

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 12, Number 6

July 2003

THE
NEW FACES OF
CHRISTIANITY



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Christianity has traditionally been strongest in the West, but that is quickly changing. The heart of Christianity is moving south and east into Africa and Asia, where large numbers of converts are re-energizing the religion—and coming into conflict with declining Western churches.

Reuters

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This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

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The Offerings of Leviticus

Part Five: The Peace Offering Sacrifice, and Love

This series on the offerings has attempted to emphasize that Jesus Christ is the object of the sacrificial laws—He is the One described in them. He is the ideal of the whole burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering, as well as the sin and trespass offerings. They offer us a concentrated view into His character, magnified in many other places in the Bible.

Once we begin to understand that the offerings are in many cases also describing the way God intends mankind to live, it opens possibilities to understand Christian living principles of great variety and depth. Leviticus 1-5 is jam-packed with vital information, especially concerning the level of dedication to holiness to which God wants His children to rise.

Therefore, we must not allow ourselves to avoid or ignore their instruction. The sacrificial laws are archaic only in the sense of when God originally gave them and in that they no longer need to be physically performed. Because they describe Jesus Christ, our model and example—because He is their object—they are pertinent to our time. We must be mindful that, spiritually, they are just as applicable to us today as they were for Christ in His day because we are to walk in His steps (1 Peter 2:21).

Romans 15:1-2, 5 bears directly upon this important principle:

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. . . . Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.

The crux of this message is that we are to be likeminded. The emphasis is on not pleasing ourselves. This is especially evident in the burnt and meal offerings, in which Christ is pictured giving Himself in service wholly to God and man. What He did was done for others. Philippians 2:4 confirms our responsibility, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

This theme continues further in Romans 15:3-4, “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Here, we are dealing with the Old Covenant and the letter of the law—or are we?

No, we most assuredly are not! Verse 4 says these things are written for those under the New Covenant. The Old Testament was recorded for our learning, for the spiritual edification of New Covenant Christians. Recall how Hebrews 10:1 says the law has a shadow of good things to come. Shadows lead to a reality; there cannot be a shadow without a reality. The reality is the Lord Jesus Christ. He fulfilled the spiritual intent of these laws, and we must strive to do the same.

We must make every effort to see a pattern of attitude, obedience, and standards in these “archaic” laws that illustrate so much more of what God wants us to strive to attain than we may have ever understood before. We may never attain to those heights, but God wants us to strive nonetheless to do our best.

A Devoted Spiritual Dynasty

Perhaps I Peter 2:5 will help us understand why this striving is necessary: “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” It helps to consider the word “house” meaning something a bit different from the common definition. Most commonly, we think of a building people live in. Here, “house” can just as easily mean “dynasty,” as in the “house of David.”

God is building us up into a dynasty, a spiritual house, a spiritual Family, one that we know will last forever. Verse 5 adds that God is forming us into a holy priesthood, the purpose of which is to offer up acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ. Verse 9 confirms that we are already a royal priesthood. This is especially important in light of the sacrifices, because those sacrifices were the activity of the priesthood under the Old Covenant.

Those priests went through the entire ritual physically. God does not require us to follow those procedures, yet He does require us to understand the spiritual concepts and apply them to the best of our ability. Why? Because we are being built up into a spiritual Family whose function is to glorify God by offering spiritual sacrifices that He will accept.

We must not allow ourselves the liberty of detaching ourselves from this by saying, “Well, that is really interesting information and nice to have, but of what value is it?” It is of great value, as the prophet Malachi clearly shows. In Malachi 1:6, God chastises the priesthood for the irresponsible manner in which they were carrying out their charge from God: “‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?’ says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name.” Those are strong words for failing to offer sacrifices pleasing to God.

The priesthood may not have come to a deliberately reasoned conclusion that the worship of God was something unimportant, but their inner disrespect surfaced in their slipshod and lackadaisical approach. God says He looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7), and His evaluation of their performance is that they considered their responsibility of offering sacrifices to Him to be shameful. Their real problem lay in their heart. Distracted by concerns they considered more important, their goal of being a whole burnt offering dedicated to God became a secondary occupation for their attention and energy.

The focus of their attention may easily have been given to functions and duties considered normal, everyday concerns, not sin per se. Nevertheless, these things are of lesser importance than fulfilling their charge from God. They reply to God in a manner that can be interpreted as offended surprise, asking, “In what way have we despised Your name?” God replies that the food they offered on His altar was defiled (Malachi 1:7).

Recall that a basic feature of the offerings is of God eating a meal. The altar is His table, and the sacrifice is His food. The fire consuming the offerings pictures God devouring it. As a result of “eating” the meal, He is satisfied just as we would feel a sense of well-being following a fine meal. God, however, is not satisfied with the sacrificial “meals” the priests of Malachi’s day offered; He complains of their poor quality. They give Him no satisfaction and are not acceptable.

The quality of their offerings had become so poor as to be downright evil. The priests would never have served such blemished beasts to a leader they could see, but they gave them to the invisible God. Their faith was so weak that He was not only out of sight, He was almost completely out of mind (Psalm 10:4)! They had no thought of the greatness of His power; His merciful, loving providence; the desire of His concern for their well-being; or of His nearness to them. They apparently never gave it much thought that He was aware of all they were doing!

King David was cut from an entirely different bolt of cloth. The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles clearly portray the external flaws in his behavior. We see his lust and adultery, his scheming deceit in conspiring to have Uriah die in battle, his childrearing errors, and his mistakes within the intrigues of government.

Like us, David was encompassed with human nature. In principle, we do many of the same things as he did, and also like him, it is an ever-present reality. It can break out at any time we get far from God and let our defenses down. However, in the Psalms we receive insight into his heart. In them, we see the real man, the one after God’s own heart, and this forms the basis of God’s judgment of him.

Malachi teaches us that we must strive to offer to God the best we can. Not everybody is the same. Each of us has our own package of abilities, intelligence levels, and skills. We have

The wicked in his
proud countenance
does not seek God;
God is in none
of his thoughts.

—Psalm 10:4

different attitudes about things and circumstances. We have been reared in different kinds of environments, and so our attitudes toward things are not always the same. We have different sins and weaknesses to overcome.

On the one hand, the ideals of the offerings are shown in the life of Jesus Christ, but on the other is the reality of what we are. We do not come anywhere near the ideals; we are frequently unstable and inconsistent. God nonetheless wants the general trajectory of our lives to

be consistently aimed toward achieving them.

We all have our peaks and valleys. God is not overly concerned about the occasional valleys we go through as long as we are consistently bouncing back, making strenuous effort to bring the very best offering we possibly can into God's service. This approach will work to produce the maturity God desires to see in us; the image of Jesus Christ will be formed. This attitude will produce the satisfaction in God and us that is the fruit of the peace offering.

What Will Sacrificing Produce?

Isaiah 53 presents an entire chapter about the Lord's Servant sacrificing Himself. Notice verse 10: "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand."

The word "pleased" does not mean that God's mind was merely inclined in that direction. Rather, it carries as a strong undercurrent of a sense of satisfaction, even pleasure and delight. Why would one have a sense like this in relation to an excruciating and painful experience such as Christ experienced in His crucifixion? Because God foresaw the overwhelming good that it would produce.

Recall that the peace offering shows us that God is satisfied because man is in communion with Him. A man is satisfied because he knows he is accepted by God, that he is in fellowship with and sharing with Him. The Priest, Christ, is satisfied because, as the common friend of formerly estranged parties, He is happy to see them sharing due to His work. Each party encompassed by the peace offering is at peace with the others.

