

Prepare^{the} Way

Preparing the Bride of Christ for the return of Christ

Issue No. 110

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**Ladies, please
don't use the
B-word on me!**

**7 Lies I believed
about missions**

**The role of
a spiritual
watchman**

Peter Pollock
**No fear of
God in the land**

**The top Bible prophecy
stories of 2017**

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COVER: "For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:7&8)."

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John & Helen Gardiner

Peter & Inez Pollock

Garth & Audrey Shillaw

CONTACT DETAILS

(Please correspond by e-mail where possible)

E-mail: info@prepare.co.za

Phone: (033) 3307-135

Fax: 086-5147-404

Cell: 082-499-3174

Post: **Prepare the Way**

Box 377

Merrivale 3291

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Dear women's ministry, please stop calling me the B-word

by Phylicia Masonheimer

I shifted in my seat at the women's ministry event; the speaker said it again. "You are a *beautiful*, chosen, special woman of God. There is no one in the world like you!"

I'd heard this message dozens of times – on the radio, in books, at conferences – even emblazoned on coffee mugs and shirts at every Christian bookstore. It's the same message directed at Christian women in every corner of western culture. And it's a message that – while well-intentioned – remains deficient no matter how many times it's preached.

You see, I'm not actually that special – and neither are you.

An honest look at our humanness reveals this truth. Any woman who's done a degree of self reflection knows that her struggles, insecurities, and sins aren't unique to *her*. They're part of being human in a fallen world. Further, any woman who knows the depth of her own inadequacy will find these Christianised platitudes of beauty and "chosen-ness" entirely insufficient for daily victory.

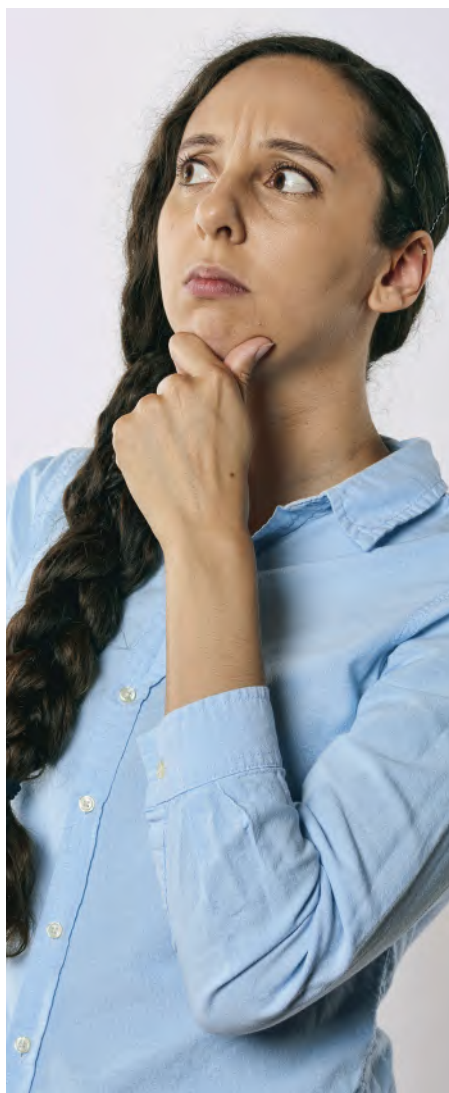
I'm not saying these encouragements are false. We are God's handiwork (Ephesians 2:10). We are chosen (1 Peter 2:9). We are unique (Matthew 10:29-31). The question is not whether or not these things are *true*, but whether or not this is the most *important* message women need to hear.

Personally, I don't think it is.

If I judged Christianity by its women's conferences, I'd be led to believe that the Bible is no more than a series of compliments from God to man. Instead, the real story is far less complimentary and far more humiliating.

Jesus didn't come to earth because we were beautiful, special, or great. He came because we were too grossly sinful to bridge the gap between ourselves and God.

That's not a message we want to hear from the stage of Extraordinary Women, is it? But it's the one we need, because



women who think they're pretty awesome *don't need a Saviour*.

Looking at the titles of the books we read, I deduce we're entangled with insecurity, fear, and identity crises. We're in this constant state of "struggle" with very little victory, never really living as "conquerors in Christ (Romans 8:37)." These are real spiritual issues, but you know what? I've yet to see *one* woman set free from insecurity by being told – however repetitively – that she is beautiful.

It doesn't work, and it's not the answer.

The truth is that, apart from the transforming power of Christ, I'm *not* beautiful, special, or all that unique. I'm born into sin, and bent to rebellion. My insecurities and fears pulse through Adam's

blood in my veins. These can't be rooted out with shallow "encouragements."

What I need – what every woman needs – is a soul-deep solution to the problem of sin. Insecurity is not the problem. Fear, poor self-image, marriage problems – these are just symptoms of the real disease. The disease is sin, and we all have it.

We need freedom, not compliments.

Again, it's not a bad message. But it's theologically deficient, and if the goal of a women's ministry is to encourage and equip female Christians, the message has to change. The gospel is good news only to those who recognise their need for Jesus.

When you create a culture that uses Jesus for little more than a spiritual feel-good, it's no wonder the women it produces can't get victory over anxiety, anger, insecurity, or fear. They leave our churches knowing all about *themselves*, and knowing little about Christ.

The solution is simple. **Stop preaching the easy message, and start preaching the right one.** Stop exalting us as women and start exalting Christ. And here's the amazing thing about a gospel-centric women's ministry: when all women do is worship Jesus, the insecurities, fears, and anxieties pale in comparison to His everlasting glory.

When our eyes turn to His beauty instead of pandering to ours, insecurities die.

When our ears listen for His voice instead of listening for more about *us*, fear has no place.

When our minds think about who *He* is instead of who *we* are, we find an identity wrapped in eternal purpose.

That's the crazy thing about the gospel: our pre-Jesus ugliness magnifies the beauty of God's love. Only by understanding who we are *apart* from Christ can we live in daily recognition of our beauty *within* Him. We need to be reminded of who *He* is to better understand who *we* are.

So please, stop telling us we're special.

Tell us about Jesus. 🐟



No fear of God in the land

by Peter Pollock

A BRAHAM was in the land of king Abimelech, and on being asked about Sarah, his wife, he told the king “She is my sister.”

So Abimelech took Sarah, but God came to him in the night and said: “Indeed you are a dead man because the woman whom you have taken, she is a man’s wife.” But fortunately Abimelech had not come near her. He had been deceived because even Sarah had said that she was Abraham’s sister. Anyway it was at least a half-truth – “she is the daughter of my father not the daughter of my mother,” explained an embarrassed and apologetic Abraham.

But why did you lie, asked the enraged king. “Because, the fear of God is not in this place.” Yes, Abraham lied because there was no fear of God in the land!

Romans 3:18 says: “There is no fear of God before their eyes,” in a statement that acknowledges this to be the huge problem that it is spiritually. Chaos and anarchy reign when there is no fear of God in the land.

There are consequences. It always just works out that way because God has ordained it so. One of the main reasons why people battle so hard to pray and to be obedient is because there is no recognition of a higher authority in their lives, in their culture or in their environment.

Verbally or outwardly, they might well say all the right words and utter the right protestations and proclamations, but deep down when there is no true acceptance of God’s authority, His awesomeness and His sovereignty, unbelief rules supreme!

Even though people might want to believe, and even acknowledge that they need to believe, when it’s not there as a sincere and honest matter of faith, it’s a massive problem.

In Jeremiah 32:38-40 God talks about His people. I will give them one heart, and one way. That they may fear me forever for their good, and their children’s good. It is an everlasting covenant. I will not turn away from doing them good. I will put my fear in their hearts. They will not depart from Me!

An absence of God in you

It is all part of the “fruit,” “presence” and the “power” of the Holy Spirit in them. So if it is God who puts this “fear” in you then, if it is NOT in you, we must conclude that there is the absence of God in you!

When Jesus comes into a life, that life changes. If there is no change there is no Jesus. In the same way if there is no “fear of God” in you, God’s presence does not abide.

Jeremiah 31:31-33: “I will put my law on their minds, write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they will be my people” That is the New Covenant, as ushered in by the Lord Jesus Christ when He died on the Cross.

God is awesome. So much more awesome than we have allowed ourselves to believe. In many respects we have undermined the awesomeness of God in the modern church and are paying a huge price.

God is immutable, which means that

He does not change, does not have to change or apologise and never makes any mistakes.

God is absolutely meticulous in everything He does – as we glean from the temple details, the genealogies and the accuracy of all the prophecies contained in the Bible.

God’s timing is always perfect. He is in charge, perfectly in control and his “real church.” That “remnant” the Bible so often talks about, is alive and extremely well.

But we must never mix this “real church” up with what we see and experience daily in the material and physical realm. Sadly, there is much misrepresentation and much profane fire and these are all indicators of an outpouring of end-time denial, delusion and deception.

While we should not be surprised when we recognise that there is no fear of God in the land, among the godless and the pagans, it is frustrating and unnerving when we see that this same problem exists even, dare I say it, in the church.

There is no fear of God in much of what is presented as praise and worship and what is paraded as preaching and teaching. Many years ago, as I was awaiting my flight from Perth to Johannesburg and was reading my Bible in the business-class lounge, I was deeply challenged by a Holy Spirit epiphany that I was in fact “playing games!”

In the process of a personal and intimate revelation of the awesomeness of God, I got to understand that while I was not “playing games” intentionally, in the true light of the awesomeness of Almighty

God, I was actually flitting and flirting around with the truth and making my own arrangements in terms of freedom, license and interpretation.

“Playing games” was a profound idiom of comparison – and my life would never be the same again. I, wholly and heartily, needed to accept the challenge to get back to the awesome basics of my faith.

God is a jealous God. He is a consuming fire and I allowed myself to be literally bombarded with all the scriptures that confirmed just that. And there are many, all over the place. Jealous does not mean envious. Jealous, as defined by the dictionary, is “fiercely protective; resentful of rivalry in love and affection and intolerant of disloyalty.” That is my God and Father in heaven!

God is jealous! He is a consuming fire, fiercely protective and possessive of His own. He does not tolerate rivals and His grace is what keeps us acceptable and blessed in Jesus Christ. He does not particularly love what we are but we are acceptable to Him because we are covered by and in the blood of Jesus.

God’s wrath and judgement is upon all that does not come under the protection and authority of His Son. God will not share you with anyone. How incredible is that? How awesome is that? All that bears repeating over and over again. All God wants is everything!

