be different from what you expected. Take Isaiah 6:9-10 as an example. It was originally a prophecy that Isaiah's preaching would often fall on deaf ears, but inspired interpreters said it was fulfilled in the preaching of Jesus in Galilee (Matthew 13:13-15), in His preaching in Jerusalem (John 12:37-41), and in Paul's preaching in Rome (Acts 28:24-28). This is not just a double fulfillment, but a multiple fulfillment or generic application, and it is true of other passages, like Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Psalms 69:25; 109:8; 89:3; 132:11; 118:22; Isaiah 66:1-2; and Habakkuk 1:5. I say this only to point out that prophecy has a more general applicability than is supposed by some who tend to think in terms of each passage being a strict prediction of only one event. If this is true of Old Testament prophecies, might it not also be true of New Testament prophecies, including passages in Revelation?

It should go without saying that the plan or theory of interpretation with which one approaches Revelation will strongly influence the outcome of his exegesis of Revelation 20. A futurist

(premillennialist), for example, is bound to say that the 1,000 years is all yet to come, and an extreme preterist is bound to say that the whole of Revelation 20 is all in the past. The chart below gives a general outline of the positions taken on four different sections of chapter 20 by four different schools of interpretation— preterist, continuous historical, philosophy of history, and futurist. There are, of course, divisions of thought within each of these schools, and there are still other views that don't easily fall into these four categories, but these general classifications include most views.

There is some agreement among the views. Those who believe the Bible agree that 20:1-3 refers to some binding of Satan, some limitation of his power, though they differ on when and how much his power is limited in these verses. They all agree that 20:4-6 describes a reign of Christ and some martyrs or saints; they disagree on which martyrs and when and where they reign with Christ. The same thing is true of the little season. There is probably more agreement on 20:11-15 than on the earlier verses; except for the extreme preterists, all believe it refers to the final judgment, and three of the four think it refers to a general resurrection of the dead. There are some differences in what the lake of fire means. Study this chart carefully:

It is this scribe's view that a progressive parallelism exists in Revelation that may fall in the philosophy of history approach and which allows a general application of the symbolic word pictures of the book to include the judgment of God on the Roman Empire without exhausting the meaning there. If one gets hung up on Roman emperor-worship as the main agency of Satan to war against Christ and the church, he is surely missing the most of 2,000 years of the devil's deceptive work. False religion may have been epitomized at one time in emperor-worship, but it is certainly not exhausted there. False religion from within the church as well as from outside of it always has been and continues to be a major, if not *the* major, threat to the church of Christ.

The preterist view as it is usually taught fails to clear one hurdle that most don't even see as they affirm that with the cessation of Roman persecution in the fourth century the church emerged triumphant as the bride of Christ ready for her wedding feast. To take this position is to say that the medieval Catholic

INTERPRETATIONS OF REVELATION 20

	PRETERIST	CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL	PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY	FUTURIST
Revelation 20:1-3 Binding of Satan for 1000 years	Destruction of Pagan Rome & persecution of saints for refusing emperor worship	Destruction of Catholicism and Islam, Satan's beast and false prophet	Destruction of power of death and persecution – for souls of saints	Cessation of Satan's power on the earth for 1000 years
Revelation 20:4-6 1000 years reign with Christ	Gospel triumphs for long time after Rome falls (not literal 1000 years; no literal res. Res. of their cause)	Gospel triumphs for long time after Catholicism and Islam fall. Martyrs honored as if resurrected. No literal res.; no literal 1000 years.	Departed saints and martyrs live and reign with Christ in heaven for the entire Christian era Res. of soul to Paradise	Saints raised to reign with Christ in His Kingdom with hdq. in Jerusalem when He comes again. Temple rebuilt. Literal 1000 years.
Revelation 20:3, 7-10 Little season; Satan's end	Period of time after Gospel's triumph – maybe many centuries	Brief time compared with 1000 years: temporary widespread evil	Satan makes a last-ditch effort just as he is to be thrown into hell	Satan is released and brings about another sort of Armageddon
Revelation 20:11-15	Extreme Pret.: a figurative descr. of fall of Rome or Jerusalem Moderates: the final judgement after the general resurrection	General resurrection and final judgment after Satan's demise	General resurrection and final judgment after Satan's demise	Second resurrection, of the wicked dead. Final judgment. Heaven; and either hell or annihilation of the wicked

church is the church of Christ and is figuratively reigning with Christ 1,000 years or for a long time, long in comparison to the era of persecution (sporadic for some 250 years). Who among us is willing to grant that medieval Catholicism is the church triumphant, is the bride of Christ, is the true people of God?

The continuous historical view has many problems, the most basic of which is that the entire outcome of its interpretations is totally dependent on where one assumes that we are now in history. Historical interpreters two centuries ago viewed symbols rather differently than historical interpreters can today, using the same symbols. Two world wars and a host of other things have altered the conclusions immensely.

The worst of all the views herein considered is the futurist, which operates on the presupposition that certain numbers and things (like the 1,000 years' reign, for example) must be literal and materialistic; and also that the reign of Christ in Revelation 20 is the kingdom of Christ and that therefore the church is not the kingdom. This leads to the ministry of Christ and the atonement being seen as failures (Jesus came to set up a kingdom and didn't get it done). It also sees the events of Revelation 20:1-10 as being very Judaistic in character; the millennial reign is accomplished through the Jews, and the Jewish temple is rebuilt; the 1,000-year reign is the kingdom of David, and it brings about the mass conversion of the Jews.

One thing that stands out in Revelation 20 is that Christ is portrayed as supreme as Ruler and Judge. Christ lives and reigns because His word has limited Satan's power to deceive men. Christ reigns with His priest-saints, to whom He gives judgment power. He rules with them for a thousand years, which symbolizes completeness, being multiples of ten, one of the complete numbers (7, 10, and 12). He reigns the whole time— throughout the Christian era, which ends in the great white throne judgment scene. God sits on that throne, but is it the Father alone, or is it the Father and Son? The following passages in the New Testament affirm that God has given judgment authority into the hands of Jesus who will judge: Matthew 3:10-12; 28:18; 25:31-46; John 5:22,27; Acts 10:40-42; 17:31; Romans 2:16; 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Revelation 2:3; 19:11. Both Christ and God are on the throne, according to Revelation 3:21;

22:1, and both are divine and in perfect unity (John 10:30; 14:10). Who can doubt that Christ's authority to judge includes this throne scene? The book is the revelation of Jesus Christ as supreme—King of kings and Lord of lords. Just as Jesus is the one who walks in the midst of the churches in chapters 1-3, the Lamb worthy to open the seals in 4-7, the King who with God reigns and judges in 8-11, the victorious Redeemer in 12-14, the Deliverer and Judge in 15-16, the Supreme Conqueror in 17-19, He is the Supreme King and Judge in chapter 20, and He with God will be the temple, the light, and the source of the water of life for the celestial city forever.

Biographical Information

Charles J. Aebi is a native of southwestern Pennsylvania. He was raised with a denominational background, but obeyed the gospel in 1949 and began preaching in 1952. He has a B.S. degree from Penn State, an M.A. from Abilene Christian, and a Ph.D. from Ohio University.

He has served as minister for churches in Texas, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, and has preached and held workshops in several states and in foreign countries. He taught Bible for 34 years at Ohio Valley College, where he served for 15 years as academic dean and for 6 years as chairman of the Bible Department. He retired from Ohio Valley College in 1998.

Charles and his wife Imogene have four children and twelve grandchildren. Among their children and their spouses they count four teachers, two medical doctors, a preacher, a nurse, three deacons who all preach on occasion, and eight Bible class teachers. Charles currently is serving as minister for the Rosemar Road Church of Christ in Parkersburg, WV., Rt. 1, Box 237, Vincent OH 45784. Phone: 740-678-2568

THE SIN OF SUICIDE

Emanuel Daugherty

Introduction

What is suicide? The term “suicide” derives from two Latin words, **sui** (one’s self), and **cidium** (to intentionally kill) i.e., intentionally kill one’s self; thus, is defined as the killing of one’s self with malice aforethought, **self murder, suicide** (*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol X, p. 12).