On the eve of His crucifixion, as He takes them through the New Testament Passover service, Jesus tells His apostles, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). He is certainly not looking forward to the pain of sacrificing His life but to what would be accomplished as a result of His sacrifice. It would be the major means of producing peace between God and man. He knows His sacrifice would make possible a Family born of God.

God repeatedly shows that, whether in a family, business, nation, or in any aspect of God's creation, *peace is a major fruit of*

sacrifice. Most specifically, for us it means sacrificing ourselves in keeping God's commandments and fighting human nature, holding it in check. It means being a living sacrifice by not conforming to this world or yielding to the base demands of human nature. The peace offering reveals the consequence of truly loving one another: Sacrifice is the very essence of love!

Psalms 119:165 confirms this principle, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." Human nature is enmity against God, and it rejects God's law (Romans 8:7). The result is continual warfare with God and between men. No one who breaks God's law as a way of life can have peace, at least not the kind of peace God gives. Jesus says in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."

The world can produce a level of tranquility from time to time, but it is not the peace of God. When a person sins, it seems as though there is a feeling, a natural fear, that wells up. Even before the sin occurs, one invariably seeks to make sure no one else sees it happen. This does not display a mind at peace. Immediately following a sin, the fear of exposure arises, and the sinner begins justifying, at least to himself, why he has done such a thing. If caught, he justifies himself as Adam and Eve did before God.

In simple terms, God is showing us the consequences of breaking His laws. If one were at peace with God, he would have no need to hide himself. With a clear conscience, he need not lie, justifying and shifting the blame on to others. No one who breaks God's laws can have peace. However, one who loves God's law will not only keep the peace he already has but will add to it as its fruit and reward.

Peace I leave with
you, My peace
I give to you;
not as the world
gives do I give
to you.
—John 14:27

A Solution to Keep From Stumbling

Psalm 119:165 promises another wonderful benefit: Nothing causes those who love God's law to stumble. "To stumble" indicates faltering along the path to the Kingdom of God or even to fall completely away from God. This provides great encouragement and assurance regarding security with God, meaning that we will not be turned aside by the difficulties along the way.

Instead of fear of exposure and a guilty conscience, we will be assured because God's Word says so, as I John 3:18-19 confirms: "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." What a confident life we can live by following God's way!

Another New Testament passage, I John 2:8-11, parallels the psalmist's thought:

Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Consider these verses in relation to the meal offering, representing the devoted keeping of the last six commandments. Hating a brother would be breaking those commandments in relation to him. It might involve murdering him, breaking the marriage bond through adultery, stealing from him, lying to or about him, or

lust after him or his possessions.

Verse 10 parallels Psalm 119:165 exactly when it says, "But he who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him." I John 5:3 defines love: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." The New Testament strongly affirms that loving one's brother is keeping God's commandments in relation to him, and this provides us strong assurance and stability along the way.

I John 2:11 then shows that the blindness of darkness envelops the eyes of one who hates his brother, that is, breaks God's commandments in relation to him. This blindness produces stumbling and fighting, and thus he has no peace.

It is particularly disturbing if the brother spoken of in these verses also happens to be one's spouse, father, or mother. Old people today stand a high chance of being shunted off into a convalescent or old-age home, if only for the convenience of the adult children. Is that honoring a parent, or is it in some way contemptuous? Are the children unwilling to make sacrifices even for those who brought them into the world? Will this course of action produce peace? Will it produce a sense of well-being in either party?

John says, "He who loves his brother abides in the light" (verse 10), implying that love produces its own illumination. Illumination is what enables a person to see in the dark. Light contrasts to the darkness, blindness, and ignorance of verse 11, which result in stumbling. Illumination indicates understanding and the ability to produce solutions to relationship problems. The difficult part is laying ourselves out in sacrifice to express love. If we fail to do this, we may never see solutions to our relationship problems.

Great peace
have those who
love Your law
and nothing causes
them to stumble.
Psalm 119:165

Sharing in the Offering

Leviticus 7:31 says, "And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'." The breast named here is what we call the brisket. In the ritual, it was waved before God by means of the offerer holding the brisket in his hands and the priest then laying his hands on the offerer's hands. The offerer then advanced toward the altar by himself as though he was presenting his gift to God. Upon reaching the altar, he returned to the priest with the brisket and handed it to him, signifying God giving that portion of the offering to the priest and his sons.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest, and I Peter 2:9 clearly declares that the church is a royal priesthood. Numbers 18:8, 10-11 adds:

And the LORD spoke to Aaron: "Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever. . . . In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be

(continued on page 14)

*“My food is to do
the will of Him who sent Me,
and to finish His work.”*

John 4:34

Developing a Mature Spiritual Appetite

One Sabbath morning, several years ago, I awoke to some strange noises downstairs in the kitchen. Upon investigating the disturbance, I discovered that my son, Eric, who was just five at the time, had made a makeshift staircase out of the kitchen drawers to reach the counter. He was reaching for a cereal bowl as I came up behind him.

“Why don’t you let Dad help you?” I called out.

“No, Dad, I want to get my own breakfast,” he replied.

I felt a surge of parental pride in seeing my offspring take charge of his life. Often youngsters are encouraged by overprotective parents to remain in a dependent, passive role long after they should have been assuming grown-up responsibilities.

Fortunately, the apostle Paul was not an overprotective parent. He continually expressed frustration and annoyance at the chronic dependency in congregations that he had assumed should exhibit some maturity. To the Corinthians he writes, “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are not able; for you are still carnal” (I Corinthians 3:2-3).

He tells the Hebrews:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of

God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)

These congregations were not equipped to feed themselves—to discern sacred or spiritual from profane or carnal. If we are in a dependent state, it would be to our advantage to learn how we can wean ourselves spiritually from the bottle. Some of us over the years have seemingly lost our appetite for solid spiritual food and need to be fed intravenously.

All of us need to become less dependent on spiritual milk and instead become more capable of profiting from solid food. For those who are losing the capacity to enjoy solid food, there is a way to revitalize our spiritual appetite for the weightier matters.

Baby-Bird Syndrome

Most of us would agree that the state of spiritual dependency described by the apostle Paul in Hebrews and Corinthians seemed lamentable and disgusting. Yet, how many of us during the last ten, twenty, or thirty years in the church, espe-

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish his work.”

cially before the massive split, became conditioned to wait for the minister to prepare our weekly formula of Enfamil rather than ravenously devour God’s Word every day?

Perhaps we have developed “baby-bird syndrome” in which we, in a helpless “take care of me” posture, open our beaks to get our weekly or bi-weekly worm. If Sabbath services were the only times we were spiritually fed, we would eventually starve to death.

Sometimes late in life, after leading a full life, people for no apparent reason lose their will to live and must be fed intravenously. A number of years ago, I knew a man about my age—a father of two teenage children, a boy and a girl—who was a patient in the Los Angeles County Hospital. He had developed the delusion that his brain was wired to a bus terminal. Over time, this man began slipping into a catatonic stupor, refusing to take nourishment. Eventually, he was transferred to another institution, where he was kept alive by intravenous feeding. Ultimately, having lost his will to live, seeing no meaning or purpose in his life, he died.

Actually, when we all think about it, without an overriding purpose for our existence, we have no reason to eat or sustain our life. After the belief system was altered in our prior fellowship, people indeed started to lose the vision of their purpose for existence and eventually lost their capacity to endure solid food. Hopefully, most of us have passed the stage of the milk bottle, or God forbid, the need for intravenous feeding.

We desperately need some further instruction on how to maintain a balanced diet or how to sustain a healthy, spiritual appetite.