And “woe to him who strives with his Maker,” says Isaiah 45:9. I well remember my early Presbyterian days when, as Sunday school kids, we were, once a month, marched into the main service. We were dressed neatly and did not dare to chat, laugh or get up to any sort of mischief as we ventured on to “holy ground.”

At the start of the service the elders would march in with the Bible and we all stood respectfully. When the pastor read from the gospel, we also stood reverently. And when it came to socialising, a notable absentee was the pastor. He was, after all, God’s man and should not allow himself to be tainted by keeping company with us and our worldly ways.

Maybe it was not all as dire as that, but for me those were my impressions as a young lad brought up in Presbyterian traditions. And I have to thank God for that upbringing, a schooling that left me with no doubt about God’s sovereignty, his awesomeness and that He was to be feared.

I have always been impressed by Psalm 139. “You have searched me and know

me. There is not a word on my tongue but behold, oh Lord, You know it altogether. Where can I go from Your Spirit? You formed my inward parts. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvellous are your works, and that my soul knows very well. Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed and in your book they all were written. The days fashioned for me when as yet there were none of them.”

It never left me that I could hate with a “perfect hatred” and “count as enemies,” those who were opposed to God. Of course, that did not entitle me to be critical and arrogant but it did enhance my conviction about sin, rebellion and anarchy.

“Search me, oh God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Can there be a greater prayer request than that? Proverbs 1:7 is emphatic. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom but fools (unbelievers) despise discipline.

The kindness and the sternness of God is mentioned in Romans 11:22. God is a God of love, mercy, grace, justice, judgement and retribution all at the same time. That is mind-boggling.

All of them all together, at the same time

We find ourselves working through various aspects and concepts of God in our studies and in our seasons as maturing believers, as we quite naturally work on these aspects one at a time.

But God is all of them all together at the same time.

When His kindness is ignored, God is portrayed as a tyrant; when His sternness is ignored, God is portrayed as a doting father. But He is neither. I fear God, but I am not afraid of Him.

It is not a fear taught by the commandments of men – Isaiah 29:13. It is a fear of His awesomeness taught and experienced by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is not a 10 Commandments fear. But if there is no awe, there something is wrong. Something is definitely missing.

“Nobody can know the true grace of God who has not known the fear of God.” So writes A.W. Tozer. The doctrine of love and grace affects the carnal heart not at all. If anything, it merely confirms us in our self-righteousness. Irony, isn’t it?

God raises prophets – true prophets – to witness against sin and sinners, affirming His providence and judgement.

The method is simple. Convict, then comfort. Reveal sin, rebuke sin and then provide a solution. Open the wound and then apply the healing lotion. And the answer always is GET BACK TO GOD!

God loves His own, His Jacobs, as He notes in the book of Malachi. But Esau God hates. God hates sin, paganism, humanism, anarchy and rebellion. God will forever have indignation against wickedness, evil and opposition to Him. God makes distinction, for He is a holy God and holiness is in fact separation unto Him.

My Kingdom is not of this world. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. We are called to be “in” the world but not “of” the world. We do not understand God’s agape love because it is not huggy, smiley, doting love, nor is it happy-clappy, well done, chappy, love.

In the book of Malachi God asks: where is my fear? Social laxity, irreverence and neglect is compared and contrasted to God’s expectations from His Levites who were a portion of the tribe set apart. They were not included in the armies; they had no territorial possessions; they were scattered amongst the tribes; God was their only inheritance and their only job was to keep alive “service” and the “knowledge” of God.


Profane fire is something, too, that offends God. “You expect me to be gracious. I have no pleasure in you or your sacrifices and offerings. Cursed be you.” Yes, that is God speaking.

I am an awesome and Great King, says God. I shall be great amongst the Gentiles. My name is dreadful amongst the heathens. It will be so. God hates sin. He abhors it. His name is to be feared.

We have no right to make Him more acceptable to the world and less demanding regarding His Word. We rob Him when we don’t bring everything into the storehouse. And there is a curse if hearts don’t change.

Lives have to change. Values have to change.

The Gospel of sin, repentance and regeneration has to be preached. The Cross has to be preached. Disciples made. The Great Commission obeyed. We must stop editing God’s Word. We must stop apologizing for Jesus Christ. It’s time to get back to God’s house.

Back on our knees! There needs to be a fear of God. If not in the land, most certainly in the church! 

Shafts of Light 37

by Helen Gardiner

"Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:22-24)."

"... as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy' (1 Peter 1:14-16)."

"Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness (2 Peter 3:11)."

WHAT does 2018 hold? I do not think I have ever had such a clear word from the Lord: personal holiness or sanctification is high on His agenda for this year.

Now I know that sanctification is His work. But He does require our co-operation: our working with Him and not against Him.

There are at present on the earth two groups of sincere Christians: those who believe the Rapture of the Bride is imminent; and those who believe that God is going to move one more time and bring into the Kingdom a mighty harvest of souls.

The first group could well be right. If we read carefully 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, we will see that Jesus could come at any time for His Church. We see the evidence of the falling away from truth and we see the strong delusion. The man of sin has not yet been revealed, but we learn in this passage that the Holy Spirit is restraining the Antichrist. When the Holy Spirit is taken out with the Rapture of the Bride or the wise virgins, that man of perdition will be revealed. This passage in 2 Thessalonians is very simple to understand for us who are like little children.

However, the Bride needs to be ready, co-operating with the Lord's cleaning up process.

Jesus says in Luke 21:36:

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that



will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

So for the first group the word of personal holiness is essential.

For the second group the word is also paramount. If there is going to be a mighty harvest with signs and wonders: healings and deliverances, we as a Church need to be especially set apart, able to move in His authority and anointing. The Church is somewhat powerless at present, because we are not able to move in His authority, because of compromise in our lives.

We need the word of personal holiness.

Old time revivalists walked in holiness. God was able to use them to bring conviction of sin and true repentance. Isaiah 58 promises that when we live a fasted life, His righteousness will go before us and His glory will be our rearguard.

Smith Wigglesworth was one day travelling in a train. He was not witnessing about the Lord, but a man suddenly broke down and said to Wigglesworth, "Sir, you convince me of sin." And soon the whole carriage of people were crying out in the same way.

Charles Finney reckoned that he had the victory over sin – and he was so very powerfully used.

We are told that there will be no superstars in the coming revival, but God's presence will be manifold, expressed through whole bodies of Christians.

So we need to pursue personal holiness, as our love for the Bridegroom increases.

A few weeks back I had a brief vision/dream in the early hours. I found myself seated in an old fishing boat which was

full to the brim with writhing fish. The fact that the boat was an old-fashioned and simple one, tells me that we need to return to the old paths where the good way is, rather than seeking to be modern and relevant.

I do personally believe that Jesus will manifest His glory upon His people who are spread throughout the whole world. Manifestation of His holiness will bring His awesome glory, which will wreak repentance and salvation.

"Arise, shine;

For your light has come!

And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,

And deep darkness the people;

But the Lord will arise over you,

And His glory will be seen upon you.

The Gentiles shall come to your light,

And kings to the brightness of your rising (Isaiah 60:1-3)."



Some other passages which the Lord highlighted to me in a time of seeking His face for this issue, follow:

Psalms 149:4:

"For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation."

We need the call to humility because, as the Bride of Christ matures, she overcomes sin, the world and the Devil. But pride always lies crouching when there is victory. God wants all the glory.

Isaiah 53:7:

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted,

Yet He opened not His mouth;

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,

And as a sheep before its shearers is silent

So He opened not His mouth."

In our walk of becoming like Him; being conformed to His image, we get to partake of suffering. When we are babes in Christ we bleat in pain and protest, but as we grow, we learn to take our sufferings quietly – as He did. Not even telling our spouses or our intercessors.

Hosea 2:16,19&20:

*"And it shall be, in that day," says the Lord.
"That you will call Me "My Husband,"
And no longer call Me "My Master."
I will betroth you to Me forever;
Yes, I will betroth you to Me
In righteousness and justice,
In lovingkindness and mercy;
I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,
And you shall know the Lord."*

We are all called to intimacy with Him: to known and to be known. We need to spend time with Him. We can have as much as we want of Him. The ball is in our courts. We can practise the presence of God by doing everything, as unto Him. So we abide in an intimate place and He becomes our Husband. Verses 19&29 give us a full picture of His character.

Obadiah 17&18a

*"But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness.
The house of Jacob shall be a fire.
And the house of Joseph a flame;
But the house of Esau shall be stubble."*

Years ago, the Lord gave me this Scripture for our local church. We are called Mount Zion Church. There are here wonderful promises for Jacob and Joseph. They were of the same lineage. Jacob was one who wrestled for God's best. Esau gave up his inheritance for a bowl of stew, for which he and his children reap stubble. Who do you relate to?

Matthew 3:11&12:

*"Indeed baptise you with water unto repentance,
but He who is coming after me is mightier than I,
whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will
baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will
thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and
gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn
up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

John the Baptist is talking here. What we need to concern ourselves with is, are we embracing His cleansing fire? Is the chaff being burnt up?

Luke 10:2:

*"Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is
great, but the labourers are few; therefore pray
the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into*

His harvest."

All God's people need to be working with Him. Everyone is called to be a missionary. I recall my vision of the fish in the fishing boat. We need to make disciples, not converts. We are all to be involved with others in the various stages of discipleship. I think evangelists need particularly to be careful that they are not lowering the bar for salvation.

Acts 6:8:

*"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great
wonders and signs among the people."*

I never realised that Stephen personally had done signs and wonders.

Ephesians 4:13:

*"...till we all come to the unity of the faith and
of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect
man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness
of Christ."*

We are still getting there. We can know that the above is God's agenda for 2018.

Philippians 4:4-8&13:

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say,
rejoice!"*

*Let your gentleness be known to all men. The
Lord is at hand.*

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by
prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let
your requests be made known to God; and the
peace of God, which surpasses all understand-
ing, will guard your hearts and minds through
Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are noble,
whatever things are just, whatever things are
pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things
are of good report; if there is any virtue and if
there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on
these things...I can do all things through Christ
who strengthens me."*

I think this passage needs to be our daily recipe for life in 2018. How transformed we will be if this is so.

Hebrews 10:35-39&11:6:

*"Therefore do not cast away your confidence,
which has great reward. For you have need of
endurance, so that after you have done the will
of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a
little while, and He who is coming will come and
will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but
if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure
in him.'*

*But we are not of those who draw back to perdi-
tion, but of those who believe to the saving of the
soul.*

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him,
for he who comes to God must believe that He is,
and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently
seek Him."*

Here we have the call to faith; not to

giving up. God has been giving me this promise for 30 years. I believe it is on the verge of being fulfilled. The years that have passed have increased my faith.