Some confuse self-sacrifice with suicide. But there is a marked difference between these acts. One may shorten his life by doing what is right even though it may lead to his early death. A soldier may in an act of heroism and bravery lose his life saving a comrade; a mother may perish in a fire while saving her infant child; think of the sacrifices of Jesus, Stephen, Paul, and the apostles. These sacrificed themselves for the sake and welfare of others (Matthew 20:28; Acts 7; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33). Their sacrifices are evident testimony of the truthfulness of the Christian religion for none would suffer these things for a cause less honorable. These are examples of self-sacrifice.

Others confuse reckless, careless living with suicide. There are those who may shorten their lives by profligacy--reckless living, drunkenness, dope addiction, prostitution, AIDS, etc; but this is not the same as suicide. Sinful living shortens life!

Whereas self-sacrifice is to gain a higher moral good, and reckless living is only for a greater degree of gratification, suicide is a conscious and deliberate contempt for life per se; suicide is a giving up in despair and the perceived uselessness of life.

What are the statistics? Is this a problem in America? Latest reports are of 500,000 attempted suicides, and 30,000 per year confirmed. One would have to conclude that it is a major problem. Suicide is most frequent among American Indians, the elderly, and homosexuals. Forty percent of the suicides are in the 60 and over age range. Twenty percent of the male suicides occur among the 15 to 20 year- olds (14% are females in this group). An article in the *Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 1993 shows that there has been a 200% increase in teenage suicide since 1960 (Speech by former Health, Education and Welfare Secretary, William J. Bennett). It is

estimated that another 50,000 deaths by suicide will be undetected, unproved, or unreported. Thus, it is a problem that is real and must be effectively dealt with in our country.

Suicide is one of those things seldom talked about until it strikes near to us. However, the growing prevalence and seriousness of the problem demands we have a good understanding of it before we face it. If we wait until it happens, it will be too late!

Suicide In The Bible

The Bible does not use the word suicide. Thus there is no specific prohibition against it.

However, this is covered by the general injunction of the sixth commandment “Thou shalt not kill (murder)” (Exodus 20:13). In the New Testament all the passages against murder would apply (Matthew 5:21-22, Romans 1:29, etc). The *International Standard Bible Dictionary* tells us that “Contrary to the practice and the philosophy of paganism, the act was held in deep abhorrence by the Hebrews because of the high value placed on human life. It was held inexcusable that any but the most degraded and satanic should lay hands on their own lives” (*ISBE*, Vol 2, p. 748).

There are four recorded cases of suicide in the Scriptures. (1) King Saul fell on his own sword (1 Samuel 31:4). (2) Ahithophel hanged himself (2 Samuel 17:23). (3) King Zimri burned his palace down around him (1 Kings 16:18). (4) Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ, hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

Samson is sometimes listed as a suicide, but his death may be looked upon as self-sacrifice since it was done that a greater good might be accomplished (see Judges 16).

The Causes Of Suicide

Suicide may be brought on by a variety of reasons. When we hear of a person committing suicide, we immediately think that there must have been some mental illness or derangement. But not all suicides may be classed this way, and it is wrong to presume so without more information. Some who are thought to be among the world’s greatest thinkers and intellects of the ages have chosen this way to exit life. Among the pagan peoples, self-inflicted death

was common. However, ancient Greeks, such as Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle deemed suicide unnatural and reprehensible. “But with the decay of national thought and character Stoicism taught indifference to life and death as mere external phenomena, and advocated voluntary surrender of life as a means of gaining independence for the soul” (*Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, Vol XI, p. 132).

The pressures of life, business, and the dread of trouble causes some to commit suicide. Rather than face failure, humiliation, and disgrace, one may choose this escape. For example, the stock market crash of 1929 produced many suicides among influential people in our nation. In the New Testament the apostle Paul prevented a suicide caused by failure of duty (Philippian jailer, Acts 16:27). This was the penalty for those who allowed prisoners to escape (cf., Acts 12:19).

Remorse and despair leading to depression may end in suicide. Death of a mate, a child, a lost love, and physical illness may cause suicide by some. Loneliness is a big factor. Sometimes death is self-inflicted out of a desire to hurt others or punish them making them feel the guilt of their deaths.

Children do this to parents. Aged parents do this to punish children for their neglect; also, partners in unhappy marriages, jilted sweethearts, and so forth.

Cultic style religions often end in suicide. For example, Jim Jones, in Guyana, South America along with over 900 of his followers committed suicide by drinking poisoned Kool-aid, and in 1993, David Koresh of Waco, Texas influenced 86 men women and children to choose suicide rather than surrender to government authorities. In October 1994, there were 58 suicide/murders in a cult in Switzerland/Canada, and in 1997, several devotees of the Hale-Bopp Comet who committed mass suicide.

Chemical imbalance from drugs, prescription, or otherwise, can cause suicidal tendencies—one must be careful in the use of all drugs and medicines!

When suicide is on the rise in a nation and is becoming a widespread and common practice, the spiritual fabric of the nation is shredding apart. This has been demonstrated a number of times in history: At the conclusion of the Jewish rebellion against Rome

the fanatical Jews resorted to the fortress of Masada where eventually over 900 persons killed themselves; In modern times, the Japanese are noted for their use of hara-kiri, and the kamikazi pilots of World War II. In Nazi Germany suicide was common among high ranking officials at the end of the war.

America's cultural decline has been spoken about by scores of noted leaders over the past 30 years. **Alexander Solzhenitsyn**, in a speech in 1993, said, "*The West...has been undergoing an erosion and obscuring of high moral and ethical ideals. The spiritual axis of life has grown dim.*" **John Updike** has written: "*The fact that compared to the inhabitants of Africa and Russia, we still live well, cannot ease the pain of feeling we no longer live nobly.*" (Quotes from *Wall St. Journal*, March 15, 1993).

Also, there is the problem of euthanasia or "merciful death," mounting in our nation. "Dr. Death," Jack Kevorkian of the state of Michigan, that has assisted nearly fifty people in killing themselves. With the great decline in moral values taking place in our society, we can expect a higher rate of suicide. These things do not bode well for the mental health of our nation. Christians must become alarmed and do our best to overcome this abnormal thinking.

Christian Principles Against Suicide

Suicide is contrary to the very tenor of the religion of the Bible, both Jewish and Christian. (1) It is a violation of God's explicit law to do no murder, which would include one's self (Exodus 20:13, Romans 13:9). (2) It is contrary to the very nature of man; self preservation and love of life are imbedded in man by his Creator (cf. Philippians 1:20ff). (3) Suicide is demonstrating an evident lack of trust in God and his promises (1 Corinthians 10:13, Romans 8:28, Hebrews 13:5-6, Matthew 6:33, etc). (4) It displays the sin of ingratitude (Philippians 4:6). (5) It is an abandonment of our role as stewards in God's kingdom. Every person has the stewardship of his own life and soul. He is casting it away as if it were of no value (2 Timothy 2:3, Revelation 2:10, 1 Corinthians 4:2). (6) It is a great injustice to family and friends who love you and do not want to see any harm come to you.

But the suicidal person counters by saying, “I’m only hurting myself. No one else is involved.”

But this is not true! “No man is an island.” The apostle Paul said, “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself” (Romans 14:7). Husband and wife, for example, are one flesh (Matthew 19:6). For a married person to destroy oneself is also to destroy a part of another person. This same principle would apply to the relationship between parents and children. In the family of God we are tied together by the blood of Christ. Suicide on the part of a Christian hurts the entire Christian family. It is contrary to the Golden Rule to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12). We would not want a loved one to do so to us--therefore we should not do so to them. As a Christian I have no right to destroy God’s possession (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, 3:16-17). It is a contradiction of those Scriptures which enjoin upon us patient endurance of trials and tribulations (James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:5-7, Matthew 5:10-12, Romans 5:3-4). One who takes his own life is committing the sin from which there can be no change of mind and heart. Thus, committing suicide causes one to stand before God guilty of murder--a murder that denies one all possibility of repentance. Thus, one brings upon himself the judgment of a never-ending hell.