Carbs and Proteins

Much of our spiritual diet, like our physical one, consists of a combination of carbohydrates and

proteins. From biology class, we remember that carbohydrates serve as ready fuel. Starch that is converted to sugar becomes metabolized as fuel. Proteins, on the other hand, become used as building blocks, giving structure or form to the bones and skin tissue. Proteins can be broken down into fuel, but carbohydrates cannot be formed into building blocks.

We can liken God’s Holy Spirit to spiritual protein. It can take isolated spiritual facts (usually in the form of scriptures) and transform them into eternal principles. The individual scriptures given in the sermonettes or sermons could be likened to carbohydrates, useful for immediate fuel. However, without the structure provided by God’s Spirit, they often remain knowledge without understanding.

In the past, I observed my sons taking notes at services and Bible Studies. When they first began taking notes, they would only write down the specific scriptures (book, chapter, verse) given in the message. I pointed out to them that all they really have over a period of time is a list of scriptures—related to be sure—but without the vital connecting links. These connecting links should have been, and probably were, supplied by the speaker’s message. The principles expounded in the message—inspired by God’s Holy Spirit—are what hold the scriptures together and give them structure.

As I told my sons, the scriptures in a random list are of little value unless they are linked together by some spiritual principle. Herbert W. Armstrong repeatedly said that the Bible is a coded book, with parts of doctrines deliberately jumbled throughout Scripture like a jigsaw puzzle. A random list of verses without the organizing principle is just like stringing out jigsaw puzzle pieces in a straight line.

We are reminded in Isaiah that God’s truth is not all neatly pack-

aged together in one place: “For precept must be upon precept . . . line upon line . . . Here a little, there a little” (Isaiah 28:10). At times, it takes considerable work and energy to find the connecting links.

In my American Literature class, I gave a series of essay questions in which I asked: “By specific references from your text, illustrate Benjamin Franklin’s use of diplomacy.” Invariably, students would parrot back passages I had quoted in our class discussion. I said, “Fine—now explain the significance of these passages. Why are they important?” This focus on the insight of the passage separates the students who merely have knowledge from the students who have understanding.

As students of God’s Word, we are required to demonstrate both knowledge and understanding. We have to consume both carbohydrates (for immediate fuel) and proteins (for long-term building blocks), providing structure and form for the body. Remember, Jesus says we cannot live by bread alone (Matthew 4:4). To the young people, we might add, we cannot live by cookies or candy bars alone. Spiritually speaking, we need both carbohydrates and proteins.

Spiritual Preserves

Preparing spiritual food like an adult often necessitates preserving, canning, and storing it properly. If we are diligently taking notes (which I assume we are) we are storing up spiritual preserves so that if we ever have to endure a sustained famine of the Word (Amos 8:11), we will not be caught without something to eat.

In Proverbs 12:27 we learn, “The slothful man does not roast what he took in season.” What good is meat in due season (Matthew 24:45) if we fail to prepare and dress it properly? Meat in due season will

rot and putrefy if the innards are not removed and it is not preserved by salt or smoke.

It is hoped that we would never assume the posture of a congregant in a Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox church—who merely stands or sits passively, as if to be entertained. These people rarely recall anything about the sermon.

Perhaps it is like the story of President Calvin Coolidge, whose wife had to stay home from church services because of illness. Trying to find out what had happened in church, she asked: “Cal, what did the minister talk about?”

“Sin,” he replied.

“Well, what did he say about it?”

“He’s agin it.”

The necessity for storing up spiritual preserves should have been underscored by the breakup and dissolution of our previous fellowship. At several points in the early 1990s, it became apparent to us that we were starving to death spiritually. Many had not stored up spiritual preserves to tide them through the antinomian heresy. Fortunately, for all of us, God has provided shepherds loyal to the Word of God, who led the flock to suitable pastureland. Many of us had the experience of realizing we were starving to death, devouring tapes and articles to reactivate the faith once delivered (Jude 3).

We found our areas of refuge and started to rebuild our strength. We dare not allow ourselves to let our guard down again. Having accumulated a backlog of *Forerunner* issues and sermon tapes should not give us a sense of false security. Just having these resources is not the same as using and assimilating these resources. We have to learn to feed ourselves.

In the observant Jewish community, the Torah (the five books of Moses) and the Haftorah (selected readings from the prophets and writings) are systematically read and expounded in an annual cycle. One

parasha (sermon or commentary) is read each week, but it constitutes only a small portion of the weekly lesson. The member of the congregation is expected to read and meditate on the other portion at home. Not every Jew devotes himself to this practice, but the devout, observant ones do. We as members of the greater church of God should have as much zeal in maintaining our daily Bible study. It is our life sustaining manna.

Calling Uncle Art

Are we ravenously devouring our notes or transcripts from previous sermons, or are we pick-picking at occasional articles like a finicky child? When I was growing up on the farm, my parents, who had both lived through the Depression, admonished my brothers and me to eat everything on our plates. If we did not, they threatened to call Uncle Art.

To this day, I do not leave anything on my plate—unless it is unclean or spoiled, of course. My sons have learned this same principle. When they would start picking around their plates, I would threaten to call Uncle Art. Unfortunately, if we do not read our *Forerunners*, review the last week’s sermon, or engage in a private Bible study, no one is standing over us, threatening to call Uncle Art.

Is private, systematic Bible study really a meaningful part of our daily spiritual diet? A minister once told the Duluth, Minnesota, Spokesman club that they were not really studying their Bibles properly unless their foreheads were hot enough to fry eggs. The danger for all of us is that the Scriptures begin to sound so familiar that we pick, pick, pick around in the Bible like children, losing that deep, overwhelming hunger through which God called us into the church in the first place.

Some of us may feel full—even

when we are not—because of failure to exercise when we have eaten and digested previous meals. Jesus says, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). In verse 35, Jesus points out that we are in the middle of harvest season right now. Doing the work of God or participating in the harvest today takes on a different but just-as-urgent stance as ten or twenty years ago. The final push of God’s harvest is to prepare the bride for Christ. We have been, through the design of Christ, split into small groups where the opportunities to serve and help one another overcome have increased dramatically.

If we want to develop and sustain a real spiritual appetite, we must become involved in this phase of the harvest. From firsthand experience, I know that participating in a harvest is one of the best ways to build up a physical and spiritual appetite. When I stayed with my grandfather for part of the summer, I had the opportunity to help with the grain harvest, driving the tractor and wagon up to the hopper of the combine.

After half a day sweating under the hot, August, southern Minnesota sun, my grandfather and I had no problem devouring huge portions of Grandma’s steamy-hot mashed potatoes with gravy, thick slices of roast beef, buttered green beans, corn on the cob, and a bottle of Dad’s Root Beer. No one had any inclination of picking around on our plates like spoiled wimps. Uncle Art would have been proud of us.

If our spiritual appetite is gone, it might be that we are not really as involved or excited about our part in this phase of the spiritual harvest as we should be. The key to developing an adult, spiritual appetite—as well as its satisfaction—is applying John 4:34: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”

—David F. Maas

Christianity Goes Global

Christianity is derelict, a deserted, rat-infested hulk moored in some stagnant, putrid back-waters of modernity, a spectacle of ghastly decay. In time, it will become more scorned for its incapacity to improve the human condition than esteemed for the promise it offers. Incompatible with Western civilization, it will become defunct, a mere artifact of history.

So declared with jaunty glee the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the pundits of the Progressive Era later, and the despots of socialism still later. And so maintain the sages of today's post-modernism. How good it is, as Gleason had it, to be finally unfettered from the moral restraints of irrational superstition, mysticism, and myth. God is dead, Nietzsche claimed—probably with a tear in his eye. With what insufferably arrogant nonchalance do today's agnostic materialists exult that Christianity is too!