Notice it speaks about the salvation of the soul, which is referring to sanctification: the process of conforming our hearts, our minds and our wills to Him and His purposes and plans.

We are told we cannot please God without faith. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Steep yourself in the Word.

Notice also the promise to the diligent of reward. Salvation is not a reward, but there are rewards.

1 Peter 5:5-11:

*"... Yes, all of you be submissive to one another,
and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the
proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore
humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,
that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your
care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be
vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks
about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may
devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing
that the same sufferings are experienced by your
brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all
grace who called us to His eternal glory by Christ
Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, es-
tablish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the
glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."*

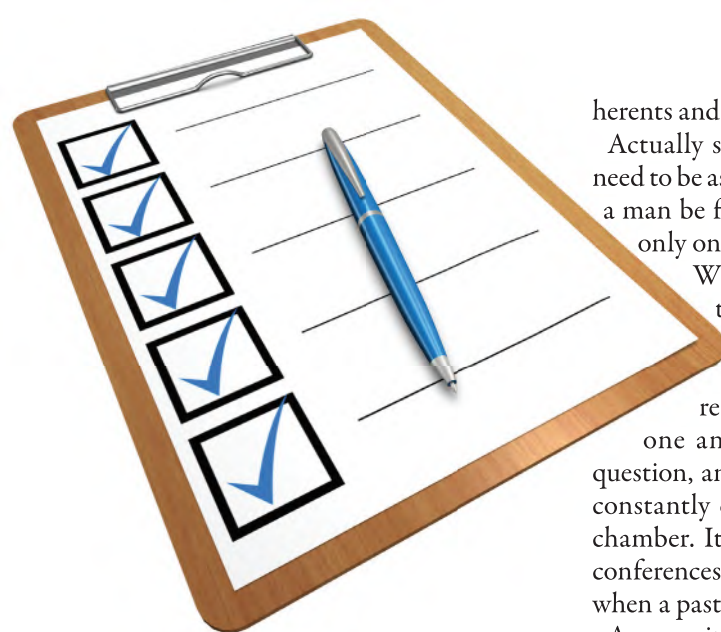
Again the call comes to humility.

Be affirmed in the reality of the war against the Devil. James 5:7b tells us that if we resist the Devil he will flee. It is true that he will flee. Don't give up on your resisting. The passage from 1 Peter is encouraging that God will come through after we have suffered a while. Just know that the Lord is with you in the battles. Psalm 46:1 tells us He is a very present help in trouble. So we can even thank Him for the trouble, because we get to know Him more.

Finally – the last word comes from Psalm 66:8-12. It needs no explanation, just an embracing by faith:

*"Oh, bless our God, you peoples!
And make the voice of His praise to be heard,
Who keeps our soul among the living,
And does not allow our feet to be moved.
For You, O God, have tested us;
You have refined us as silver is refined.
You brought us into the net;
You laid affliction on our backs.
You have caused men to ride over our heads;
We went through fire and through water;
But you brought us out to rich fulfilment."*

Amen. 



The great test: modifying the truth

by A.W. Tozer

THERE is a great decision that every church has to make either at its beginning, or a little later. Eventually every board is faced with the decision and has to keep making it, not by one great decision made once for all, but by a series of little decisions adding up to one great big one.

Every pastor has to face it and keep renewing his decision on his knees before God. Finally, every church member, every evangelist, every Christian has to make this decision. It is a matter of judgement upon that denomination, that church, that board, that pastor, that leader and upon their descendants and spiritual children.

The question is this: Shall we modify the truth in doctrine or practice to gain more adherents? Or shall we preserve the truth in doctrine and practice and take the consequences? If the decision is that we modify the truth and practice of the church, then we are responsible for the consequences, whatever they may be.

God already knows what the consequences are, and history has shown what they are. But if we choose to preserve the truth, then God accepts the responsibility.

Business people have to make that choice in business. Everyone has to make it at income tax time. Students have to make it in school. We have to make it everywhere in our lives as we touch society. Shall we preserve the truth and the practice of the truth, or shall we alter it just comfortably in order to be more popular, gain more ad-

herents and get along easier in the world?

Actually such a question should never need to be asked. It is like asking, "Should a man be faithful to his wife?" There is only one answer to that question.

When we ask, "Shall we preserve the truth and practice of the church, or shall we modify it for immediate and visible results?" we ought to have only one answer. It is not a debatable question, and yet it is one that has to be constantly debated in the secret prayer chamber. It is constantly debated when conferences meet, when boards meet and when a pastor must make a decision.

A commitment to preserving the truth and practice of the church is what separates me from a great many people who are perhaps far greater than I am in ability. This is my conviction, long held and deeply confirmed by a knowledge of the fact that modern gospel churches, almost without exception, have decided to modify the truth and practice a little in order to have more adherents and get along better.

When we make a decision to modify the truth, we bring the consequences of that choice upon ourselves. What have the consequences been?

One has been an absence of a spirit of worship in the church. Many people do not even know what is meant by a spirit of worship. That is tragic. I wish God would either change things a little or give me a sight of His glory among His people. I admit that sometimes I feel like the man of God who said, "And I said, Oh that I had wings, like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah (Psalm 55:6&7)."

Many of the Lord's people do not know what you mean when you mention a spirit of worship in the church. They are poor victims of boards, churches, denominations and pastors who have made the noble decision to modify the truth and practice a little. But God responded, "If you do, I will withdraw from you the spirit of worship. I will remove your candlestick."

A second consequence is the absence of spiritual desire. How many people do you know who are all burnt up with spiritual desire and longing after God? How many have tears of eagerness in their eyes when you talk to them? How many say, "Oh, that I might know God better!"

Our fathers had spiritual desire, and they spent days with God.

A third result is coldness of heart, which is similar to an absence of spiritual desire. Once you have been baptised with the fire of inward longing, you will never be satis-

fied with coldness of heart.

G. Campbell Morgan, the great English preacher, went to Wales to see the Welsh revival and then came back to Westminster Chapel. What he saw in Wales so moved the great expositor that he got up and roundly lectured his audience. In effect he said, "You are a cold bunch. You don't even sing warmly; you don't even sing right." Morgan had heard the Welsh sing – they sang the Psalms and nothing else.

A man would get up to preach, and in the audience somebody would raise a psalm and off the whole congregation would go, singing a psalm. The preacher would have to sit down in confusion. God had never told him to preach anyhow, and he knew it. Then two or three people would get down on their knees and get converted – no altar calls; they just got converted where they were. The fire of God would fall upon them everywhere.

Those people had warmth of heart. But we do not have it because we have made the ignoble decision that we would rather compromise a little bit on truth and practice.

A fourth consequence is the lack of the spirit of prayer. No child is born until there is labour. When Evan Roberts, whom God used to start the great Welsh revival, was in a prayer meeting somebody said to him, "Evan, never miss a prayer meeting, because the one you miss may be the one when the Holy Spirit falls." So Evan never missed a prayer meeting.

One night when he was on his knees the Holy Spirit fell upon him, and he began to pray, "Oh God, bend me, bend me, bend me." Another man was praying, and Evan did not want to break in. Roberts described the experience, "I waited for the other man to get through, but it seemed he would never get through; he prayed on and on. Finally, he tapered off and petered out and said, 'Amen.'"

Evan began to pray, and the place was shaken with his prayer. From there on the revival in Wales was under way.

Now that is the spirit of prayer. When the spirit of prayer falls on people, God answers their prayer and things are done. When a spirit of prayer is not on us, we just mumble on endlessly. But when the spirit of prayer is on us, the Spirit praying in us to the God above us will get things done around us.

A fifth consequence of modifying the truth is that there is no sense of God's presence in the average church. I get around quite a bit, but I do not go into many places where I find the sense of

God's presence. There are almost no answers to prayer and almost no divine manifestations. This leads to the deadliest consequence of all: the absence of saintliness.

There are a few saints around who are so sold out to God that you could not keep them still. They are always coming up with something, and you know that they have been in the presence of the Lord. They live their faith regularly and consistently. Everything they do is congruous with everything they testify to.

It is the will of God that we should be burnt with spiritual desire. We should be singing, "Oh Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord, forgive me if I say, for very love Thy precious name a thousand times a day." We would not be singing hypocritically – we would mean it.

It is God's will that we should have no coldness of heart. The difference between coldness of heart and warmth of heart is the difference between being in love and not being in love. When a person loves deeply, whether someone of the opposite sex or a baby or a child, it warms the affections.

God wants us to have warm hearts, and He wants us to have a spirit of prayer so prayer is effective. Most prayer is like forever turning a key on a dead battery, and the starter does not even whine. Turn the key for 20 minutes saying, "Our Lord and our Father..." 29 times, and there is still not a buzz.

God does not want us to pray like that. He wants a spirit of prayer to be on the people. You can have that spirit of prayer. He wants to answer your prayer, and He wants the sense of His presence to be upon you. Always remember one thing: When the Spirit of the Lord comes, that is the presence, and you have that presence. God does want to manifest Himself.

Our eagerness to be proper, never get out of order and never have anything fanatical happen continues until nothing happens at all. There is no divine manifestation, and there is an absence of saintliness. Yet God wants us to know His presence and exhibit saintliness.

There must come a reformation, a revival that will result in a fresh emphasis on neglected truth. I do not preach any new truth. I do not have a new doctrine, and if anybody would come here preaching a new doctrine, I would say, "I'm sorry, but we already have our doctrine." I would not allow that preacher in the pulpit. We do not want new doctrine – we want fresh emphasis on doctrine already well known by all of us.

We must have a revival that will mean purity of heart as a normal standard for everybody. We must be clean people, and not only clean outside. Average evangelicals do not smoke, and because they do not, they feel they are doing God's service. Thank God they do not smoke – that is a start toward clean living. But purity of heart goes deeper.

Purity is taken for granted

Purity of heart is taken for granted, yet we must have it to be clean people. Even in my lifetime I can well remember that when people lost their tempers they had to go to an altar and get cleansed. People knew they were out of victory and were not right with God. People were supposed to have a pure heart. We need and must have a revival that will mean divine energy to give our Christian witness power.

"But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me (Acts 1:8)." It is frustrating to talk to people about the Lord and not get anywhere at all, to not have any power at all.