Preventive Medicine Against The Sin Of Suicide

What can we do to guard against suicide in our own life and help others? **One must begin with faith in God and his Son.** This faith must be strong and constant (Hebrews 11:6), leading us to full surrender and obedience to the gospel of Christ. The purpose of obedience to Christ is for the remission of sins which removes the great burden of guilt that accompanies a life of sin. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23; Acts 2:38; 8:39; 22:16). Note these faith-building promises in Romans chapter 8:

1. The law of the Spirit of life has made me free from law of sin and death (1-2).
2. We have the Spirit of God (9-11).

3. We are saved by hope (24).
4. The Spirit helps our infirmities (26).
5. If God be for us, who can be against us? (31).
6. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (35).
7. In all these things we are more than conquerors (37).
8. No outside force can pull away from God (38,39).

These are “exceeding great and precious promises” which ought to encourage us to live in full assurance and hope of eternal life and be a blessing to others.

Moderation in regard to material possessions is a must for a happy life for several reasons. (1) If we love the things of the world excessively we will be overwhelmed when we lose them (1 Timothy 6:6-12, 1 John 2:15); and we will give them up when we die. Some of the world’s most wealthy men have found that wealth and fame did not bring them happiness (Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, those who took their own life in the 1929 stock market crash). (2) Seek God’s kingdom; He will provide (Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:19). Even possessing great wealth cannot satisfy all our desires; this will not bring happiness. Happiness comes from confidence within and is not measured by possessions, power, and prestige.

Self-control is a safeguard against suicide. The intemperate person is more likely to commit this rash and thoughtless act. We must continually work to add self-control to our lives. Jesus and Paul are great examples (2 Peter 1:6, Galatians 5:23). “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5-7).

Prayer, constant and continual is a precious virtue for the saints supplying calmness, security, self-control, hope, and faith (1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 3:16-19).

A happy disposition and outlook on life is immeasurable. A joyful, happy attitude gives one an optimistic view of life enabling one to find happiness, joy and fulfillment in the small, common,

and insignificant things of life (Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16). Joy is indispensable to healthy living.

Worship of God, which includes study and meditation of His word, and communion with the saints, rejuvenates the spirit and helps us ward off depression and anxiety. Worship helps us keep things in perspective--the relationship we sustain with a God who knows us, loves us, and gave his Son to save us, teaches us that we are persons of value! God knows, He cares, He helps, provides and sustains (Matthew 6:25-34; 1 Peter 3:12; 5:7). The church, the Christian family, provides the basic need of fellowship, others who care (Galatians 6:2, Hebrews 10:25). This point could be developed greatly.

We must have total confidence in the grace and forgiveness of God. God's grace abides and the blood of Christ continually cleanses as we confess our sins and walk in the light (1 John 1:7-2:2). God's love is the center and circumference of his grace. We must believe and accept God's love (1 John 4:19) and the forgiveness that He gives in and through obedience to His Son (John 3:16; Hebrews 5:8,9).

Heaven and the glories to be shared causes us to live lives of hope and anticipation of the good things God has in store for His children (2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:4).

Hell, and the fear of punishment beyond the grave is a deterrent to suicide (Matthew 10:28). Surely, everyone knowing the terribleness of separation from God and the miserable state of the wicked dead will do all in their power to keep from going to hell.

Live one day at a time. When events and people are pressing heavily and you feel like you can't go on, tell yourself to get through just one more day, believing that each day brings you closer to finding an answer to the difficulty and closer to our heavenly home.

The words of Jesus to the disciples when they would see the Fall of Jerusalem upon them, though out of context, are appropriate to those who are despondent, downcast and in despair; "Look up, lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

Conclusion

Suicide solves nothing. It helps no one. We cannot run from our sins and mistakes. We must admit them, and learn to live with them through repentance and prayer, even if others cannot. Jesus was betrayed by two disciples. Judas sold Him. Peter denied Him. Judas took his own life. Peter repented and wept bitterly. Which one demonstrated the greater courage? Which one went on to accomplish great things for the Lord? Which one is still admired today?

No matter how heavy the burdens, how dark the night, nor how intense the pain, let us promptly and resolutely reject the very thought of suicide. It is not an option open to the Christian!

Let us do our best to help relatives, friends, and neighbors in the world to have a high value for life that will eliminate the word “suicide” from their vocabulary and thoughts.

“Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5)

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THE “SOUL” PURPOSE OF LIFE

Matt Thomas

Introduction

As much as depends on me, I could not produce the name of a single person who is able to give thought to the meaning of life, who has not at some time asked the question, “For what purpose am I here?” Like other questions such as, “From where did I come?”, and, “Where will I go?”, answering the question of the purpose of life depends not upon scientific investigation, but upon divinely revealed truth. Man has vainly attempted to answer questions of origins and destinies, but no theory has been produced that even slightly satisfies the question, “Why am I here?” Without the special revelation of God (the Bible), man would be no closer to answering this question today than he was in old times. As long as men believe in false theories about *how* we got here, there will be no satisfactory answer to the question of *why* we are here. For example, the “general theory of evolution” states that we arrived here by random chance, or accident. But a chance or accidental existence *opposes* the idea of having purpose to life. Perhaps this theory of life is reason for the increase in suicides, and the onslaught of shootings? If we are an accident, then we have no reason to live, no purpose in life! On the other hand, when one understands that he was created, he automatically knows, “I have a meaningful purpose in this life!” There is an important relationship we have with the Creator. The quest in life then turns to finding out exactly *what* the Creator has purposed for us. For this reason God has given us the Bible. There are three basic answers given in the Bible to the question, “Why are we here?”

Discussion

The first given purpose for our existence is **to PRAISE God!** The word “praise” is found in the KJV Bible 248x in 216 verses. The abundant use of the word should gain our attention in understanding the importance of praise. To praise God is to express gratitude and respect toward Him. It is usually done verbally through singing and praying. It is closely linked to worship. When one worships, he praises, and when one praises, he

worships. There are many critics of Christianity who scoff at a Creator who would seek praise from His creation, but there are many reasons why man should praise God.

David gives several reasons in the Psalms. In Psalm 139:13-14, David praises God

for His creative power, “For thou hast possessed my reins (NKJV - “formed my inward parts”); thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. 14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.” Anyone who considers the creative power of God should be respectful toward Him. A being who can plan, design, and create the intricate beauties of the earth and the heavens, and then speak it into existence, is worthy of my respect and praise!

We can also praise God for His continuous care of mankind. Psalm 145:14-16 states, “*The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. 15 The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. 16 Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.*” The reason our needs are met so perfectly - God opens His hand! James 1:17 tells us that everything good in this life comes from God. This is why David said in 1 Chronicles 29:12-13,

“Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.”

Men should also praise God for our lofty status among the creation. Man is the pinnacle of God’s creation. David again wrote in Psalm 8:3-5, “*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; 4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? 5 For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.*” Of all the creation, man is the recipient of God’s affection and love. There is no other creature which He “crowned with glory and

honor!” When we realize that mankind is the “glory and honor” of God, we will better appreciate Him, each other, and ourselves. Life will be worthy of living. People will be worthy of loving. Problems will be worthy of solving. God will be worthy of serving.