How wrong has the march of events proven them all! For Christianity (which is used in this article to refer to Satan's counterfeit of the way of life Christ taught) is very far from dead. The liberal media, enamored as it is with secular humanism—the doctrine that mankind, using his powers of reason in a religion-free environment, can resolve his problems—refuses to broadcast that fact. Deeply troubled that Christianity remains persistently a viable force in modern culture, the media has chosen to spread the lie that Islam is the religion of this century, and, like all religions, constitutes a clear and

present danger to Western civilization. That is only a dishonest subterfuge to conceal the real story.

JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM

The real story is Christianity's dynamic and widespread *growth* in the last century—particularly in the last five decades. Whether measured objectively (by its raw number of adherents) or subjectively (by their fervor), a candid observer cannot gainsay Christianity's growth. Let the facts speak for themselves.

- In Africa at large, often thought to be a Muslim stronghold, the number of Christians has grown 360% in the last 100 years. That translates to 3.6% per year. In 1900, there were 10 million Christians there; today, the number is 360 million.^{1,2}
- This striking growth is even more evident in the Orient than in Africa. In Korea, for example, the number of Christians has grown from 330,000 in 1900 to 12 million today, about 25% of the total population.³
- Even more impressive is the case of China. Since 1948, the number of practicing Christians continues to grow spectacularly. Today, there are “tens of millions” of Christians there.⁴
- In the Philippines, one Christian group alone, El Shaddai, has 7 million adherents.⁵
- By 2050, only 20% of the world's Christians will be non-Hispanic whites.⁶ A full 80% will be of Gentile stock spread worldwide.

Look at a map and you will see that the locus of this growth is the global *south*. That is why this phenomenal upsurge in Christianity has come to bear the name “Southern Christianity.” As one Kenyan scholar puts it, “The centers of the church's universality [are] no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London, New York, but Kinshasa, Buenos

CHRISTIANITY

ONE

Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila.”⁷ There is a lot to that: So extensive has been this spread of Christianity that the West’s claim to be the heartland of Christianity is becoming less and less defensible each day. In fact, “the great plain of irreligion” serves as a far more accurate descriptor of northern Europe today than does the soubriquet, the “city of God.” This is true in spite of the fact that northern Europe—Israelite Europe—was the geographic fountainhead of Protestantism. This re-orientation of the hearts of northern Europeans from God to godlessness is one of the most remarkable changes in our time.

THE FACE OF SOUTHERN CHRISTIANITY

Let us sketch a composite portrait of Southern Christianity.

- Unity does not at all describe Southern Christianity at this time; rather, it is fragmented, with a “bewildering array of sects and splinter groups.”⁸ These fragments, however, have much in common.
 - Almost by definition, Southern Christianity is made up of “born-again” individuals.
 - Again, almost universally, Southern Christianity is charismatic and Pentecostal in orientation, as well as evangelistic in vision.
 - Many groups are markedly fundamentalist. They tend to be Trinitarian and Calvinist—that is, in the Reformed tradition of Protestantism, rather than Catholic or Lutheran. (We will see, though, that many are Catholic.)
 - Many teach the imminent return of Christ. Some variant of pre- or post-Millennialism is a common doctrine. Many Southern Christians are prophetic hobbyists.
 - Adherents are noted for their zeal for their faith.
- The many groups tend to emphasize private revelation over pastoral teaching, feelings over doctrine, emotionalism over formalism. Their liturgies, where they exist at all, tend to be “contemporary.” Soft rock replaces *The Rock of Ages*.
 - Charismatic individuals often lead them. In almost all cases, that leadership is indigenous, composed of locally educated nationals rather than European or American prelates.
 - Syncretism is prevalent. Southern Christian groups often blend local pagan practices with fundamental Christianity. In this regard, it is important to recognize that Southern Christianity is not a direct offshoot of the missionary initiatives of 19th- and 20th-century Western denominations. It may be better to call it a *mutation* of mainstream Christianity, for in many ways it is quite different. It is “homegrown,” indigenous, displaying local cultural traits.
 - While many groups are made up of disaffected Catholics, most of them “seem determinedly Protestant” in outlook.⁹

Some groups are attached to mainstream Western denominations, albeit often tenuously. But the bulk of Southern Christianity is comprised of splinter groups pure and simple, claiming no affiliation with mainline denominations. In fact, many shun links with Western orthodoxies. This leads to some interesting arrangements indeed. For example, El Shaddai, mentioned above, was founded by, and is led by, lay-Catholics but lies largely outside the control of the Roman hierarchy. It is highly Pentecostal, so much so that its contemporary “liturgy” makes its mass meetings “look like nothing so much as a 1960s rock festival.”¹⁰

Another strange combination, of a totally different nature, is that of American Episcopalians and South African Anglicans. A number of American Episcopalians, unhappy with the liberalism of their leadership, found common cause with a group of highly conservative Anglican bishops in South Africa.

CONSERVATISM: A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC

This affiliation, which appears to be a lasting one, is an example of one of the most important areas of commonality among Southern Christians. Their syncretism aside, and in spite of vast diversities in nationality, race, culture, and language, they are overwhelmingly *conservative* in their moral stance. Their leadership as a whole rejects the doctrinal and moral liberalism that has come to infect much of European and American mainstream religion.

As a rule, Southern Christians are far more traditional than their mainstream coreligionists in the West. They refuse to “compromise on issues like homosexuality, the ordination of women, the acceptance of divorce and the tolerance of abortion—practices that many in the West have either advocated or tacitly accepted.”¹¹ They almost ubiquitously speak for strong family values and totally abjure the culture of death practices of abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide, and euthanasia.

Anecdotes speak louder than statistics. Consider the amazing Lambeth conference in the summer of 1998. Leading Anglican—Church of England—bishops from around the world convened to hammer out a resolution on homosexuality and the ministry. Mainstream Anglicanism in England “had been ordaining active homosexuals into the ministry for years.”¹² The European bishops used this conference to advocate the advancement of this practice worldwide. All seemed to be going their way—until it came time to vote on a resolution. Then, quite suddenly, the (largely) Gentile bishops from Africa and Asia hijacked the conference and voted overwhelmingly for a resolution that strongly condemned homosexuality, to the point that it declared same-sex relationships, consensual or otherwise, to contradict the tenets of Christianity and to be abhorrent.

The “progressive” bishops left the conference furious. One, John Shelby Spong, noted for his threadbare claptrap that Christianity must either “change or die,” whined that the Gentile (African) bishops had “moved out of animism into a very superstitious kind of Christianity.” Reflecting on the course of the conference, he concluded, “I never expected to see the Anglican Communion, which prides itself on the place of reason in faith, descend to this level of irrational Pentecostal hysteria.”¹³

Spong’s comments invite commentary. *Animism* is the belief that all objects (especially

natural ones, like trees or animals) have souls. Cultural anthropologists categorize animism as little more than pure superstition. One generally finds this type of religious activity—basically, nature worship—among the most primitive of peoples. For instance, most 18th- and 19th-century North American Indian tribes practiced animism.

Unlike the American aborigines, however, Lambeth’s Third World Anglican bishops were educated in the best schools of the former British Empire, some in Oxford and Cambridge; they were not illiterate, unsophisticated, simple-minded country bumpkins who just fell off the turnip truck. Assuredly, they do not worship oak trees, something, incidentally which the current Druid leader of the Anglican Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, *does* do. Spong’s patronizing remarks verge on the worst sort of condescending chauvinism. Indeed, since most of these Third World bishops were Gentiles (that is, non-white), his vitriol smells of outright racism. It seems that at least this liberal churchman—and he probably speaks for legions of others—is convinced that Old Testament morality is puerile superstition, that the fruits of man’s reason supercede the truth of God’s revelation, and that that revelation is both irrational and hysterical.