In addition to becoming people with clean hearts, we must become a fellowship where there are frequent answers to prayer and the calling out of Christian missionaries and preachers. I would like to see our young people feel the call of God on them until they have to leave us and begin preaching. I would like to see the Spirit of God move upon us until our young people cannot afford to sit and figure out who they are going to marry and when. That will come in its time, but they will be thinking, *Where can I serve God?*

A man I knew during World War II was something of an oddball in temperament. I never thought he would amount to very much. He went off to the war, was wounded and was tumbling over a cliff. He would have fallen to his death below. Before he went over he said, "I am called to Ethiopia."

As he was tumbling and sliding slowly toward certain death, he knew he was called to Ethiopia. A great big old tough sergeant saw him, grabbed him as he was going over and hauled him back, and he recovered. He came back after the war but nobody wanted him; he did not have the proper schooling. Finally, a well-known missionary society sent him to Ethiopia. He went over there and has been preaching there ever since.

I believe we desperately need revival and reformation to come. In Exodus they came to the end of 400 years of Israel's defeat. I read of Hezekiah, the son of an

evil father, Ahaz, who had brought Israel to the lowest moral condition that it had been in for a long time. Ahaz died and his son Hezekiah reigned in his stead.

Hezekiah was a holy man and sought God immediately. He threw the dirt out of the temple and sent word throughout all Israel and said, "Come to the meeting." Israel began to be blessed. They cleansed the temple and started the fires again (see 2 Chronicles 29.) The first thing they knew they had a revival on their hands.

It was also Hezekiah who prayed when Sennacherib came down like a wolf on a foal with his cohorts all gleaming in purple and gold. It was under Hezekiah that the breath of the Lord smote those thousands and delivered Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 32:1-23.)


When the Israelites returned from Babylon God spoke to a man who cared, a man with a concern, who was cupbearer to the king. The king said, "What's the matter with you? You haven't been gloomy like this before." Nehemiah responded, "Your majesty, pardon me please, but I can't help it. My heart is broken. My father's city is in rubble and the foxes run over the walls. The glorious temple where we used to worship Jehovah has been razed to the ground and the religion of Israel is gone into decay."

King Artaxerxes, not knowing that God was working in his life, said, "You go back to rebuild Jerusalem." That was the beginning of the return from Babylon.

Since Bible times we have had these periods of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. I just happened to notice a comment in a book I was reading today on this subject. The writer said, "God added a postscript to that." Here it is: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches; To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7)."

Everyone has a private battle going on, a private fight. You are in the midst of a wicked and adulterous generation, but you have got to overcome. He who overcame indicates that you also can overcome, but He indicates that not all do.

You can overcome your own flesh, which will be the hardest. You can overcome tradition and custom, which will be the second hardest. You can overcome all things. "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (2:7)."

The world is waiting to hear an authentic voice, a voice from God – not an echo of what others are doing and saying, but an authentic voice. 



Seven lies I once believed about missions

by Conrad Mbewe

THE work of missions is one of the most important that any church can engage in. It is the responsibility of every Christian. We are either supposed to go into the mission field or we should be supporting those who have gone with our prayers and our finances.

This is because our God is a God of missions. That is what the whole Bible is about. It is God's agenda. Whereas I knew this from the time I became a Christian, somehow the penny never quite dropped that I should put this into practice both as a Christian and later as a church pastor.

How come? It is because we are all creatures of our own day. We live with many unconscious beliefs that dictate our priorities and how we relate to situations in life.

I once had presuppositions that made me conclude that, at least for now, the work of missions was none of my business. Looking back, I realise that those unconscious beliefs were all lies. There were many of them but, at the risk of embarrassing myself, let me share with you seven of them.

Many fellow African Christians may find themselves making similar confessions.

Lie 1: We Africans were at the end of the process of missions

I always believed in missions. However, somewhere at the back of my mind I was of the unconscious belief that I was at the finishing end of the factory-line of missions.

Other people had brought the gospel to me and to my people. Our task here in Africa was simply that of evangelising our own people. That was all.

Hence, in our prayer meetings we prayed for our evangelistic programmes. In our scheduling we only planned for evangelistic activities. In our budgeting we set aside funds for evangelistic trips and tracts.

There was no sense of guilt that we rarely ever prayed for actual missionaries by name. Prayer meetings came and went without a single cry to God to raise up missionaries from among us. And we had nothing in our annual church planner and budget that was to do directly with missions work. It was all about neighbourhood evangelism, which was to result in our own church's growth.

Lie 2: Missionaries were "white people"

To me, missionaries were from Europe

or America. They were "white-skinned" men and women. That fitted the pictures and paintings of missionaries that I was brought up seeing in books. William Carey, David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, Stanley Moffat, Olive Doke, and Mary Slessor were all "*muzungus*."

It also fitted what I saw as I visited mission stations around the country as a young believer. I made friends with a number of them. They were all "white people." Whenever it was announced that a missionary would share in our church about the work they were doing, a "white-skinned" man or woman would stand up and go to the front to speak.

That stereotype remained in my subconscious mind. I ended up with the unconscious belief that a black man like me was not in that category.

Lie 3: Missionaries were extraordinary people

The little I knew about the life of a missionary convinced me that these were men and women who were a notch above ordinary mortals like me.

I thought they probably heard an audible voice telling them to leave the comforts

of their world to go and spend the rest of their lives in the jungles of Africa among ferocious beasts and unpredictable tribal chiefs or in Islamic and Communist countries where upon being discovered they would face certain death.

I was convinced that missionaries possessed super human strength and courage. I admired them the way I admired Marvel's Captain America, Iron Man, and Spiderman.

Since I knew that I was an ordinary mortal who almost collapses at the sight of a spider and I also knew my church members were of the same ilk, I was of the unconscious opinion that we did not have men and women among us who could be missionaries.

So, I never bothered to challenge our people to seriously consider going into the work of missions. Never!

Lie 4: Those who supported missions had a lot of money

I was convinced that God did not expect my church or me to give finances towards missions because only Christians and churches with plenty of money did such a thing. And I thought such Christians and churches were only found in America and Europe.

I did not realise that many individuals and churches that were giving to missions in the West were doing so out of their poverty.

They were doing so primarily because they saw it not as an optional extra to their Christian lives but as an intrinsic part of it. Some of them were students who had to forgo perhaps a meal a day in order to give the money they could have spent on that meal to the work of missions.

In other words, I did not realise that we, too, could and were obligated to support the work of missions financially while we were struggling to make ends meet.

Lie 5: We must support a missionary's total budget

This was another barrier to my involvement in missions. I always thought that a single church must have all the money needed to support a missionary's total budget before they can get involved in supporting missions work.

Since our church could not do so, I assumed God was leaving us out of this obligation.

It was not until I got close enough to individual Western missionaries that I realised that many of them get "bits-and-

pieces" from different churches and from different Christians to meet their needs on the mission field.

Sometimes some churches and individuals drop off and they have to get back home to raise further support. In this way, even small struggling churches and poor Christians could participate in missions.

Missions work is a joint effort where we all must contribute our little to make it happen!

Lie 6: Only churches with missionaries should pray for them

I thought that only those churches that have actually sent out missionaries are expected to pray for missionaries by name. After all, they have seen them grow up among them, get married, and even begin raising a family. So, they know them very well.

For the rest of us it was enough to simply pray generally for "the advancement of God's kingdom through the work of missions." Thus, even when I visited churches in the USA and heard them praying specifically for missionaries by name and sharing about the circumstances they were going through, I concluded, "They must have been members here and are now serving abroad."

It never dawned on me that some of them were never members in those churches but that churches in the West tend to adopt and support missionaries sent out by sister churches.

Lie 7: It is not yet time for us to get involved in missions

This was the final lie, which was a result of the cumulative effect of the smaller lies mentioned above. We were not "white" people and did not have a lot of money.

None of our members showed extraor-

dinary faith and courage. Therefore, it was not yet time for us to get involved in missions.

We must keep the best of our young adults in good well-paying jobs to add to our numbers and funds.

Our church prayer meetings should rightly concentrate only on our evangelism. One day it will be our turn, but that is somewhere in the distant future. The application of the Great Commission to us in Africa is simply that we continue to evangelise. What a BIG lie!

Conclusion

These seven lies and many more shut my eyes to the obligation that I had as an African Christian and pastor towards the work of missions for a number of years.

How else could I have missed the fact that we are called to fulfil the Great Commission even as African believers and that this goes beyond reaching out to our neighbourhood?

I am glad that my eyes have since been opened and as a result our church and its members are engaged in the work of missions – sending out missionaries to plant churches, raising funds to support them, and praying for them by name every week in our prayer meetings.

I could kick myself for taking so long to see the light. Yet, when I talk with fellow pastors in Africa about missions I notice the same false beliefs that I once had in many of them.

These are unconscious beliefs that are betrayed by a lack of actual action. They agree with me in theory that the work of missions is important but they remain inactive about it.

The cumulative effect of these lies causes them to think, "It is not yet time for us to get involved in missions."

I will not throw the first stone because sadly I was once in their shoes. 🐟

**The true glory of life is
not to gain but to give,
not to seek from others
but to offer them service
which costs us something
in the sacrifice of our own
desires, and in the comfort
of our own lives.**



RECON

by T.A. McMahon

“And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight (Colossians 1:20-22).”
“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).”

THERE are a number of things that God our Creator desires for His created humanity, and certainly at the top of that list is reconciliation. First and foremost, He wants His created beings, all of whom have been separated from Him through sin, to be brought into fellowship with Him.

That separation began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. The penalty was death (Genesis 2:17) – spiritual death, immediately, and physical death, eventually. In both cases death involved eternal separation (Matthew 25:41).

Scripture tells us that all have sinned, a fact that no one can honestly deny, although the attempts are widespread. Yet the Bible reveals mankind’s condition with absolute clarity:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Romans 5:12);”
“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).”

The consequences of sin are likewise given: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:2).”

The penalty for sin is eternal, therefore the reconciliation must be eternal:

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12).”

Reconciliation with humanity’s Creator is impossible for a man or a woman to achieve through his or her own efforts. Why? Divine justice demands that the

penalty must be paid and the penalty is infinite – endless. Finite humanity itself cannot bring about reconciliation by satisfying divine justice because the punishment is without end, i.e., “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:8&9).”

What is impossible for man, however, is possible for God (Mark 10:27).

Jesus, who is God, and who became a man – a perfect, sinless man – could (and did) pay the eternal penalty for all of mankind.

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).”

“But we see Jesus... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).”