Perhaps, the most significant reason for praising God can be found in the Hebrew letter, *“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. 13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. 14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. 15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”* We can praise God for solving the gravest problem mankind has ever faced -- the death of our souls by sin. Some may exclaim, “A loving God would not allow His creatures to be tormented in hell.” But God has clearly stated our greatest problem (sin), has given us a cure (Christ), has given us the choice of accepting or rejecting that cure, has explained to us the consequences (heaven or hell), and has urged us to make the right choice (take the cure - Jesus). That is as fair as it gets! That is as loving as it gets! And if one chooses to learn what he must do to be cured, God promises he will find it. He has offered His Son to die in our stead. I don’t feel “forced” to give Him praise for this, He has *earned it!*

The second basic purpose for our existence here on earth is **to PREPARE for eternity with God!** This life, as wonderful and fulfilling as it may sometimes be, is not the fulfillment of God’s purpose for us, but the preparation period! It is not the permanent, but temporary. It is not everything, but only a minuscule part of the grand scheme of things! Consider these passages: Job 14:1, *“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble”*; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”*; 2 Corinthians 5:1, *“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house*

not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"; Philippians 3:20, "*For our conversation (NKJV - "citizenship") is in heaven*"; Hebrews 13:14, "*For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come*"; James 4:14, "*Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*" Isn't it obvious that God does not want us to get too comfortable here? He wants us to know that this life is a brief span in a real long journey, and that the best is yet to come. In this brief span is enough time to make preparation for heaven, but we must not procrastinate! We are exhorted throughout the Bible to be ready for the day of judgment, the day in which it will be decided by Jesus Christ whether we have made the necessary preparations. Jesus forewarned in Matthew 24:44, "*Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*" Paul exhorts in Ephesians 5:15-16, "*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*" And the Hebrew writer encourages in 3:13 to "*exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today;' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*" As you can see, the concept of "sewing wild oats" is far from the Bible's cry. God wants us to see this as early as we can, and cease every moment of every day preparing for His kingdom!

What preparation must be made? Are we flying on a "wing and a prayer?" Hoping that we have been good enough? Relying on someone else to get us in? God has not reduced it to a mere guessing game! The preparations that will be required at the judgment are the same ones that are given to us in God's Book to make today! Jesus stated in John 12:48 that the words which He has spoken will judge us in the last day. You ask, "What might those requirements be?" Do you believe Him, as the Son of God, to save you (John 8:24)? Did you repent and turn to God (Luke 13:3)? Do you confess him before men (Matthew 10:32)? Do you put Him on in baptism (Mark 16:16)? Do you do the best of your ability to transform and grow each day to be more like Him, and to produce fruit to Him (Romans 12)? If you can answer "yes" to these, then you can know you have made adequate preparation! You will have joy and peace of mind as you continue to prepare.

So many people are miserably unhappy and without hope because they are seeking fulfillment in this tiny portion of the timeline -- and it isn't there! They don't know of eternal life! This brings us to the third point . . .

The third basic purpose for our existence is **to PROCLAIM God** and to ensure that everyone receives the opportunity to hear of His salvation and eternal reward. Since it is true that God is worthy of praise, and heaven is worthy of preparation, it is also true that God's message to us is worthy of being taught to others. The level of enthusiasm with which one shares God's message of salvation is dependent upon the two previously mentioned points. If one sees the need to praise God and prepare for Him, they will also see the need to teach others. However, if one puts very little effort into maintaining a healthy relationship with God, they will also put little value on proclaiming Him. Let's put it this way: the word "gospel" means "good news." If one believes that the message of Jesus Christ really is *good* news, he will let it affect his life, and will not be able to keep it a secret. After all, isn't this the way we respond to any good news? On the other hand, if the gospel is not really considered to be *good* news, then there won't be much desire in sharing it. Before we share, we've got to care!

What is your motivation for sharing the gospel of Jesus? My opinion is, there are two main reasons why some are not proclaiming: 1) they are not too enthused about the "good news," and/or 2) they feel like they "better speak, or else!" While it is true the Lord commands us to "make disciples . . . baptize . . . and teach" (Matt. 28:19-20), I feel confident the Lord doesn't want us to be motivated because he "made us do it." When we truly see the *good* in the news, we will proclaim God because we *want* to proclaim Him! We should feel like Jeremiah, "*Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of forbearing, and I could not stay"* (20:9); or David in Psalm 51:12-13, "*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee*"; or Peter and John in Acts 4:19-20, "*. . . Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but*

“speak the things which we have seen and heard”; or the Thessalonian church, *“For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything”* (1 Thess. 1:8). This is the type of conviction with which the church must proclaim the gospel! Proclamation by desire, not compulsion.

Conclusion

Every human life on the planet is valuable because they have purpose. You do not only “matter” to God, but you are *all that matters!* The animals are not immortal, and the earth will be burned up, but human beings have been given eternity. When we convince people of this, we will have accomplished a great deal toward saving souls. People who believe they have purpose in this life are fertile ground for the gospel, but need direction. We need to tell them what God has done for us all, and how He is worthy of **PRAISE**. We need to tell them that this life is only temporal, that there is an eternity that awaits us, and to begin making **PREPARATION**. And we must **PROCLAIM** to them from willing hearts the good news of Jesus Christ. As we make ready for that great day, and for an eternity in heaven, let us all strive fervently to *“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man”* - Ecclesiastes 12:13!

Biographical Information

Matt Thomas lives in Nelsonville, Ohio with his wife Monica and three children: a son, Kolton (7), and two daughters, Taylor (4), and Emelia (1). Matt is originally from Wadsworth, Ohio, and now serves the church of Christ at Blackburn Hill in Athens, Ohio as a minister to the campuses of Ohio University and Hocking College. He began the work in July of 1997 upon graduation from the West Virginia School of Preaching.

UNIVERSALISM

Michael W. Mayo

In 1888 Universalism was the 6th largest denomination in the United States.¹ The results of their teaching are seen in the thinking of our world today. Universalism and Unitarianism are sister movements. The two movements were separated by social factors more than anything else. The Unitarians were more from the upper class and more highly educated than the Universalists. While both groups held many of the same beliefs, there was an obvious difference between their views on salvation. The Unitarians believed they could earn their salvation, but that an individual man by his free will could choose to be lost. The Universalists on the other hand did not believe that anyone could be eternally lost. The two groups were eventually consolidated in 1961.

Universalism is a compromise between Calvinism and Deism. Two words that amply describe the Universalist movement are compromise and change. Many of the Universalists came out of Calvinism rejecting the doctrines of total depravity and limited atonement. The Universalists were heavily influenced by Deism. Like the Deists, the Universalists had an optimistic view of the nature of man and of human reasoning. However, the Universalists did not go as far as the Deists did in rejecting the scripture. As their movement began they sought to justify their beliefs through human reasoning and the scripture. As time went by, scripture and its authority was placed further and further in the background until it was put on a par with the religious writings of all the world's religions... nothing more and nothing less.

The basic tenant of Universalism is that God is all loving and all powerful; therefore, no matter how bad man becomes, God would not punish him for all eternity. The Universalists have never agreed on the specifics of this. Many are the variations on this teaching and justifications for this belief.

Universalist ideas were held by many in the colonies of America. Universalism began to spread and gain influence because of a book entitled *The Everlasting Gospel* which was published in 1753. Universalism did not become a movement in

America until the arrival of John Murray in 1770. Murray was influenced in his belief in Universalism by the teaching of James Rely. Rely taught that there was such a close union between Christ and man that Christ was equally guilty of the transgressions of disobedience committed by Adam. Then he argued that when Christ died it was for His own sins and for those of all mankind through all of time and all of eternity. Thus, all men are saved now and forever. In their teaching they use passages like Romans 5:18. Murray took up Rely's cry. Another Universalist, Elhanan Winchester, took a quite different approach to Universalism. Winchester taught that after the end of the world there would be a period of 50,000 years in which sinful man would undergo all manner of suffering to purge them of their uncleanness. At the end of the 50,000 years those who had been purged would be united with Christ and their brothers who escaped the flames because of their purity. Tension between these two extremes of Universalism is seen throughout the history of the movement. Murray's group maintained that since Christ's act is sufficient for all time that there is not any need of further punishment. Therefore, there was no need to hold the threat of punishment to keep people living right, they would do so because of their gratitude for the debt being paid. Winchester's group argued that even though God is love, man needed correction for sins indulged in during this life. They also said the expectation of such punishment would prevent people from living the wrong kind of life now.