How far has Israel fallen! In Isaiah 43:10, God calls the people of Israel “My witnesses.” The world ultimately could not help but see these witnesses and “hear all these statutes,” the great law of the great God, as Moses writes in Deuteronomy 4. The nations shall then say,

“Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? (Deuteronomy 4:6-8)

National Israel was to set a godly example, by which it would teach the nations the value of God’s way of life. This was a basic role of ancient Israel, and indeed remains a key job of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Members of today’s true church bear the responsibility to be exemplars, as the apostle Peter asserts in I Peter 2. Peter, echoing Paul’s comments in Philippians 3:20 that we have our citizenship in heaven, not in this world, reminds God’s people that they are pilgrims in this world. As real as our alien status is,

however, it does not abrogate our responsibility to walk morally before the peoples of this world.

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (I Peter 2:11-12).

But, today, national Israel lacks knowledge of her identity and has come to reject God's law. The tables have turned! Now, God raises up *Gentiles* to teach the Israelites of His law; He uses Gentiles to instruct the pagan churchman, vacuous hirelings in high places who refuse to accept God's clear revelation.

Perhaps the clearest sign of this reversal—and of the West's moral decadence in general—is the evangelization of Europe by *Africa*:¹⁴ Some conservative Southern Christian groups in Africa actually send *missionaries* to that vast “plain of irreligion” to re-evangelize the birthplace of Protestantism, to restore there the faith of God. While we in God's church understand that these missionaries do not preach the true gospel, they do serve as a witness against the pagan Western world, the world that has forgotten God and wandered far from Christian ethics and morality. Often, these missionaries teach principles of God's law that Americans and Europeans have forgotten.

IMPLICATIONS

The advent of Southern Christianity has a number of important implications.

A movement of this scope and size certainly carries economic ramifications, which of course have not been lost to the Babylonish merchants who hire workers in Singapore to fabricate necklaces of gold crosses, so popular today among “born-again Christians” around the world. If Christianity has gone global, so have the merchants who pander to the faithful.

If history is any guide to the future at all, Southern Christianity certainly has its geopolitical implications as well. After all, more than a few wars have had their roots in religious differences. There is no reason to believe that the idea of the church militant is a dead idea. It is alive and well.

Of all the physical laws of nature, it is the Third Law of Motion, formulated by Isaac

Newton, that seems most consistently to have application in the social and civil affairs of mankind: *For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction*. Every political or economic force has its counterpoise: Counterbalancing conservatism is liberalism; against capitalism is socialism; against nationalism is internationalism; and so on. This pattern of dichotomies seems to be the nature of things.

Historically speaking, against Islam there has been Christianity. *Today, fundamental Southern Christianity seems to be growing as a counterpoise to the rise in fundamental Islam. Will the tension between the two become violent?* Some think so. The Islamic movement led by Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines directs its terrorist activities at the Christian establishment there. The internecine war between Islamic Nigeria and Sudan may be just the start of a *series* of wars between fundamentalist Islamists and Southern Christians. Some commentators forecast a war between Islamic Nigeria and Uganda or the Congo. Others see in the wings a war between the Philippines (Catholic) and Indonesia (Muslim).¹⁵

Could such regional wars intensify to become continental or inter-continental in scale?

The answer to that question largely pivots on the issue of *unity*. For the present, Southern Christianity is anything but unified. Rather, bearing the malaise of this age, it is highly fragmented. There are literally hundreds of groups, some small, some large. There is no commonly recognized leader at this time, one with the ability and prestige to unite Southern Christians. None appears to be on the horizon. As conservative as Pope John Paul II has been in the issues of the ordination of woman, abortion, and such, he has not been able to win the hearts and minds of most Southern Christians. In fact, Southern Christianity is, in many ways, a reaction against the hierarchy and formalism of the Roman Church he leads.

If the current pope will not unite Southern Christians, who will? When?

These are just two of many questions that could be asked but cannot be answered, right now at least. Will Southern Christianity, with its characteristic missionary zeal, unite to mount a large-scale (perhaps worldwide) crusade against Islam, as the Roman Church did on a smaller scale centuries ago? Will it unite to mount a crusade against liberal Christianity in the North—in America and Europe? Will Southern Christianity recruit the soldiers of the 200,000,000-man army that marches on the Middle East, perhaps

in defiance of the False Prophet? Is some charismatic leader, who finally unites Southern Christianity into a worldwide force, destined to become the famous “king of the South” who pushes at the “king of the North?”

To answer these questions now would be to speculate. Let us face it, most people do not even recognize Southern Christianity to be the worldwide movement that it is, much less comprehend its potential. Thus, it is just too early to determine what course Southern Christianity will take, too soon to perceive the role it will play as prophecy inexorably works itself out to become history. We will have to wait and see.

One thing, though, is absolutely clear. The conservative zealots who make up the bulk of Southern Christianity will brook no compromise with the lawless liberalism of the North, whether it emanates from Europe or America. The South will continue to see that liberalism as the calumny and the tripe it is, to resent that lawlessness as incompatible with Christianity, and to resist what

it perceives as the West’s apostasy with all its being. At the very least, then, Southern Christianity bodes to grow into a powerful anti-Western cultural phenomenon that grits its teeth against Western economic and cultural globalism.

But the portrait of Southern Christianity has another very important dimension. The United States’ Immigration Reform Act of 1965 has brought it to America. Next month, in the second part of this three-part series, we will see how Southern Christianity is rapidly moving north.

—Charles F. Whitaker

ENDNOTES

- 1 Douthat, Ross, “The Christian Future,” *Policy Review*, February/March, 2003, p. 89.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 90, as quoted by Jenkins in *The Next Christendom*.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 91, as quoted by Jenkins in *The Next Christendom*.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

PERSONAL ➤

(continued from page 6)

holy to you. This also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.”

Sons and daughters indicate the family of the priest. It surely included his wife as well, but this was all God needed to say to make His intention clear. Spiritually, the altar represents God’s table, and the sons and daughters are the brethren in the church, the Family of our High Priest. Since we are eating from God’s table, this shows us in communion with God. It also shows us doing or having a portion in the work of the priest and as having a claim on the sacrifice.

All who have communion or fellowship with God must share that communion with His priests and His children, the rest of the church, our brothers and sisters. If one brings an offering, he shares in it. There is an interesting example of this in Acts 2:41-42, beginning on the Day of Pentecost and continuing for an unknown time thereafter: “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine

and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The sharing with brothers and sisters is plainly expressed in the words “fellowship,” “breaking of bread,” and “prayers.”

Verses 43-45 add, “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” It almost seems as if the godly fear, wonders, and signs sprang directly from the sharing spirit and the sacrifices made by those who gave.

Can we feast with God and ignore His other guests? A person in communion with God *must* be in communion with all who are in communion with Him. Do we see the oneness this implies? We are all eating of the same sacrifice, the same meal. We are all being fed and strengthened by the same Spirit, and God expects that we share what we have with our brothers and sisters.

This era of the church has never experienced anything similar to the first era, but before the end time is over, we may. In the meanwhile, we should open our homes in hospitality, sharing our experiences in life with one another. We should be praying with and for each other to assist in drawing us together in unity.