As God, He could experience and pay that eternal penalty; as Man, He could die physically – all of which He did on the cross. Although His complete payment for the sins of humanity is beyond our ability to comprehend, Scripture proves that the reality of His atonement is undeniable. Christ’s final words as He hung on the cross are both clear and certain: “It is finished.”

Paid in full

The Greek term used for “finished” is *tetelestai*. One lexicon explains: “The word *tetelestai* was also written on business documents or receipts in New Testament times to show that a bill had been paid in full... The connection between receipts and what Christ accomplished would have been quite clear to John’s Greek-speaking readership; it would be unmistakable that Jesus Christ had died to pay for their sins.”

Christ’s sacrifice for all has only one requirement in order to bring about reconciliation between God and every human being. His death, burial, and resurrection according to the Scriptures must be believed and received as Christ’s payment for a person’s sins.

Faith alone brings about God’s free gift of salvation, and anything added to that is a rejection of Christ’s unfathomable gift that brings about reconciliation.

As I said, being reconciled to God is first and foremost. What then of reconciliation in our personal lives with others once the “first and foremost” takes place?

“And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us

the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).”

That ministry, which all believers have been given, has to do with simply explaining the good news of the gospel to everyone with whom God provides the opportunity. Sharing the good news of the gift of eternal life that we have freely received should be one of the easiest things for Christians to do but, sadly, too many believers are reluctant to do it.

There’s another aspect of reconciliation that some Christians find terribly difficult, and it has to do with our personal relationships.

Scripture gives us instructions and commands regarding how we, as believers, are to effect reconciliation in our relationships.

Matthew 5:23&24 gives us a sense of the priority of personal reconciliation with others before God:

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there rememberest that your brother has ought against you; Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

It seems that God won’t accept one’s service to Him when we are at the same time disobedient to His commands.

Obviously, reconciliation between individuals is very important to God and examples are found throughout the Bible. The brothers Jacob and Esau were reconciled (Genesis 33:4).

After terrorizing believers, Saul, *aka Paul*, was accepted by those Christians whom he had terrorised!

The Corinthians separated themselves from the young man who had his father’s wife, but after he repented he was reconciled to them. Regarding that situation, Paul wrote:

“This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:6&7).”

Paul’s letter to Philemon consists primarily of his exhortation to receive back his escaped slave Onesimus. Paul himself had issues with John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, which caused Paul to separate himself from him. However, those issues must have been resolved, for Paul later declared, “Take Mark, and bring him with you: for he is profitable to me for the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).”

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to reconciliation among believers is reluctance, even refusal, to forgive an offending individual. That’s why the Lord, knowing the heart of man, underscores the necessity of forgiveness throughout the Scriptures.

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven

CILIATION

(Matthew 18:21&22).”

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses (Mark 11:25&26).”

So what are the factors that prevent us from obeying the commands of God’s Word? Pride... self... our old nature... to name a few. Because pride is a major factor, it keeps us from availing ourselves of God’s grace, because “God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5).”

Who is ever eager to admit that he or she is to blame – or willing to reconcile when not guilty?

God’s way

All of the things that keep us from reconciling with others can be overcome by simply doing what the Scriptures tell us to do. If we’re willing to do things God’s way, He’ll enable us to obey Him.

If that sounds too simple, let’s consider a few ideas that might help a person to turn from his own way to God’s way. Although those justifications shouldn’t be necessary, the examples are much like the deterrents listed in the Bible itself, warning readers of the dire consequences of disobedience.

Just what is to be gained by being *unwilling* to reconcile or forgive? Nothing good! It’s all about self. But pride blinds one to the fact that unwillingness to forgive is self-destructive. Rarely does it have an effect on the person against whom the grudge is held.

For many who refuse to reconcile, it conjures up feelings that feed their prideful sense of superiority. Yet Proverbs 12:1 calls the person who rejects biblical instruction and correction brutish, or stupid. Furthermore, the longer such feelings are sustained, the easier it will be for a root of bitterness to take hold. At the very least, a bad attitude will prevail, affecting others, especially the family members who have to live with the individual.

So we see that nothing is gained, but much is lost.

Worst of all, refusing to reconcile injures a believer’s relationship with the Lord. God certainly does not change or go back on His declaration that He will never leave nor forsake a believer (Hebrews 13:5), but those who disobey God will hardly draw closer to Him! By choosing their own way, they’re in the process of drifting away from Him (Hebrews 2:1; Revelation 2:4), or worse.

Verses such as Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:12&13 are not suggestions but rather commands that must be obeyed:

“And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving

one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.”

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”

Those who claim to be believers but refuse to comply need to take to heart the admonition given by Jesus:

“And why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say (Luke 6:46)?”

Throughout the Word of God believers are exhorted to deny themselves, putting Christ first and then others:

“And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:14&15).”

“Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself (Romans 15:23).”

“Love does not seek its own (1 Corinthians 13:5).”

“Walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).”

An unforgiving heart stands in direct opposition to those verses and many more.

In my four decades of being a biblical Christian, I had to learn about reconciliation the hard way, which meant through my own experiences rather than by simply obeying what the Scriptures clearly present. I lost a number of friends during that time for a number of reasons, whether through what I did, or said, or wrote.

It never brought reconciliation

Early on, my approach was to engage them in communication, mostly to defend myself, regardless of whether or not I was at fault. That attitude never brought about reconciliation, even when I made my case using scriptural support. More often than not, it worsened the relationship.

So what did I learn? I needed to do what the Word of God commanded.

When convicted of my own wrong in a situation, I needed to repent of whatever it was and try to make amends.

What about when I wasn’t at fault, or when I was biblically correct in what I had written, but a brother took offence? I would often respond in order to better

explain my point of view or to clarify what I had written that would provide a better understanding.

It appeared to be the right thing to do, as long as I could make *reconciliation* my goal rather than my *defence* of myself. But even when I did what I could to reconcile, rarely did my attempts meet with success, at least for a while.

What I learned over the years helped, however. First of all, it takes two to reconcile. Both parties must be willing to obey the Bible’s teachings and do things God’s way, which may involve the instructions found in Matthew 18.

If, however, I’m willing but the other person is not, we can’t be reconciled. That doesn’t excuse me from doing all I can to obey God’s Word regarding the matter. To not do so doesn’t please the Lord, nor does it help to bring about the possibility of a resolution to the situation.

What I’ve also learned is that when I’ve attempted to dispute the issues of disagreement, no matter how meekly, more often than not I’ve unintentionally created obstacles that thwart resolution.

On the other hand, I have experienced a few truly miraculous reconciliations!

How did they happen? I believe they were all helped by my getting out of the Lord’s way, meaning that I stopped defending myself. Instead, I turned the circumstances over to God, doing what His Word said, with His help, and committed those situations to continual prayer.

It was the Lord who turned the hearts of those in opposition toward reconciliation, which only He could do. As it says in 2 Timothy 2:25 regarding those in opposition, “if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.”

God knows everyone’s heart and what needs to be done to effect change, which only He can do. Others, however, cannot know or do anything about our hearts, but they can see how we as Christians handle things.

God’s Word instructs us to “not be wise in your own conceits,” not repaying “evil for evil,” but rather do good to others “in the sight of all men” striving to “live peaceably (Romans 12:16-18).”

That’s God’s way, and anyone who wants to experience peace in his own life but has departed from God’s way must begin the reconciliation process first and foremost with Him. ☞



The Wrath of God

Is it a myth or a reality?

by Dr David R. Reagan

BACK in the mid-1990s, a popular radio talk show host on an Oklahoma City secular station interviewed me live on the air via telephone.

Everything went well until the host asked me to summarise the fundamental message of my ministry. I responded by saying that God had called me to proclaim “the soon return of Jesus in wrath.”

Before I could proceed with my explanation, the announcer cut me short. “What do you mean, ‘wrath?’” he asked.

“I mean that Jesus is going to return very soon to pour out the wrath of God upon those who have rejected God’s love and grace and mercy.”

“Your God is a monster God!” he snapped. He then added, “I happen to be a Christian, and I can tell you that my God wouldn’t hurt a flea!”

That was the end of the interview. I was not given an opportunity to respond to his misrepresentation of our Creator.

The radio host’s vehement response to the wrath of God did not surprise me. It is characteristic of both Christians and non-Christians, and I have encountered it many times.

Satan has sold the world a bill of goods concerning the nature of God. Most people, both Christian and non-Christian, tend to view God as being a sort of Cosmic Teddy Bear.

They see Him as big and warm and soft, full of infinite love and forgiveness. He couldn’t hurt a fly, and He certainly wouldn’t be so cruel as to condemn or harm any beings created in His own image.

On the Day of Judgement, God will simply give everyone a big hug and wink at their sins. The only problem with this wonderfully comforting image is that it is a lie straight from the pit of Hell.

Yes, the Bible teaches that God is loving, patient, caring, and forgiving (Psalm 86:15 and John 3:16). As the apostle John put it,

“God is love (1 John 4:8).”

Two of my favourite passages in the Bible emphasize the personal loving nature of God. One was penned by the apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 5:6&7 he says that we are to cast all our anxieties upon God “because He cares for you.” That is a very comforting thought.

The other passage that I love to read over and over consists of words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:22-24, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in Him.’”

But the Bible also clearly teaches that there is another aspect of God’s character that is equally important. It is the aspect that Satan wants us to ignore, and he has been very successful in prompting ministers to overlook it. After all, it doesn’t produce popular sermons! I’m speaking, of course, of the holiness of God (Leviticus 11:44, Isaiah 6:3 and 1 Peter 1:16).

The Bible teaches that God is perfectly holy. Because of this attribute of His character, He cannot tolerate sin (Numbers 14:18). The Bible says God must deal with sin, and He does so in one of two ways – either grace or wrath.

All of us seem to know John 3:16 – a very comforting verse about God’s love for us. But few of us seem to be aware of the words recorded a few verses later in John 3:36 – words taken from a sermon by John the Baptist: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

The apostle Paul emphasised this point in his preaching and teaching. In Ephesians 5 he warns against immorality, covetousness, and idolatry, and then he adds this observation: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the

sons of disobedience (Ephesians 5:6).”

We come under God’s grace by placing our faith in Jesus and appropriating His atoning sacrifice for our lives (1 John 1:7). There is no salvation apart from Jesus (Acts 4:10-12). Those who have rejected God’s free gift of grace in Jesus are under God’s wrath (John 3:36), and they have no one to blame but themselves.