The next major leader to arise in Universalism, Hosea Ballou added new twists to the ever changing doctrine of the Universalist. Ballou was a determinist, that is, he believed that God had determined that all men were going to be saved and was intent in carrying out His plan. Ballou also taught that sin was misery and that God wanted all His people to return to happiness. He also taught that sin was misery, it could not be pleasurable. He finally came to the conclusion that since sin is misery, the punishment for man's sin is in the here and now. Therefore, he taught that there was no punishment in the afterlife. There were several problems with Ballou's teaching that were obvious to many. First, sin does bring pleasure... even if that pleasure is temporary and deceitful.

Second, there was no tangible evidence that all sinners were getting punishment for the sins they were committing. Even with these short comings in his doctrine, Ballou held much influence among the Universalists throughout his life.

The Universalists tried several times to write a creed that would be a profession of the essentials of their doctrine. None of these professions held much weight due to the fact that there were such great divisions in their ranks. Each of these attempts reflected the thinking in the various time periods in which they were written. These professions brought a minimum of uniformity into their body. The Winchester Profession even stated that it could be adapted to meet the local needs. The Universalists were constantly changing to match the views of society. They were tossed to and fro by every wind of change.

Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859 had its effect on Universalism. Universalists came to accept evolution over creation. In fact, in 1899, the Universalist General Convention in Boston adopted a new creed to replace the Winchester Profession of 1803. The Winchester Profession had stated that the Holy Spirit would "restore" mankind to "holiness and happiness." The Universalist no longer agreed with this because the implication that man had fallen from a previous state of grace and could be "restored" was out of line with the conviction born of Darwinism that man was evolving to higher and higher forms.²

Change hit the ranks of the Universalists once again in 1933 with the publishing of *The Humanist Manifesto*. Although only one Universalist signed *The Humanist Manifesto*, the Universalists saw a need once again to change their theology. They no longer expected divine intervention in man's life. They believed that although there may be a divine power somewhere in the universe, if man's problems are to be solved he must solve them himself. They came to the understanding that man, within himself, has a basic religious need which has to be met and which has been expressed in various formulations in different cultures. Robert Cummings said, "Universalism cannot be limited to Protestantism or to Christianity, not without denying its very name. Ours is a world fellowship, not just a Christian sect. For so long as Universalism is Universalism and not partialism, the fellowship

bearing its name must succeed in making it unmistakably clear that all are welcome: theist and humanist, unitarian and trinitarian, colored or color-less. A circumscribed Universalism is unthinkable.”³ Therefore, Holy Scripture was put on a par with all other “religious writings” like those of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. This had to be the natural outcome of their belief. Since everyone is going to be happy throughout eternity without eternal punishment, and since not everyone is a Christian, all religions must be accepted equally.

L. B. Fisher said, “Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all, we move.”⁴ How sad and how true are those words. Universalism is characterized by compromise and change.

The Universalists claimed to rely on reasoning and the scriptures. However, they trusted more in their human reasoning than they did in God’s revealed word. One cannot help but think of 1 Corinthians 1:18-21...

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

And as one looks at the history of Universalism he cannot help but think of Ephesians 4:13-14...13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive

This passage tells us that “the faith” that is the system of doctrine that was delivered by Christ and revealed by the Spirit and

recorded by the apostles and prophets in the first century, is that which can keep us from being tossed about by every wind of doctrine. The reason is because it is objective truth whereby we can measure all other teaching.

We need to measure the doctrine of the Universalist by the objective truth of scripture to see if it is true or not. The doctrine of the Universalist has had a profound impact on our world. A Northwestern University School of Education survey of 500 ministers from various denominational groups yielded this result: When asked the question, “Is there a hell?” only 31% said yes.⁵ While working in Australia, we polled several thousand homes in the neighborhood where we worked and when we ask that same question, 50.2% said that they did not believe there was a hell. I wanted to ask the question that Jesus asked... “Have you not read?” Let us turn to the pages of God’s holy word and let us reason together. Are all people everywhere going to be saved?

The real problem with the Universalists is that they disregard the two things that originally they claimed to hold to: reason and the scripture. They have looked only at the love of God without reference to His justice. Possibly they never read Romans 11:22... *Behold therefore the **goodness and severity of God**: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, **if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.*** Note the following scriptures. I added all emphasis in the following verses.

Matthew 18:8-9

*8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into **everlasting fire**. 9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into **hell fire**.*

Mark 9:43-48

43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two

*hands to go into **hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:** 44 Where their worm dieth not, **and the fire is not quenched.** 45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into **hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:** 46 Where their worm dieth not, **and the fire is not quenched.** 47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into **hell fire:** 48 **Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.***

Revelation 14:10-11

*10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he **shall be tormented with fire and brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: 11 And the smoke of **their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever:** and they have **no rest day nor night**, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*

Hebrews 10:27-31

*27 But a certain fearful looking for of **judgment and fiery indignation**, which shall devour the adversaries. 28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 29 Of **how much sorer punishment**, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him that hath said, **Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense**, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his*

people. 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-9

*5 Which is a manifest token of **the righteous judgment of God**, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: 6 Seeing it is a **righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation** to them that trouble you; 7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 **In flaming fire taking vengeance** on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be **punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord**, and from the glory of his power*

Matthew 25:46

*46 And these shall go away into **everlasting punishment**: but the righteous into **life eternal**.*

The Universalists try to use Romans 5:18 to say that through one man sin entered into the world, therefore all are guilty of Adam's sin. Then they argue that since the gift came through one man, everyone of all time is saved. To answer the first part of their argument, while all men sin they are accountable for the sins which they commit... not the sin which Adam committed (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Ezekiel 18:1-32; Matthew 16:26-27; Colossians 3:24-25; Revelation 20:10-15). To answer the second part of their argument, yes, Jesus did come and bring the gift of God and made available to all mankind salvation. Yes, God wants all men to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9-14). Look at the word 'but' at the beginning of verse 10. Also note what is said in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9, while salvation is open to all mankind, those who know not God and **OBEY** not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus is describing the judgment scene. In verse 46 a very clear statement is made about the destination of both the righteous and the wicked. The wicked are said to go into everlasting punishment and the righteous are said to go into life eternal. The word “punishment” is translated from the Greek word **kolasis**. Both Thayer and Arndt & Gingrich say that this word is properly translated as punishment. Therefore, after the judgment there will be punishment for the wicked. How long will that punishment last? The word translated “everlasting” comes from the Greek word **aioonios**. According to the Greek scholars, when the word **aioonios** is used to describe future time, it denotes time without end (Thayer, p.20; Arndt and Gingrich, p.28; and H. Sasse in Kittel, Vol. I, p. 209). It is this same Greek word that describes God in Revelation 4:9, where it says of God “who liveth for ever and ever”. The most important item to note about this word in our current discussion is that it is used twice in Matthew 25:46... once to describe how long the wicked will be punished and once to describe how long the righteous will have life. Both are everlasting, never ending, eternal.

The Bible clearly teaches that man has sinned and deserves punishment (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But God in His infinite love provided man a way back. Christ came and made the sacrifice that made it possible for man to be with God throughout eternity. He only made one way (John 14:6). Man has only two choices, to obey and live or to disobey and be punished (Matthew 7:13-14). We each will either make our lives wicked or righteous (Matthew 12:33). Based on that choice, we will either have eternal punishment away from God or eternal life in His presence (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelations 21:3-7). May we ever choose obedience and life.

Endnotes

¹Ernest Cassara, *Universalism In America: A Document History*, (Boston: Boston Press, 1971) p. 39

²*Ibid.*, p. 38

³Statement of Robert Cummins to the General Assembly of the Universalist Church of America, New York, October 1943, quoted in his *Excluded. The Story of the Council of Churches and the Universalists* (Boston, 1966) v.

⁴Ernest Cassara, p. 44

⁵Terry Hightower, *Whatever Happened To Heaven and Hell*. (Pensacola, FL: Austin McGary and Company, 1993) p. 56

Biographical Sketch

Michael Mayo has been preaching full time since 1985. He worked five and a half years on the mission field in Australia. On his return to the States, he worked with the Riverside Church of Christ in Corpus Christi, Texas. He has spoken on a number of lectureships both here and in Australia. He has been working with the Washington St. Church of Christ in St. Albans, WV since November 1997. He has a weekly radio program.