This is My
commandment,
that you love one
another as I
have loved you
—John 15:12

Christ is our supreme example in all things pertaining to life. What did Christ do to bring us into oneness with the Father? Whatever He did we must, in principle, also do as burnt and meal offerings, keeping the commands of God with all our heart in complete devotion. In His final teaching before His crucifixion, He sets a very high standard: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). As means “equal to.”

He also says in verse 13, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” Jesus laid down His life step by step and then concluded it his life by submitting to crucifixion for our well-being. Those sacrifices produce peace and unity with God for those who accept His sacrifice and submit to the burden of bearing one’s responsibilities before God.

The conclusion is inescapable: The peace that God gives is directly linked to sacrifice and love. Our Father began the process by so loving the world that He sacrificed His only begotten Son for its sins. The Son followed the Father by magnanimously giving His life in sublime submission to the Father’s will following laying down His life for them and us day by day.

All of this begins the process for us so that we can have peace with God and His Spirit can shed His love abroad in our hearts. The process of producing peace, harmony, and unity is thus also directly linked as a result of our sacrifices in devoted obedience to His commands.

The burnt, meal, and peace offerings are meaningful illustrations of what is necessary within our relationships to produce peaceful and edifying fellowship that truly honors and glorifies God.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

—John 15:13

Be Clean

We must consider another important factor in relation to our service to God and man and participating in the blessings of the altar. Notice Leviticus 22:1-7:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they do not profane My holy name in those things which they sanctify to Me: I am the LORD. Say to them: ‘Whoever of all your descendants throughout your generations, who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel sanctify to the LORD, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My presence: I am the LORD. Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean. And whoever touches anything made unclean by a corpse, or a man who has had an emission of semen, or whoever touches any creeping thing by which he would be made unclean, or any person by whom he would become unclean, whatever his uncleanness may be—the person who has touched any such thing shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat the holy offerings unless he washes his body with water. And when the sun goes down he shall be clean; and afterward he may eat the holy offerings, because it is his food.’”

I Peter 1:16 says, “. . . because it is written, ‘Be

holy, for I am holy,’” which is precisely the lesson contained within Leviticus 22:1-7. Our holy God is clearly saying, “Those who serve Me must also be holy.” *Holy* essentially means “set apart,” but it also carries with it the sense of “different,” which helps explain why a person or thing is set apart. Certain factors or characteristics distinguish the set-apart one or thing, making it different from persons or things of the same kind.

Holy also has the sense of cleanliness or of being undefiled. God can just as easily be saying to the priests and their children, “I am a clean God, and I want those who serve Me to be clean.” In this case, His transcendent purity of intent and character sets Him apart from others or things that people may consider to be god. He is therefore completely undefiled.

The Leviticus passage mentions leprosy, a corpse, and semen. We must not forget that, when this was written, God was addressing a carnal people. Thus, the instruction is couched in physical terms, but we must look for spiritual meaning within the physical instruction.

The Tabernacle, altar, priesthood, furniture, vessels, and all of the rites have spiritual significance, and Paul writes that they are “shadow[s] of good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1). Leprosy is a horrible, dreadful disease, thus it is a type of a spiritual disease. It is externally visible in its disfigurement of its victim’s body. At times, there can be running sores. It probably does not parallel any one spiritual disease, but rather it symbolizes any number of sins that disfigure a person’s character and/or attitude.

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For the law having a shadow of the good things to come, . . . can never with these same sacrifices, . . . make those who approach perfect.
—Hebrews 10:1

Why Do Bad Things H

Most of us who have been in God's church for any length of time have heard the oft-repeated question, "Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?" expounded on before, perhaps several times. However, have we ever examined it from the perspective of the *Christian* who has bad things happen to him or her?

We know, or we should know, that the word "good" in this context is only a relative term. The scriptures tell us that "no one is good," not even one of us (Mark 10:18; Romans 3:10). We also know that we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Still, as God's children, begotten with His Spirit, we expect a certain amount of protection and also certain blessings from Him. After all, do the Scriptures not say through the apostle John that He wishes above all things that we may prosper and be in health (III John 2)? Does not the hymn based on Psalm 1 say, "Blest and happy is the man who does never walk astray"?

Blameless and Upright

Many centuries ago, a godly man felt the same way we do about this subject. He expected God to bless him. Maybe he did more than expect blessing; perhaps he took it for granted that God would bless and protect him as long as he did what God required of him. That man's name, of course, was Job.

We do not need to wonder if Job was righteous. We are told so in the first few words of the book bearing his name: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). Seven verses later, God says the same thing to Satan in their well-known conversation about Job. There is no question this man was one of God's people and a righteous man at that.

Part of the problem is that Job felt that Job was righteous too. It is all summed up in Job 32:1 during his lengthy discourse with his three friends: "So these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes." Job had been in his comfort zone—self-righteous. Something had to be done about it, and God was the one to do it.

In Job 16:12, Job himself tells us all about it: "I was at ease, but He has shattered me; He has also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces; He has set me up for His target." His complaining shows that Job badly needed an attitude adjustment; he needed to move—or be moved—out of his comfort zone. Who knows whether God had tried to get this message through to Job in other ways and at other times? We can assume that He probably had—and it had not worked.

Could many of us today also have this attitude? We are survivors. We made it through the apostasy. We are the tough ones—the ones Satan could not fool. We feel pretty good about ourselves, right?

Satan, however, never gives up. The apostle Peter warns us, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). John tells us that he is "the accuser of the brethren, who accuse[s] them before our God day and night" (Revelation 12:10).

One of the worst problems in members of the church today, as in Job, is the problem of complacency. Perhaps it has been born out of our troubles these last few years, in which we feel we have won. Now that the apostasy appears to be behind us, we may feel we no longer need to be as vigilant as Peter warns. We seem to be oblivious to the fact that, as the famous New York Yankee, Yogi Berra, was fond of saying, "It ain't over till it's over."

We are warned in Proverbs 6:10-11, repeated similarly in Proverbs 24:33: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep [*rest*—so shall your poverty come on you like a robber [*prowler*], and your need [*want*] like an armed man." While these verses refer primarily to economic poverty, they apply just as well to *spiritual* want. We can find ourselves in a spiritual crisis as a result of living with a self-satisfied attitude.

Comfortable Enclaves

Some in God's church have built for themselves comfortable enclaves, little fortresses, consisting of close-knit local groups and/or biological families that are defensively hunkered down, doing nothing to prepare to do a work for God. I personally had to give up my biological family some thirty years ago when it became clear that they would not coexist with my new beliefs. Many others had to do the same.

Christ tells us in Matthew 10:37: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." There is no reason to understand this as metaphor: We should consider it literally.

Upon close examination, much of so-called family closeness is an illusion. I am an attorney, and I have probated and seen probated wills in which money has been involved. It has been shocking to see what appeared to be kind, loving families almost literally devour each other when the parent or parents are gone, along with their stabilizing influence—or, more likely, iron grip. What ripped the families apart was money or other property. Family love and loyalty dissolved in an appallingly short time.

While God certainly expects us to love and provide for our biological families (I Timothy 5:8), He makes it clear that we have another Family that will be with us through eternity, one we must now love and cherish too. In Luke 8:19-21, we pick up the story:

Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could

appen to Christians?

not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.” But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

These are things some people do not like to read, but our Savior Himself spoke them. Some in the church have found their comfort zones, not necessarily in Christ and the truth He brought, but in the reassuring closeness and familiarity of likeminded friends and relatives. Instead of being convicted of the doctrine, they simply follow their crowd.