Despite the Bible’s clear teaching that our Creator is a God of both love and wrath, I never cease to be amazed at the number of pastors I run across who argue that the God of wrath is the Old Testament God and not the God of the New Testament. In the process they ignore another clear teaching of the Bible that is found in Malachi 3:6 where God, speaking of Himself, says, “I, the Lord do not change...”

The New Testament confirms this important point in Hebrews 13:8 where it says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.”

Nonetheless, Jesus seems always to be presented in sermons as the meek and gentle Saviour who is full of grace and forgiveness. That statement is true – but it is not the full picture.

Jesus castigated the Pharisees, calling them “hypocrites,” “serpents” and a “brood of vipers.”

Likewise, in His letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, Jesus condemned the church at Thyatira for tolerating a false prophetess. He called upon the church to repent, and then He warned that if they refused to repent of their immorality, He would cast the offenders “upon a bed of sickness,” killing them with pestilence (Revelation 2:22&23).

The Bible reveals several different aspects of the wrath of God:

***Consequential Wrath** – This is what might be called “sowing and reaping wrath.” It is the wrath we bring upon ourselves when we reap what we sow through

sinful living.

***Cataclysmic Wrath** – As evidenced in disasters, either natural or man-made, like the 9/11 attacks. God allows these as a way of calling people and nations to repentance.

***Abandonment Wrath** – The wrath exhibited by God when He turns His back on a person or a society, allowing self-destruction.

***Eschatological Wrath** – The wrath God will unleash on all the world during the Great Tribulation.

***Eternal Wrath** – The ultimate punishment God will inflict upon those who are consigned to Hell.

God's wrath of abandonment is what America is experiencing today.

In Romans chapter 1, the Apostle Paul strongly warns of God's wrath of abandonment concerning nations. He asserts that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18)..." He then proceeds to tell how God does this when dealing with a nation that is in rebellion against Him.

First, God steps back and lowers the hedge of protection around the nation, allowing evil to multiply. The result is an outbreak of sexual sin (Romans 1:24&25), which is what happened in the 1960s.

If the nation refuses to repent, God takes a second step back and lowers the hedge even further (Romans 1:26&27), producing a plague of homosexuality. Again, America has experienced this second phase ever since the 1990s, but it gained momentum in 2003 when our Supreme Court struck down all sodomy laws.

If the nation persists in its rebellion, God will take a third step back and abandon the nation to "a depraved mind (Romans 1:28)." This depravity was manifested in America when our Supreme Court sanctioned same-sex marriage in June, 2015 – and our President celebrated the decision by having the White House lit up in the rainbow colours of the Sexual Perversion Movement.

God's eschatological wrath will fall on all the world when Jesus returns (Jude 1:14&15). The passage in Revelation which pictures the return of Jesus says that He will return in righteousness to "judge and wage war (Revelation 19:11)."

The first time Jesus came, He came in loving compassion with eyes filled with tears. But when He returns, He will come in vengeance (Revelation 6:12-17), with eyes like a flame of fire (Revelation 19:12). He will come to destroy the enemies of

God (Revelation 19:11).

The presidents and kings and prime ministers of the world will get on their knees and cry out for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, so great will be the terror of the Lord (Revelation 6:15-17). The unrighteous will stumble about like blind men, and their blood will be poured out like dust (Zephaniah 1:17).

Does this make God a "monster?" No! On the contrary, it proves His goodness, for how could a good God ignore the evil of sin and allow it to go unpunished? His wrath against evil will demonstrate His righteousness.

The prophet Nahum summed it up best. Writing of the love of God, he said, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him (Nahum 1:7)." But a few verses earlier (2&3) Nahum had also spoken of the holiness and wrath of God: "A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished..."

God's wrath is never motivated primarily by a desire to punish. Rather, it is designed to bring people to repentance so that they might be saved. Even in His wrath, God remembers mercy.

Mercy in wrath

God demonstrates His mercy in wrath by never pouring out His wrath without warning. He tried to warn Sodom and Gomorrah through Abraham. He warned Noah's world through the preaching of Noah for 120 years. He sent both Jonah and Nahum to warn the pagan city of Nineveh.

Consider, too, how He sent prophet after prophet to call the nations of Israel and Judah to repentance (2 Chronicles 36:15&16).

God's mercy in wrath is also manifested in the fact that He always leads up to His final outpouring of wrath through a series of progressive judgements. These remedial judgments are outlined in detail in Deuteronomy 28:15-57.

This characteristic of God's wrath is demonstrated in the prophecies concerning the Tribulation. Rather than simply pouring out His wrath on the rebellious nations of the world, destroying them in one instant of overwhelming catastrophe, He subjects the world to a series of judgements that sequentially increase in scope and intensity (Revelation 6,8&9,16).

Although most people refuse to repent in response to these judgments (Revelation 9:20&21), there is "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" who do repent and respond to Jesus in faith (Revelation 7:9).

These radically different responses to the wrath of God illustrate the point that was often made by Billy Graham: "The same sun that melts the butter also hardens the clay." The wrath of God melts some hearts in repentance, but it has the effect of hardening the hearts of many others.

Many Christians respond negatively to Bible prophecy. It's not at all unusual to hear a Christian say something like this: "I don't want to hear anything about prophecy because it's too full of gloom and doom."

Well, there is a lot of gloom and doom for those who refuse to respond to God's gift of love in Jesus. But there is only good news for the Redeemed!

The Old Testament ends with a passage that presents both the gloom and the joy of end-time prophecy. Malachi says that when the Lord returns, the day will be "like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff (Malachi 4:1)." That's the bad news.

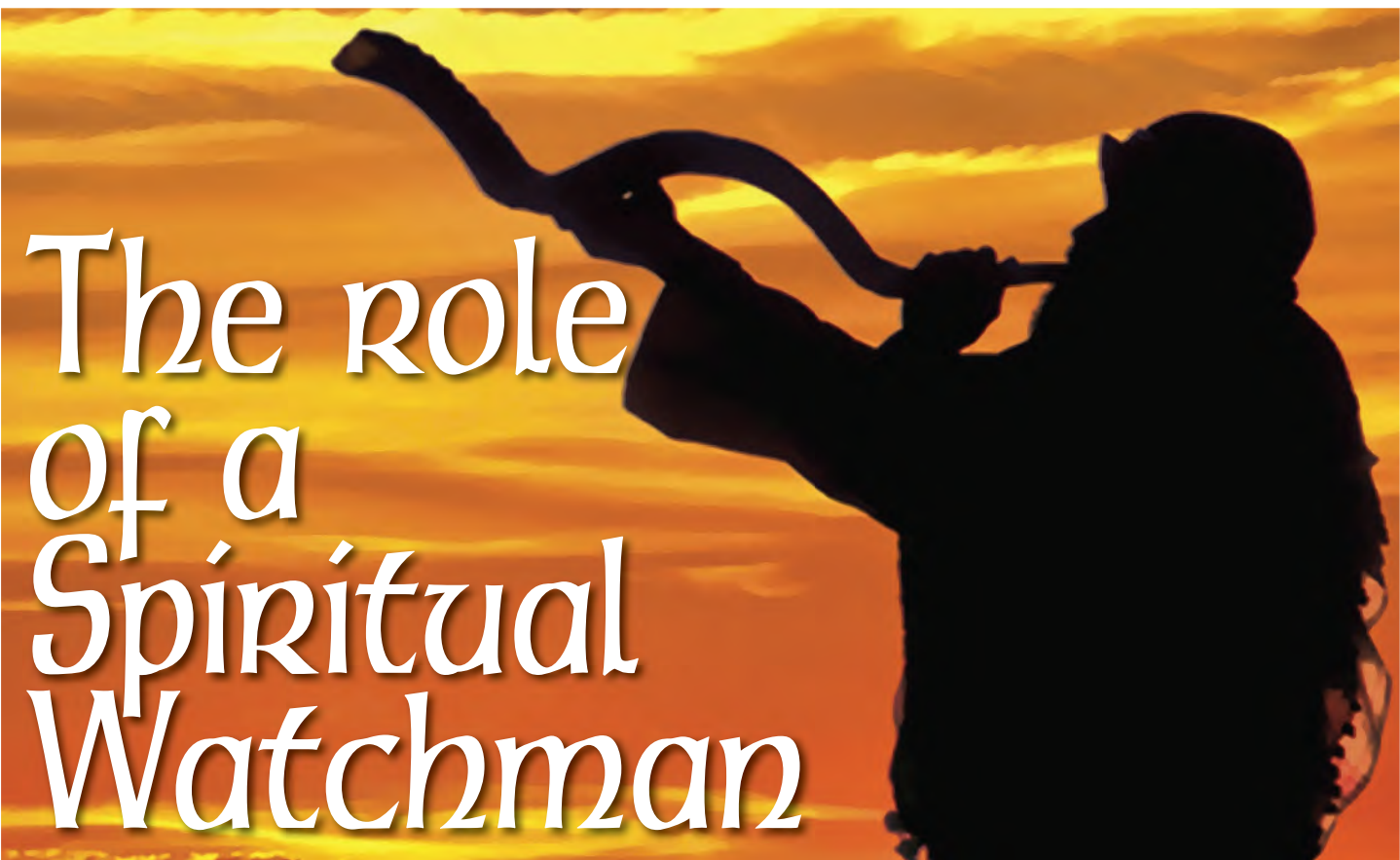
But consider the good news: "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall (Malachi 4:2)."

There is no reason for any child of God to fear the wrath of God. Paul wrote that since we have been justified by the blood of Christ, "we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Romans 5:9)." And in a most comforting verse, Paul told the Thessalonians that Jesus will "deliver" the Redeemed "from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10)." The reason, Paul explained, is that "God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9)."

Are you under grace or wrath? The choice is yours. Jesus is coming soon. When He appears, will He be your Blessed Hope or your Holy Terror?

God loves you and He wants you to accept His Son as your Saviour so that you will come under grace and can participate in an event that will occur when Jesus returns (Isaiah:35:10):

*"And the ransomed of the Lord will return
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
With everlasting joy upon their heads.
They will find gladness and joy,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away."*



The role of a Spiritual Watchman

by Henry Blackaby

EVERY believer is called to be a spiritual watchman to some degree in his or her prayer life. It may be a watchman upon the walls of your family, or the walls of your church or your city, or God may entrust you with being a spiritual watchman on the walls of the nation. Some may have a more advanced calling in this aspect of their prayer life.

A spiritual watchman is one who has been uniquely equipped by God to see.