THE CHURCH, ALIVE AND THRIVING

Frank Higginbotham

The second chapter of the book of Acts gives us the history of the beginning of the church. Those who obeyed the gospel of Christ, from this day forward were added by the Lord to the church. "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47). That same church is still alive and active in our world today. However, there are times that doubt and concern for the church bothers us. Do you ever wonder what the church will be like twenty years from now? Many changes have taken place in the past twenty years. Is there a possibility that these changes will cause the church of the Lord to cease to exist? It would be good to remember that the church has always faced problems but has survived and is thriving today. As you read through the book of Acts you see the early Christians facing opposition in many forms. Acts 4 tells of Peter and John being called before the Council and being told not to preach in the name of the Lord. "And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20). These threats did not stop the church from spreading the gospel. Persecution simply scattered the loyal Christians into new areas that presented new opportunities to teach God's Word. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." (Acts 8:4). The church of the first century faced opposition but thrived in spite of it. The "Dark Ages" recorded very little about the faithful servants of God. During this time the saints were forced to worship God in caves and other secret places but the church continued. Most of us have seen or heard of a number of "issues" that have threatened the existence of the church. The "College Question" divided brethren all over this country. In many instances, fellowship was broken but the church has continued to grow. In more recent years we have been troubled with those who want to make laws for God. They demand that all others accept

their man-made laws. They legislate about who the church can help from the treasury, what can be done in the meeting house and how the church is to carry out its obligation to the needy. While this created many problems for the local church, this issue was faced and the church moved on. Presently, we are faced with another extreme. Instead of binding where God has not bound, we see many brethren loosing where God has not loosed. We commonly call this “liberalism”. This represents a very real danger in our effort to maintain the church as God made it. We must do all things by the authority of Christ. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” (Col 3:17). Will these problems and others like them destroy the church?

It should be remembered that God did plan for His church to survive. In Ephesians 3 Paul pictures the church as the demonstration of God’s wisdom. He made known His wisdom to “principalities and powers in heavenly places” by the church. “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:” (Eph 3:10-11). Was God so inept that He could not build a church that would survive? It is a reflection on the wisdom of God to think that His church could be defeated by the works of men. The prophets of the Old Testament saw a kingdom or church that would last. Isaiah pictures that strength in his prophecy concerning the beginning and spread of the church. “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isa 2:2,3). When Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar he said, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for

ever.” (Dan 2:44). In view of this statement there can be no question about the durability of the church. It should also be remembered that the Lord is the builder of the house and it is not a vain effort. “.... Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” (Psa 127:1). The Lord did not plan for His church to be destroyed.

To properly understand the church and the nature of its problems we need to understand that there are two sides to this body. There is the divine side of the church and there is the human side. The divine side is God’s part and is perfect. God never does anything less than this. To add to or change something that is perfect is to corrupt it. The church is set up according to the ‘perfect law of liberty.’ (Jas. 1:25). We are forbidden to change it. “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Rev 22:18-19). When God decided on the conditions for salvation, what He wanted in worship and how the church is to be organized, He did it perfectly. No change in these things is needed nor is it permitted. There is also a human side to the church. Men and women who obey the gospel are added to the church. They are not perfect and do not become perfect when they are baptized into Christ. Paul declares in Romans 3:23 that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Anyone who claims that he has not sinned and that he has no sin is making God a liar. (1 Jno. 1:7-10). Any criticism of the church must be directed to the human side. Any change that can be made to the church would have to be in the correction of errors in our lives. We should daily look into the ‘mirror of the soul’ so that the proper corrections can be made. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect

law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” (James 1:21-25). The church at Ephesus was warned to repent (make change) or the Lord would come and remove their candlestick. “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” (Rev 2:5). Any change made cannot be with the things God has done in regard to the church. It must be in the corrections of our shortcomings.

It has always been the case that God standing with a man provides the element of success. In the great Roman letter Paul speaks with great confidence when he asserts that no one could prevail against God. “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). He then affirms the victory that the Christian has by standing with God. “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” (Rom 8:37). To conquer is to be victorious but we are abundant victors if we stand with God. Think of the great vindication that Noah had when the flood arrived and he and his family were delivered on the other side of the flood without harm. If right were determined by a head count, Noah would have been the loser. However, God and one man always make a majority. Imagine the thought of those who had scoffed at Noah when the rains came and the ark began to rise. There is no way that Noah could have lost because he stood with God.

David stands as another great example of a man who trusted in God and was victorious over his enemy. 1 Samuel 17 tells of a young man of great faith. He was facing obstacles that seemed impossible. Faced by a giant, this young man could recall that God had delivered him from a lion and from a bear. He knew that God would deliver him from this Philistine. David was amazed that his brethren were afraid of the enemy who was so bold to challenge God and His people. With a sling, five little stones and great faith in God, he went forth to do battle. Remember that if God is for him, no one could be against him. David killed Goliath and delivered his people. The church today should take great courage from the example of David .

The prophet Elijah also learned what it means to stand with God. King Ahab accused him of being a troubler of Israel. It is clear that Ahab was the source of Israel's problems. 1 Kings 18 gives the account of this great encounter. Elijah told Ahab to gather the people together in Mount Carmel. Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of the grove appeared before Elijah. The God who answered by fire would be God. "And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." (1 Ki 18:24). The false prophets went first. They received no answer from Baal. They even rent their own bodies to show the sincerity of their plea but no answer was received. The prophet of God chided them by telling them to yell louder. Perhaps their God was asleep or had taken a walk. Then the time came for the prophet of God to call upon the real God. Water was placed

on the altar and the sacrifice. Elijah called upon God to answer by fire. Fire consumed the altar, the sacrifice and even the water that was in the ditch about it. It would seem clear to all that if God was with Elijah, no one could prevail against him. Reading this great account should build our faith. If God stands with his servant and brings him victory, would anyone assume that He would abandon His church?

Paul and Silas were beaten and placed in jail. This would be a time of great discouragement for them and for the church. What reaction did Paul and Silas have. Read about them in Acts 16 as they sing songs of praise to God at midnight. Do they think that the church will be destroyed by the threats of these enemies of the truth? With a great miracle God demonstrated that He had not abandoned His servants. We do not need a miracle to believe that God will deliver His servants today because of the abundant evidence recorded in God's book. Paul and Silas were given an opportunity to teach an honest soul about the Lord. They taught the jailer and then baptized him into Christ. Instead of stopping Paul and Silas in their work for the Lord, the enemies just gave them further opportunity to spread the gospel. They were standing with God.

What about God's church today? Can we have confidence that God will aid and deliver us from our enemy? The answer is yes. Read carefully the eighth chapter of the book of Romans. Like Paul, we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. (Phil.4:13). There is no enemy that is strong enough to stand against man and God. Satan and all his forces will not be able to destroy the church nor keep it from being the force for good that God has planned. The church will continue and will be finally victorious when the Lord delivers up His kingdom to His Father. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Cor 15:26).

Is the church thriving? It is clear that we are not doing everything that can be done but if we were, there would be no room for improvement. We must not become discouraged by some of our shortcomings. Rather, we need to be challenged to do more. The church is today carrying out its mission in our world. Let us take a look at what we are doing. The militant work of the church is to take the gospel to the lost. While some have lost sight of our main objective there are many souls that are lost that are being led to the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. The church is described as the pillar and ground of the truth. "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim 3:15). Paul encourages us to hold forth the word of life. (Phil.2:16). Angels were not given this great work. Denominationalism can not be trusted to take over this work. They pervert the gospel. Only the church is commissioned to take the gospel. Souls are obeying the Lord daily because of the church doing its work.