God, however, is not into “group think”; He is interested in each individual’s life and decisions, apart from others. He says through Ezekiel, “Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:14). In the New Testament, Paul writes:

Now if anyone builds on this foundation [Jesus Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become manifest, because it will be revealed by fire [*trials*, see I Peter 1:6-7]; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. (I Corinthians 3:12-13)

Those God has called, He does not want to lose; He is “not willing that any should perish” (II Peter 3:9). His goal of having us all in His Family is so important that He corrects and tests us individually to keep us “on track” (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:12). If we are among those who have been leaning on a group or our family, we should not be surprised when He puts us in a spot where we are forced to stand on our own and lean on Him.

Hebrews 12:11 explains that “no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous.” “Grievous” does not seem to indicate God’s chastening will always be a light slap on the wrist! Our trials, designed to keep us headed for the Kingdom of God, can be traumatic, depending on how far off the path we have gone.

The Product of Correction

What does such “grievous” correction produce? The rest of the verse tells us: “Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” In other words, the benefits of this correction far outweigh the suffering we endure during them.

Lest we think we have been tested beyond what we deserve or we can handle, Peter tells us otherwise, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try [test, prove] you, as though some strange

thing happened to you” (I Peter 4:12). Trials happen to us all and for good reason. He goes on to say, “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (I Peter 5:10).

Paul echoes his fellow apostle in Hebrews 12:4: “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” If so many Christians in the past have suffered martyrdom for the truth, we have nothing to complain about regarding our trials. He also writes encouragingly in I Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Now, here is a man who knows whereof he speaks! In II Corinthians 11:23-28, he chronicles his trials, and they should make us—with our so-called past suffering—feel quite blessed!

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

Sad to say, the apostle Paul did not always have the support of the churches when he needed it from them, but he survived all this to say that a crown was laid up for him (II Timothy 4:7-8). His race was run and won. As Christians, we need to look beyond our current trials and travails to the goal ahead of us, just as Paul did. By doing so, we will stop looking behind at the pain and disillusionment a previous organization may have inflicted on us.

Why do bad things happen to “good” people, specifically those in the church? We are promised that, in God’s plan, *all things* work together for good for those who are the called and who love God (Roman 8:28). This “all things” includes correction, sometimes even harsh correction. God will do whatever it takes—even the lengths He took with Job—to bring His chosen people to salvation. Through it all, God promises He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). That is a promise we can depend on!

—Thomas Shadoin

(continued from page 15)

Both a corpse and semen possibly represent carriers of disease. Something causes a person to die, and all too frequently, it is an invisible, internal disease, of which infections and cancers are examples. The widespread AIDS virus is a good example. It can be carried within a man's semen into a woman's body. The carrier may look healthy externally, but a deadly disease is present. Only the carrier may know of its existence within him. A corpse and semen represent sins that are not easily perceived. Withdrawal from participation in the fellowship requires the sinner to exercise discipline, as he may be the only one aware of his problem. Creeping things are also defilements from sins that are less obvious. Perhaps in this case, it might be problems with one's attitudes like resentment, bitterness, envy, jealousy, and lusting.

Regardless of what rendered a person unclean, he was not allowed to participate until he cleaned himself by washing in water, a type of the Holy Spirit. Even then, he was still considered unclean until evening of that same day. This process was a form of excommunication. The unclean person was symbolically excluded from communion with God and held unfit to eat of the holy food of the altar, symbolizing the Word of God, until he had cleaned up his act. Verse 7 distinctly says he was free to eat of the holy things only after the sun went down. Even given this permission, he was still eating in the dark! Though accepted back into fellowship, he was still somewhat removed from full exposure to the light of God's throne until the next day, when complete communication with God was restored.

Taking steps to rid ourselves of uncleanness has awesome ramifications when we grasp how burdened we are with the potential for sin. The apostle Paul labels himself as a wretched man who greatly needed deliverance (Romans 7:24-25). Despite what we can do on our own—and God requires us to strive to do so—complete deliverance can only come through the work of Jesus Christ. It is essential that we know this, yet it is perhaps beyond our full understanding and appreciation that God is so merciful and full of grace to provide the sin offering that precedes us! If it were not for these elements—because we are so full of spiritual creeping things and spiritual leprosy—we would never be permitted to eat from the Lord's table.

I and II Corinthians offers us great comfort by showing that, though one may be cut off from the body, he can return once he has cleaned himself through repentance. It shows that even though he is denied close communion with God because of some spiritual uncleanness, he still

remains tied to God through the New Testament priesthood. Disfellowshipping is intended to be a temporary corrective tool.

I Corinthians 5:4-5 says, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The purpose of excommunication is to save the person from his uncleanness that is destroying his communion with God and others in the fellowship. Therefore, if he can still be saved, that person is not completely cut off from God.

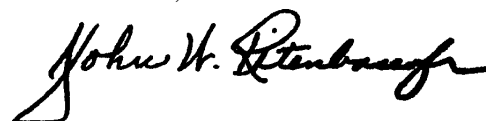
II Corinthians 6:14-17 adds more information to this subject.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

Paul asks four questions that provide comparisons that clearly urge us to avoid or depart from what is unclean so that we can be at peace and in communion with God. Fellowship with God and being allowed to eat spiritual food from His table are clearly conditioned upon our not falling into uncleanness but instead striving to maintain the purity provided by Christ's sacrifice.

Our part in striving to maintain the purity is to follow Christ's example of thorough dedication in fulfilling the requirements of the burnt and meal offerings. Doing so in no way earns us the fellowship privileges expressed in the peace offering, but it does show God our understanding of faith, love, sacrifice, thanksgiving, and the links between total devotion to Him, Jesus Christ, our fellow man, and His wonderful purpose. God has invested a great deal to provide this for us. The least we can do is give back to Him full devotion in our life as a living sacrifice.

In Christian love,



Owretched
man that I am
Who will deliver
me from this
body of death?

Romans 7:24

Do not be unequally
yoked together
with unbelievers.
For what fellowship
has righteousness
with lawlessness?

II Corinthians 6:14

SARS

Peril or Panic?

While news of the SARS virus has been a regular feature of the mainstream media, a number of statistics have been overlooked, casting this "epidemic" in a new light and suggesting it is merely a reclassification of the flu and/or pneumonia.


- In Hong Kong, the "normal" annual number of hospitalized cases of pneumonia has ranged between 15,000 and 25,000. Lately, more than 3,000 people have died each year of serious pneumonia.
- The symptoms of serious flu/pneumonia include high fever, coughing, runny nose, headache, muscle ache or diarrhea, shortness of breath, and lung inflammation—not significantly different from SARS.
- Vivian Wong, Director of the Hong Kong Hospital Authority reports that the total number of deaths from Atypical Pneumonias of all causes in the period January-April 2003 was less than 5% higher than the number of deaths in the same period in 2002. This demonstrates that there is **not** an epidemic.
- According to the U.N.'s World Health Organization (WHO), 300,000 people died of flu worldwide last year. There were over 63,000 influenza and pneumonia deaths in the U.S. In the last flu season, more than 400 people died in Beijing in one month. There was no panic then. This year in 4 months (January to April), fewer than 200 died of severe flu in Beijing, and there was widespread panic.
- On May 6, 2003, WHO stated that the international mortality rate of SARS was 4% and 6% in Singapore. The published data of average mortality rate for influenza/pneumonia in the U.S. is 7.6%.


Why the media have focused so much on this syndrome is uncertain, but there are a number of well-documented effects of the hysteria. First, certain national and local economies have been crippled by the restrictions on trade and tourism. The "epidemic" has helped to undervalue Asian currencies, and the city of Toronto has already lost \$190 million.