In Matthew 13 God says that every believer has been given eyes to see and ears to hear. But a watchman has to be equipped by God to see what others do not see and he has a unique capacity to see when the enemy is invading. The enemy comes disguised, but a spiritual watchman is very alert and blows the trumpet and gives a sound so that family members can be quickly warned and not destroyed.

Or he may be given spiritual eyes to see something that is happening in the life of the church. The watchman suddenly realises that something has come in and there is turmoil and dissension and conflict.

A watchman doesn't just see and observe or hear. A watchman blows the trumpet. The watchman sounds the note: the enemy is approaching! Or, the enemy has slipped in!

In history, the watchman on the walls carried with him the safety of the entire

city. The city could sleep at night knowing the watchman was on the wall. If they, with the uniqueness of their sight and hearing, noticed that the enemy was creeping up to the wall, they could blow the trumpet, or the Scripture in Joel says, "lift up the ram's horn" and let the sound go out and give the warning so the people could ready themselves and not be taken unawares.

Let me give you an illustration. My wife is an unusual person in prayer although she would see herself as very ordinary. But I've noticed in the 50 years we've been married and have had our children, that she has an unusual degree of being a spiritual watchwoman on the walls of our home, and I'm very alert to that. There are times when she hears from the Lord in ways that I have not heard.

A watchman knows more than the rest of us

There came a time when three of our children were in university and they were driving 800 kilometres for a student conference. It was wintertime. I remember Marilyn pulling the three boys aside and saying, "I don't want you to drive in the same car."

"Mom," they said, "why don't you want us to drive in the same car?"

"Well, you could be in an accident, and I don't want you all three in the same car. I have something in my spirit that is alerting me to warn you, don't ride together in the same car."

About 3 o'clock that winter Sunday afternoon when we knew the boys were driving back, I was taking a nap, and Marilyn came running in and grabbed me and said, "Get on your knees! Get on your knees! We've got to pray for our boys!"

A spiritual watchman knows a lot more than the rest of us. She somehow knew that there was a need for us to be deeply in prayer for the safety of our boys.

When they finally got home one said, "Mom, let me tell you what happened. We were driving home and we hit black ice. Our car began to spin and we missed an 18-wheeler by about a metre! We would have had a head-on collision and we would have all been killed. But somehow the car wheels grabbed and we went across into the ditch on the other side and the truck went by."

Marilyn asked, "What time was that?" It was exactly at the moment when we were on our knees praying for our sons.

A spiritual watchman holds in his or her hands life and death.

It is as if God has equipped their eyes to see or ears to hear of danger and then has equipped them to know how to blow the horn and to give warning and to call

us to pray.

I want to let two Scriptures speak from the heart of God. The first of these is from Joel 2:1. Joel was one of these whom God equipped to be a spiritual watchman on the walls of His people and especially when God Himself had seen the sin of God's people and had chosen to bring judgement upon them. In the book of Joel, God used nature to do it and He brought swarms of locusts and then He brought another devastating swarm of locusts and then He sent fire.

The day of the Lord

God alerted Joel in a way that nobody else had quite heard. Listen to what God says and listen to the phrase, "the day of the Lord." In the Old Testament "the day of the Lord" was the day of God's judgement. When God comes against His people to judge them because of their sin it is called, "the day of the Lord." So listen to God's instruction to the prophet:

"Blow the trumpet in Zion..." – that is, in the midst of My people – "and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand..." When God was on the move to bring judgement on the people because of their sin, He alerted one of His own and heightened the capacity of that one to hear and to see.

Could I alert you to your role as a child of God? God has equipped you with spiritual eyes and ears, and it is not just for all the pleasantries, but there are times when God's judgement is coming. The enemy may be at the door of your church or the enemy may have even slipped into the life of the church and the beautiful harmony and joy and love of the church is suddenly being disrupted.

God gives you spiritual eyes to see where that is coming from and gives you the capacity to understand. If this is unchecked, it can destroy the church. You see it and hear it, but you may have a tendency to say, "That's none of my business." But you are a spiritual watchman on the walls of your church, and if you happen to see something or hear something that has the potential of great harm to the people of God, then listen to God.

In your time of prayer God will surface that awareness and you will sense a burden. There may be even a kind of trembling that comes over you because

you see where it is headed.

Then God says to you what He said to Joel: "Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm..." You might say, "I've never been a person who does that." I haven't been either, but when God orders it, then the life of His people is at stake, and I cannot keep quiet.

Does not Paul say that we can speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)? You don't have to speak the truth in anger or rail at someone. You can seek out someone and give them counsel and let them know that you are aware of what is happening whether they are or not.

Or you may say, "I need to go before the deacons or the elders and share something that I'm aware of that has the potential of hurting the people of God."

Of all the things that bring a response from me, it is when I sense that something is in motion that can hurt the people of God. Many times we say, "We don't want to offend them." You better warn the people about them or go to them and talk with them. I've done that many a time. The person may not be aware of how they are influencing others.

You see it they don't

If you are a spiritual watchman it may be you sense that someone who has joined the youth group is beginning to pull many of the youth in a direction that is destructive and hurtful. You see it but the youth don't.

That kind of a moment may come at a time when God is putting His hand on many of the youth and calling them into ministry and missions. What you see that has entered the youth group is going to turn them away from that and maybe because of that, most of those who might have felt the call of God into missions or the ministry will never feel that call.

Does that have eternal significance? It does!

A spiritual watchman placed on the walls of the youth of his or her church may be the most important person that God has set up for the purpose of helping the youth. If you have noticed a sudden call of God to care about the youth, could I suggest that God may have been raising you up as a spiritual watchman on the walls of the youth of your church?

God might be at the point where He wants to do His most significant move in the next generation, but there's an enemy who has come in. They are completely

unaware of the impact, but you are not. Has God made you a spiritual watchman on the walls of your church?

Ezekiel 33 is another passage which specifically talks about God establishing a watchman and what he ought to do. You'll hear God say to Ezekiel: "O son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel (verse 7)." But God has something to say ahead of that.

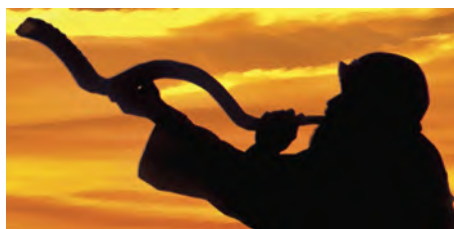
Beginning at verse 1, we read: "Again..." Aren't you grateful that God doesn't stop after the first time, when you weren't paying attention, but that He comes again? Here is this wonderful word "again" the Lord came.

"Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: "When I [God] bring the sword upon a land and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming again upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for me (verses 1-7).'"

When I read a significant statement like that there comes over me, under the Spirit's guidance, the question, "Henry, has God made you a watchman unto His people? Has He made you a watchman in the denomination of which you are a part?" And I sense that is true.

Being a spiritual watchman puts you in a position where you see and where you hear. That Scripture in Ezekiel says something like this: if I tell the watchman that a sword is coming, and then the watchman sees the sword coming, he must warn God's people, because it is life-and-death. If the people hear and believe they will be saved. If they do not, they will be destroyed.

And the blood of the one who hears and



The role of a Spiritual Watchman

Continued...

chooses not to believe will be on his own head when he dies. But if the watchman fails to blow the trumpet and they are not warned, and the sword does come, they will die in their iniquity, but their blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

My prayer for you would be that you would never diminish the significance of the role that you have as a spiritual watchman by virtue of the fact that you are placed as a child of God in the midst of a people of God.

A covenant to be an intercessor...

Let me give you an illustration of how God alerted me. I still feel the pain of it. I was at one of our conference centres when one of our dear missionary couples and their children who were there asked to talk with me. They were on furlough and they were about to go back to Africa. They said, "Henry, would you make a covenant to be an intercessor for us another term?"

There as we sat around the lunch table, I made as solemn a covenant as I could that I would pray for them. Then I got busy and forgot to pray until I received word that Linda, on the road out of Zambia, was suddenly ambushed and killed.

Immediately I remembered I had promised to be a watchman on the walls of their life and I had failed. You may say that I probably am not responsible. God told me I was responsible.

I had the privilege of making a trip to that country after that. I was with one of our dear missionaries who felt so close to Linda, and when we came along a certain road he said, "Let's stop right here." I

asked, "Why are we stopping here?" He turned with tears streaming down his cheeks and said, "This is where Linda was killed." I said, "Let's linger a little longer, and I'll ask God to forgive me."

How serious is it to be a watchman on the walls of our missionary families? Don't leave them vulnerable. God will instruct you when to pray, and He will guide you what to pray, and He'll tell you when you need to write a letter or make a call, or gather a small group of people and say, "Let's go over and walk with them."

If you've made a covenant with a missionary family to be a spiritual watchman on the walls of their mission or mission field, keep covenant with them because a watchman carries life and death in his or her hands.

When you go to pray, God may lift you up to a level that you've never been before, and He will say to you, "I've set you as a watchman," and He will tell you what the parameters are of your assignment.

Are you watching over your grandchildren? Are you watching over your church family? Are you watching over your city or the group of churches that make up your denomination in the city? Where has God placed you in your prayer life?

The enemy will come, but God is wanting someone to blow the trumpet. Have you said, "I'm too old," or "Nobody will listen to me?" They may not listen to you, but they may listen to the trumpet sound. When you blow the warning, then they may listen.

My prayer is that you will never again be a watchman on the walls of God's family and see the enemy come and fail to blow the trumpet or sound the alarm. You must sound the alarm or they will never know that they ought to take warning or that there is an enemy. God may give you an insight that they do not have.


The Bible simply says that God places watchmen on the walls of His people. Would you let God assign you? Would you

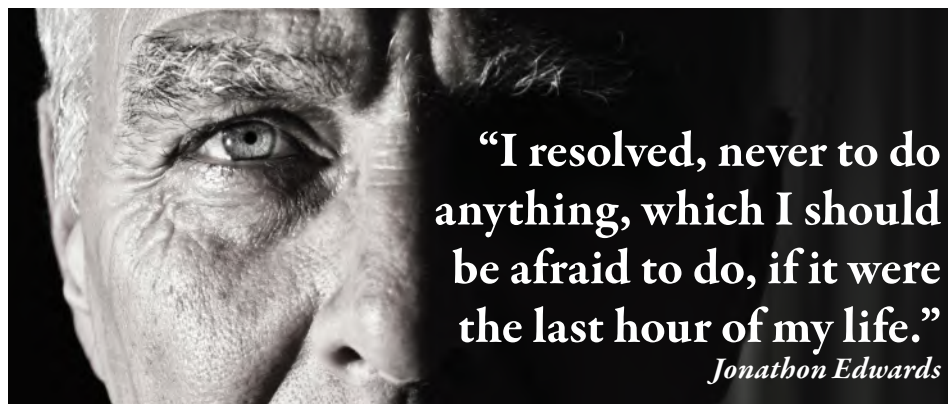
open your heart to God to be a spiritual watchman to hear and see what others may not, and will you say to God, "Whatever You show me that is putting Your people in any danger, Lord, give me the spiritual boldness and courage to put the trumpet to my lips and blow the warning so that nobody will be where the enemy is destroying and not realise what is going on and that we need to pay attention."