Is the church maintaining its identity? It is obvious that the Lord did not build a denomination. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose

on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Mat 16:18-19). The Lord has one body and that is the church. “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:” (Eph 2:16). That church stands distinct amid the many human denominations that exist today. The marks that identify it do not change with time. It is the same today as it was in the first century. While some congregations have been overwhelmed with the pressure to conform, many others maintain the same characteristics that were true of the first century church. Many are not afraid to be different. The teachings, the worship and the practice of the church are not up to a vote. God has settled these matters. Faithful brethren will not drop the Lord’s requirements for membership into the church. The Lord said that we must believe and be baptized for the remission of sins. (Mk.16:16). Some are afraid to offend those who refuse to accept the necessity of baptism but the faithful still defend this teaching of the gospel. You can still tell the worship of the New Testament church by its duplicating the kind of worship the early church practiced. Instrumental music is still rejected as an addition to the public worship. It is not handled as a matter of indifference. The church you read about in the Bible did not use the mechanical instrument of music. While it is true that some brethren have bowed the knee of submission to the digressive church, it is also true that there are many faithful who demand Bible authority for any practice of the church. Yes, we are thriving by maintaining our identity.

The church is thriving as it stands strong for the standards of morality that are maintained by the Bible. We have seen a rapid decline in morals in our country. The church today is taking the lead in our communities in showing that morals are essential for our survival. It is not uncommon to hear someone maintain that the Bible is just a love book and not a book of do’s and do nots. Read carefully the Galatian letter chapter five. Note especially verses nineteen through twenty one. Does it sound like we are being told what to do and what not to do. God who is our maker, knows what is good for us and what is not. The standard of the atheist that tells us to just do the things we want to do is going a long way toward destroying the lives of many individuals and also the nation. I would hate to live in any community that abandons

the moral standards of the Bible. Someone must stand up for the innocent, unborn baby. The church maintains that life is sacred. And reminds people of the consequence of shedding innocent blood.”These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” (Prov 6:19). We must live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. (Titus 2:11,12).

The church is thriving as it pleads for all men to stand in the old paths. “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.” (Jer 6:16-17). Jeremiah was doing God’s bidding when he stood up and pleaded with men to return to the way of God. The people did not want to hear this plea but this did not stop the great prophet. The same may be true today. We must be faithful in maintaining the plea to return to the old paths even though many have already made up their minds to reject God’s way. That plea is being heard. Thus the responsibility to accept it is on the shoulder of the hearer. “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Isa 55:11).

Yes, the church is alive and thriving. It will never be destroyed. We do not need to worry if the church will be able to overcome the work of the devil. God’s people will overcome.

Biographical Information

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, WV on February 21, 1933. He is the son of Mr. & Mrs. A. G. (Bus) Higginbotham. He attended public schools and was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville. He was graduated from Florida Christian College in Tampa Florida with an Associate of Arts Degree. He began located work with the Columbia Street Church of Christ in Fairmont, WV (‘53-’56) He

next worked in Wellsburg, WV ('56-'58) and West Street in Weirton, WV ('58-'64). He is currently in his 35th year with the Virginia Avenue Church of Christ in Chester, WV. Radio preaching includes WETZ in New Martinsville, WMMN in Fairmont, WEIR in Weirton and WOHI in East Liverpool, OH . He worked with a television program on WSTV-TV in Steubenville, OH. He has been speaker on the Ohio Valley College Lectures, the Ohio Valley Lectures, the Greater Kanawha Valley Lectures and the West Virginia School of Preaching Lectures. He conducts 8-10 meetings a year. He is married to the former Rose King and they have two children. Janie is married to Brent Gallagher, the preacher of the Church of Christ at Oakwood Road, Fairmont. Steve is the preacher of the South Green Street Church of Christ in Glasgow, KY.

HELL, THE ABODE OF THE LOST

Steve A. Miller

Introduction

One positive step we can take toward motivation for righteousness, and abstaining from sin is to consider what the Bible teaches about eternal punishment. The greatest and deepest tragedy of hell is banishment from the presence of God, and the eternal relationship with the Son. The suffering in hell will be intensified by the kind of people who will be there.

Many do not believe that a loving God could send anyone to an eternal hell. First we must consider the character of God. "...there is none good, but one, that is, God:" (Matthew 19:17). "God is love" (1 John 4:8). "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). "...a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me" (Isaiah 45:21). "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm 145:17). We conclude that God is good, loving, just, holy and merciful. There are other characteristics of God, consider His wrath (Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8-9; 5:9). Because of sin, man deserves punishment. God does not force one into eternal punishment, he has given us the opportunity to decide where we will spend eternity. It is a matter of choice with each of us. "Choose ye this day" (Joshua 24:15) has always been God's call to man. God "would have all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4).

Inquiries About Hell

What word describes the final and eternal abode of the lost?

This word occurs 12 times in the New Testament and is used by 4 authors - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and James. Geenna occurs seven times in Matthew (5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33), three times in Mark (9:43, 45, 47), once in Luke (12:5), and once in James (3:6).

Six of the twelve references to geenna mention fire as one of its characteristics. Eleven of the twelve references are in the Gospels and are the recorded

words of the Lord Jesus Christ. But where did the word geenna come from?

Southeast of Jerusalem there was a valley known as the “valley of the son of Hinnom” (Josh. 15:8). It was also referred to as “Gehenna” from the Hebrew word, ge-hinnom, which means “valley of Hinnom.” During Old Testament times children were offered to Molech in this valley (2 Chron. 33:1-6; Jer. 7:31). (Harold J. Berry. *Gems From The Original*. P. 30).

Josiah, in his overthrow of idolatry, “defiled” the place called Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10), and the area became known as a place to be abhorred. It was renamed by Jeremiah as “the valley of Slaughter” in a prophecy that associated it with punishment to be brought upon Jerusalem (Jer. 7:31; 19:6), and as a result it became a burying place (Jer. 19:11; 31:40) (Gary Workman, *Whatever Happened To Heaven And Hell?* P. 496).

Later, after such heathen practices were stopped, the Jews used the valley to dispose of their rubbish as well as the bodies of dead animals and unburied criminals. To consume all of this, a fire burned continuously, known as the “Gehenna of fire.” To be in the “Gehenna of fire” would be the most excruciating torment the human mind could imagine; thus, Christ used this well-known place, with its gnawing worms and burning fires, to teach truths about the unknown place – the final abode of those who reject Him as Saviour (*Gems From The Original*. pp. 29-30).

Will those in hell have memory and conscience?

Memory and conscience will produce shame (Daniel 12:2). Consider the rich man in Luke 16.

Will hell be for eternity?

The punishment of those in Gehenna is unending. The fire is “unquenchable” (that which cannot be extinguished) (Matthew 3:12). The worm dies not – their punishment after death will never cease (Mark 9:48). The punishment is eternal (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). “Eternal damnation” (Mark 3:29). “Everlasting chains” and “eternal fire” (Jude 6-7). The fire of hell will never die.

Inhabitants Of Hell

Our assigned lesson “Hell, The Abode of the Lost” Who are the lost? Does the Bible reveal who will be lost? Some attempt to sidestep the question as seen in the following: “We must not permit ourselves to be sidetracked by the question of who will be consigned to hell. That judgment does not belong to us” (Gregory Alan Tidwell, *Gospel Advocate*, September, 1997, p. 13). We can, without playing God, identify those who will be cast into hell. 1. Devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). 2. Those who do not know God, and...those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). 3. Revelation 21:8. 4. 2 Peter 2:9 5. Those who fall away from the truth (1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 3:12; Hebrews 6:4-6). 6. Those who sin willfully (Hebrews 10:26-27). 7. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. 8. Galatians 5:19-21. 9. The lawless.