Second, the SARS scare has allowed governments to ratchet up their levels of control. President Bush has authorized airport immigration and customs agents to detain arriving passengers with flu-like symptoms. Similarly, the United Nations has dramatically increased the authority and influence of WHO to "fight international health threats." It can now intervene even when countries are not reporting a health crisis. Though WHO has no power to punish a noncompliant nation, the agency can use international pressure to gain cooperation. As has been demonstrated, its alerts and travel advisories can have a devastating economic impact.

Third, SARS has served to divert world attention from other controversial issues. Even though SARS was first classified in November 2002, it only became a highlight in March 2003, when a tremendous amount of attention focused on a relatively tiny number of fatalities.

BIOENGINEERING

 How much of the food produced and consumed in the United States qualifies as bioengineered? Brendan Koerner of MSNBC reports that two of the nation's biggest crops, soybeans and corn, are subject to frequent genetic tinkering, often under the guise of fending off insects. Corn is commonly modified with the addition of a gene from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*. The resulting plant kills destructive caterpillars. Other added genes give resistance to certain herbicides that might otherwise devastate the crop. Approximately 76% of last year's American soybean crop was genetically modified (GM), as well as 32% of corn—and some estimates place the corn figure closer to 50%. No government body keeps precise statistics, but it is estimated that around 70% of processed foods contain GM ingredients.

 *The New York Times* says U.S. President George W. Bush is painting the U.S.–E.U. "trade war" over GM crops as part of a campaign against world hunger, but it is really a battle over billions of dollars in agricultural trade. Some of the largest American agriculture and biotechnology companies have invested billions over the past decade to develop and market GM crops, but only wealthier nations, such as those in Europe, can afford them. American farmers have planted more than 70 million acres of GM corn and soybeans and are upset that they are banned from Europe, the largest food importer in the world.

Japanese Military Transforming

The Sydney Morning Herald reports that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi indicated earlier this year that Japan is prepared to strike preemptively against foreign threats, adopting the most aggressive position by a Japanese leader since World War II. Koizumi also advocates amending Japan's war-renouncing constitution to allow its 240,000-strong "Self-Defense Forces" to be called its military. His comments reflect Japan's defense policy changing from "hesitant pacifism" to a more robust, deterrent-oriented posture. This shift results from threats of terror and communist North Korea.

Wars and Rumors of Wars

Historian Will Durant calculated that in all of human history only 29 years have not seen a war waged somewhere on the planet. According to John Whitehead, founder and president of The Rutherford Institute, in the wars of the 20th century, 62 million civilians have died—almost 20 million more than the 43 million military personnel killed. In all, during that 100-year span, over 100 million lives were taken. Just in the 1990s, 2 million died in Afghanistan; 1.5 million died in the Sudan; 800,000 were slaughtered in 90 days in Rwanda; 250,000 died in Bosnia; 200,000 died in Guatemala; 150,000 died in Liberia; 250,000 died in Burundi; 75,000 died in Algeria; and untold tens of thousands fell in the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the civil war in Colombia, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Kurdish Turkey, Sierra Leone, Congo, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, and Kuwait. The earth is literally soaked in blood.

NEWS AND TRENDS Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:13)

BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) differs from most other parables in that it is so simple and concrete that a child can understand its basic point. However, it is also an insightful and memorable exposition of practical moral principles. That so many religious and secular people understand it shows the effectiveness of its simplicity and depth. Unlike other parables, each figure in the story does not necessarily represent a spiritual equivalent. The whole narrative describes working compassion as contrasted to selfishness, of hate compared with love.

In the parable's introduction (Luke 10:26), Jesus uses a technical term regularly used by the scribes or lawyers when consulting one another about a matter of the law: "What is your reading of it?" The lawyer gives the only right answer—the necessity of loving God and his neighbor (verse 27). He then asks the question—"Who is my neighbor?" (verse 29)—that prompts Jesus into giving His parable. The lawyer believes that no Gentile is his neighbor, although it seems he suspects they really are. This parable makes clear who is our neighbor and how we should respond to his needs.



1. What is meant that the priest and the Levite stumbled across the injured man "by chance"? Luke 10:30-31; Ecclesiastes 3:1, 17; 9:11-12; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:11.

COMMENT: The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was a steep, rocky, dangerous gorge, troubled by prowling robbers. Because of their high religious stature, thieves did not usually assault priests and Levites, but others were "fair game."

The word used here for "chance" means the coincidence of time and circumstance, indicating that the priest and the Levite traveled that road as a matter of habit. We see that it was also habitual for them to ignore the needs of others. However, it was by God's design that the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan came to the spot where the suffering man lay. God plans and orchestrates human events and knows how to send relief. Within the sovereignty of God, there is no such thing as pure chance for God's people.

2. What character traits were missing in the priest and Levite? Luke 10:31-32; I Timothy 6:18; II Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 1:16; 3:14; James 2:14-17.

COMMENT: Supposedly, the priest served God and His law, which encourages mercy. He professed his love for God and human beings, and he prayed several times a day. This spiritual leader, one of 12,000 priests living in Jericho at that time, had left service to God back at the Temple, having neither time nor compassion for his neighbor. The priest knew that God's law endorses loving God and neighbor, yet he failed to put his faith into action.

The Levite was of the same tribe as the priest but of one of the inferior branches. As a servant of the Temple, a custodian of religious worship, and an interpreter of the law, he should also have been eager to assist the battered man. These two spiritual leaders should have been the first to apply their faith in God by aiding the beaten traveler, yet Jesus must rebuke the heartless and unkind spirit of their form of religion. Both men ignore God's instruction by neglecting the intent of His law.

3. What is different about the Samaritan's attitude? Luke 10:33-35; Proverbs 25:21; Matthew 18:33; Luke 6:27-31; Galatians 5:13-14; I Peter 3:8-9.

COMMENT: The Samaritans were a Gentile people mostly living in Samaria, and Jews thought of them as inferior and hated

them. It probably shocked the lawyer to hear Jesus speak well of the Samaritan as the only one who acted compassionately toward the beaten traveler.

"Compassion" in Luke 10:33 comes from the Greek *splagchnizomai* meaning "to be moved as to one's inwards." A person's innards represent the seat of the warm, tender emotions or feelings. It specifically symbolizes the higher viscera: the heart, lungs, and liver, signifying compassion out of the depth of one's character. The Samaritan not only intervenes on behalf of the beaten traveler, he goes beyond the call of duty to ensure the man receives care until he has recovered. He does not contemplate his action but reacts from the pre-shaped compassion of his true character.

4. How should we treat our neighbor? Luke 10:27, 36-37; Proverbs 14:21; Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 6:7-10.

COMMENT: Following the moral to the parable—the command to love our neighbor as ourselves—Jesus encourages the lawyer to "go and do likewise." Helping the needy without asking first who he is and what his relationship is to us fulfills this. The Samaritan proves himself a neighbor by his unprejudiced mercy and compassion. Without distinction of race, nationality, or religion, the human being that we affect good or bad by our conduct is our neighbor. More specifically in light of this parable, he who needs our aid, no matter who he is, is our neighbor. The question, then, should not be "Who is my neighbor?" but "Are we neighborly?" Are we friendly, kind, helpful, considerate, caring, cooperative, amicable, merciful, and compassionate? Do we love our fellow human beings more than ourselves?

Jesus Christ is the quintessential good neighbor, and His example is the one to imitate. He saw a world of sinners robbed of their potential, stripped of spiritual ideals, wounded by sins, and unable to rise by themselves from their beaten state. He came down to where the sinners are and gave mankind a corresponding act of mercy, seen in type in the good Samaritan. Through His death and resurrection, He covers our nakedness, binds up our wounds, and heals them. He puts us in the safety of His church and provides for our physical and spiritual needs. God gives us abundantly more than we ask.