Interior Of Hell

What will eternal hell be like? The Bible gives many descriptions of the abode of the lost. 1. Lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). 2. A bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1). 3. A horrible tempest (Psalm 11:6). 4. A devouring fire (Isaiah 33:14). 5. A place of sorrows (Psalm 18:5). 6. Where they wail (Matthew 13:42). 7. A place of weeping (Matthew 8:12). 8. A furnace of fire (Matthew 13:41-42). 9. A place of torments (Luke 16:28). 10. Everlasting burnings (Isaiah 33:14). 11. A place of filthiness (Revelation 22:11). 12. Where they curse God (Revelation 16:11). 13. Where they have no rest (Revelation 14:11). 14. A place of outer darkness (Matthew 8:12). 15. A place where people

pray (Luke 16:27). 16. A place where they can never repent (Matthew 12:32). 17. A place where they scream for mercy (Luke 16:24). 18. A place of everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46). 19. A place where they gnaw their tongues (Revelation 16:10). 19. A place of blackness and darkness forever (Jude 13). 20. A place where they scream for one drop of water (Luke 16:24). 21. A place where they will be tormented with brimstone (Revelation 14:10). 22. A place where there are dogs, sorcerers and whoremongers (Revelation 22:15). 23. A place where they do not want their loved ones to come (Luke 16:28). 24. They are away from the face of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9). 25. It is the second death (Revelation 20:14).

Conclusion

In the forward to John Blanchard's book, "*Whatever Happened To Hell?*," J.I. Packer wrote: What should we do with this teaching? May we water it down because we find it uncomplimentary, and embarrassing, and contrary to the spirit of our age? Surely not: it is as divine, and as authoritative, as anything else in the New Testament, and the fact that it jars with today's humanistic unbelief makes the declaring and defending of it all the more important" (pp. 9-10).

Biographical Information

Steve is a native of Garrettsville, Ohio. Presently preaching for the Paintsville Church of Christ, Paintsville, Kentucky. He and his wife Deanna, have three children: Brittany, Chelsea, and Isaiah.

THE SALVATION THE PROPHETS SAW

Rod Rutherford

God's plan to redeem man from his sins was not a haphazard, last minute, "plan B" endeavor! The infinite, all wise, merciful heavenly Father had His creature's spiritual welfare in mind from the very foundation of the world. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:3,4). The Apostle John called the Christ "the Lamb slain **from the foundation of the world**" (Rev. 13:8). Paul also wrote to the Ephesians: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the **eternal purpose** which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10,11).

God's scheme of redemption was in His mind long ago, was gradually revealed to man in the Old Testament, and found its culmination in the life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ in the New Testament. In the Garden of Eden, the first promise of the coming of the Savior was given when God said to Satan: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15 - ASV). The remainder of the Old Testament chronicles the constant conflict as Satan through his servants on earth seeks to thwart God's plan to bring the Seed of the woman, the Christ, into the world through the chosen nation of Israel.

Prophecies of the Christ

The Old Testament prophets were God's spokesmen to the nation of Israel, which He had especially prepared in order to bring His Son into the world to be man's Redeemer. The prophets reproved and rebuked God's people in a vain attempt to keep them from iniquity and apostasy. They also had the privilege of foretelling the future as it related to man's salvation. Peter wrote of these prophets:" Of which salvation the prophets have inquired

and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did testify, when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

One of the strongest evidences for the inspiration of the Scriptures is fulfilled prophecy! Corollary to this, the primary and preeminent proof that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16) is fulfilled prophecy. There are more than three hundred specific predictions of the Christ in the Old Testament, which Jesus in the New Testament, fulfilled to the letter. A mere man might guess the future, and based on his knowledge of human nature and the past history of mankind, perhaps could predict with a limited degree of accuracy general trends and conditions.

But Jesus fulfilled exact prophecies made hundreds of years before His birth. Many of these prophecies foretold intimate details of His life which could not have been arranged by by an ordinary mortal in any way. A few of the better known of these prophecies are: (1) His birth of a virgin - Isa. 7:14, Matt, 1:23; (2) The place of his birth - Mic. 5:2, Matt. 2:1-6; (3) His suffering for the sins of others by being scourged and crucified - Psa. 2, Isa. 53, Jno. 19; (4) His resurrection from the dead - Psa. 16:8-10, Acts 2:24-32; (5) His descent from David to sit and rule upon David’s throne - 2 Sam. 7:12,13, Luke 1:32,33; (6) He would be both a priest and a king at the same time - Zech. 6:12,13, 1 Tim. 6:14,15, Heb. 4:14-16.

Prophecies of the Church

Not only did “holy men of God speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” in reference to the coming of the Christ (2 Pet. 1:21), but they also foretold the coming of His kingdom (church). Joel, known as “the prophet of Pentecost,” some eight hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem, foretold the events of

the first Pentecost day following the resurrection and the ascension of our Lord back to His heavenly Father. Please note the specific points predicted by the prophet: (1) The events foretold would take place “afterward” or, “in the last days;” (2) God’s Spirit would be poured out upon this occasion which was predicted; (3) Whoever called upon the name of the Lord would be delivered (saved); (4) These events would take place in Jerusalem; (5) Deliverance (salvation) would be available in Jerusalem (Joel 2:28-32).

Approximately seven centuries before Christ, Isaiah, known as “the Messianic Prophet” and his contemporary, Micah, foretold the building of God’s house (church, kingdom) in identical language. Please note the elements of that prophecy: (1) It would take place “in the last days;” (2) The house of the lord would be built; (3) All nations would come into it; (4) The word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-3).

About six hundred years before the Son of God made his entrance into the world, Daniel, prophet in the king’s court in Babylon, was given the power and privilege by God to recall and interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Dan. 2:1-45). In his sleep, Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of a great image which had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs and feet of iron and clay. Daniel gave the meaning of the image beginning with the head of gold. It represented Nebuchadnezzar, the head of the Babylonian Empire. Each succeeding part of the image in descending order represented a succession of empires. The legs and feet of iron and clay historically represent Rome, the mightiest Empire to rule the world up to that time. Then Daniel related to Nebuchadnezzar: “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44).

By looking at the history of the world from the time of Babylon, we see a series of four great empires following one another in rapid succession. They are Babylon, Medo-Persia, the Greek or Macedonian Empire established by Alexander the Great, and the Roman Empire. According to Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, God would set up His eternal kingdom

in the days of Rome. It was during the time that the Caesars ruled Rome that our Lord was born (Luke 2:1 ff), carried out His earthly ministry and was crucified by decree of Governor Pilate, a representative of Rome (Luke 3:1ff; 21:1ff). It was also while Rome ruled that “the kingdom which shall never be destroyed,” the church of Christ, was established in Jerusalem on Pentecost day (Acts 2).

The Hub of the Bible

Acts, chapter two, which records the event of Pentecost, has been called “the hub of the Bible.” Just as the spokes lead from the rim of the wheel and rest in the hub, so all the prophecies of the coming of the Christ and His church find their fulfillment in Acts, chapter two, on the first Pentecost after the Lord’s ascension.

Please note how all the prophecies come together so beautifully: (1) Pentecost occurred “in the last days as Joel foretold; (2) Rome ruled the world as Daniel foretold; (3) The events took place in Jerusalem as prophesied by Joel, Isaiah, and Micah; (4) The Holy Spirit came as Joel predicted; (5) Whosoever called upon the name of the Lord was saved as Joel had promised; (6) The word of the Lord went forth from Jerusalem as both Isaiah and Micah had said.

The Great Commission

Shortly before He returned to His heavenly Father, the crucified, resurrected Redeemer gave His apostles their marching orders. These orders are recorded by three of the four Gospel writers. Matthew’s account reads as follows: “And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:18-20).

Mark’s account of the Commission is essentially the same as Matthew’s: “And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is

baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15,16).

Luke records some different details from the other two evangelists: “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46, 47).

Now if we draw the essential principles from the three accounts of the Great Commission, we find the following: (1) Christ has all power (authority), both in heaven and on earth; (2) The Gospel of salvation must be preached to the whole world, every nation, and every creature (individual); (3) Those who respond to the preaching of the Gospel must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God Who died for their sins and rose again, repent of all their past sins, and be buried in baptized for the remission of sins in order to be saved; (4) Those who reject the Gospel will be lost!

What About You?

Paul wrote: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:2,3). God’s great love for us, His sinful, fallen creatures, is seen in His long planned and patiently revealed scheme of redemption. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jno. 3:16). How ungrateful we are if we reject or neglect God’s free and full pardon through His Son! Why not believe in Him this very day, repent of your sins, and be buried with Him in baptism ,so that you can have the promise of eternal life in heaven?