A prayer...

"Father, we hear You say, 'I have made you a watchman unto your people.' Father, help us to identify Your activity in our life. Help us to feel the weight of giving a warning when the enemy seems to be so active. When Your people are under the strain and the stress, they need to know what it is that has come against them. Lord, You may have given us unusual insight or You are about to because You are about to set us on the walls of our family afresh or our church or our city and You are stirring in our heart. Father, help us to know it is You and to remember that You have done that in other days, and that You will not let this generation go by without many watchmen. You will not let this generation go without warnings so that we can adjust our lives.

"Father, even now You are putting Your hand on many who will make a decision about their life as spiritual watchmen on the walls of Your people or their homes. May You do a great work in our heart, and don't let us ever be afraid to blow the trumpet. So Father, along with the others, I wait for and watch for and expect Your anointing on my life to fulfil such an assignment.

"And You have made me aware of what could happen if they never hear the warning. Enable us in these moments of worship to respond to Your invitation which is so critical for the lives of Your people and our families in the days and months that lie before us. We ask it in the Name of Jesus our Lord." 



"I resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life."

Jonathon Edwards

close

by Daymond Duck

IHAVE often said (and heard people say), “I think the Rapture is close,” “We are SOOO close,” “I don’t see how the Rapture could not be close,” and more.

No one knows the day or the hour of the Rapture, so it is important to understand some of the reasons why people think this way.

First, many students of Bible prophecy know that the Tribulation Period will begin when the Antichrist confirms a covenant (peace agreement) with many for one week of years (seven years; Daniel 9:27).

There are differences of opinion, but some of these people believe in the pre-Tribulation Rapture (the idea that the Rapture will take place before the Tribulation Period begins, Zephaniah 1:15; I Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9, etc).

They know that President Trump has promised to release his peace proposal in the next few weeks. A peace proposal is different from a peace treaty, and it is different from the Antichrist confirming a treaty; but a breakthrough could turn President Trump’s peace proposal into a peace treaty in need of confirmation.

History is littered with failed Middle East peace proposals, but reports that Saudi Arabia has ordered PA President Mahmoud Abbas to accept President Trump’s proposal or resign, means that things could be very different this time.

One of the big obstacles has been Arab refusal to recognise Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish nation. It now appears that some of the Arabs have changed their position.

If a peace treaty is on the horizon, the Rapture is close.

Second, in that day (at the end of the age), war will break out between Israel and Syria (Isaiah 17:1-14).

In late November 2017, at Israel’s request, Russia delivered a warning from Israel to

Syria: If you let Iran set up bases in Syria, we will attack them.

In early December 2017, Israel attacked bases in Syria on at least two different occasions; and on December 4, 2017, Israel’s Ambassador to the U.S. said war on Israel’s border could be just weeks (not months or years) away.

If war between Israel and Syria is just weeks away, the end of the age is close.

Third, on December 6, 2017, President Trump signed a Proclamation to recognise Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel and to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Although it will probably take a while to settle the issues surrounding the borders of Jerusalem and the controversy over the Temple Mount, many influential Jewish groups believe President Trump’s Proclamation was a major step toward rebuilding the Temple.

But rebuilding the Temple is something that many evangelical Christians think will happen after the Rapture and very early in the Tribulation Period. They believe the Jews will accept the Antichrist as their Messiah, and the covenant he confirms will give them permission to rebuild the Temple (John 5:43).

Anyway, if President Trump’s Proclamation is a major step toward rebuilding the Temple, it is a major step toward the Rapture, because that will take place first.

Fourth, Mark Zell, head of the Republican Party in Israel, said President Trump’s Proclamation “is part of a larger plan to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.”

In the latter years and latter days (Ezekiel 38:16), a war called the Battle of Gog and Magog will break out between Israel and Iran (Ezekiel 38-39). Troops from Iran and her allies (Russia, Turkey and others) will die on the mountains of Israel.

As noted above, Iran has recently estab-

lished bases in Syria, and Israel has attacked them. Iran is also striving to build nuclear weapons, and President Trump’s Proclamation appears to be part of a plan to stop that.

When this war breaks out, the latter years and latter days have arrived, and the Rapture is close.

Fifth, when asked about the signs of His coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3), Jesus responded, “Now learn a parable of the fig tree (Israel); When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves (starting to grow), you know that summer is near: So likewise, when you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors (Matthew 24:32&33).”


One hundred years ago, there was no Fig Tree nation of Israel. However, on November 2, 1917, England’s Balfour Declaration called for the creation of a homeland for the Jews.

Seventy years ago, on November 29, 1947, the UN Partition Plan called for the creation of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. The Fig Tree nation of Israel came into being on May 14, 1948.

Fifty years ago, on June 5-10, 1967, the Six-Day War took place, and the Fig Tree nation of Israel grew by capturing East Jerusalem and the West Bank; but the UN refused to recognise that these areas were part of Israel.

On December 6, 2017, President Trump recognised that East Jerusalem belongs to Israel.

In 100 years (1917-2017), the Fig Tree nation of Israel has grown from a barren wasteland to a thriving nation of more than 7 million people that is the envy of the world.

This truth alone (the official expansion of Israel’s borders and development of the nation) causes many students of Bible prophecy to know that it is near (close). Even at the doors. 



Top Bible Prophecy Stories of 2017

by Jan Markell

PIECES of the eschatological puzzle continue to manifest daily. Even signs that are primarily Tribulation events are casting a shadow today. As I perused news stories of the year, I selected 15 items that tell us time is short.

The King is coming soon. Don't ever doubt that.

1 Jerusalem became a greater "burden-some stone" with Donald Trump's acknowledgement that this is truly Israel's capital and holy city (see Zechariah 12:3). Greater controversy will surround her in the year ahead.

2 The Gog-Magog alliance went on fast-forward. Iran, Turkey, and Russia are uniting with a primary goal in mind – coming against Israel as foreshadowed in Ezekiel 38-39. Turkey's Erdogan threatened to "wipe out all Jews" after the Jerusalem announcement.

3 A new false god came on the scene and many hailed its arrival. An ex-Google executive is founding a church where artificial intelligence will be worshipped. It's called AI for short and keep your eyes on this in 2018.

4 The scoffing of eschatology went to a new level. Many said the announce-

ment concerning Jerusalem was received well by many Christians only because it will hasten Christ's return. Many who love prophecy have given up finding a church that will address this.

5 Tribulation Temple talk escalated after Donald Trump's announcement concerning Jerusalem.

6 One salacious scandal followed another in 2017 revealing that man's character now reflects the end-time warnings of Romans 1 and 2 Timothy 3.

7 Israel continued pounding targets in Syria, foreshadowing the day when she will carry out the prophetic verse found in Isaiah 17:1 – the destruction of Damascus.

8 The idea of micro-chipping is now so accepted that one news outlet said people will soon be eager to be micro-chipped. It was suggested that we will eagerly line up like dogs for a chip.

9 As predicted, evil is waxing worse and worse (2 Timothy 3:13). Pagan gods are appearing in many places including at the U.N. The occult is more appealing than ever and Millennials are "spellbound" by the paranormal.

10 Lawlessness is growing and the "spirit of Antichrist" seems to be poured out on the earth in greater ways

this past year. The Antifa movement is one illustration. George Soros is busier than ever in his waning years.

11 There has been an intensification of calling evil good (Isaiah 5:20). Islamic jihad proponent Linda Sarsour made threatening comments about President Trump yet almost became *Time* magazine's "person of the year." In the mind of the Left, Islam must be celebrated.

12 The world of technology has declared war on Christians and conservatives. Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and more, are pulling the plug or limiting righteous comments and ideology yet they often celebrate evil. This reached new levels in 2017.

13 The terms "peace and security" are used in the Bible in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. It is false peace and security. The term was used with greater intensity in the last year. Donald Trump has been heralded as the president who will bring Israel "peace and security." On December 18, Fox News said President Trump would bring peace and security around the globe. The President stated that he "has laid a pathway to peace and security in our world."

14 In spite of world turmoil, there is a greater "business-as-usual"



atmosphere particularly in America. Since Donald Trump has been President, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has closed at record highs 82 times. The Bible suggests there will be such a comfortable time on earth when Christ returns in spite of the frequent “birth pangs” which have also been record-setting.

15 There is even more evidence that only Jesus ruling and reigning from Jerusalem will provide great government. It has become evident that mankind


cannot drain a swamp filled with alligators and poisonous snakes! Washington is corrupt to the core because mankind’s heart is “desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9).” Draining the swamp was a great campaign slogan but 2017 showed us that first man’s heart must be made new.

We can look at a list like this and focus on “sighs of the times” rather than realise that they are “signs of the times.” The pieces of the puzzle continue to fall into place.

Nothing is falling apart but instead falling into place.

Because of the turmoil of our times, someone said that the future is not what it used to be. Not true. The future was foretold and is playing out with a precise script and a predictable end only because it is all outlined in scripture. We can watch it in high-definition colour with surround sound and even in 3D.

We have front row seats!

The King is coming. Perhaps today. 

Will you help us be a blessing?



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

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

Prepare the Way is a 100% non-profit ministry. No-one associated with the magazine draws **any** form of salary or income from the magazine – so, very simply, every cent you give goes straight towards sending out more magazines! The more gifts we get in, the more magazines we give away – it’s as simple as that.

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

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Does anyone still blush?

by Grant Phillips

SEEMS like I recall, way back there in another world, people used to blush. If I recall, embarrassment seemed to be the main trigger that would cause the “red face.”

We, and I speak generally, don't seem to be embarrassed by much of anything these days. The days of innocence are long gone.

There used to be a time when a man would never say a “bad word” in front of a woman. Most men I knew wouldn't even say those bad words among one another. Today is a new day however, and I don't think we have progressed.

To the contrary, we have regressed to the point that we are seldom shocked by what we see and hear.

When I was young I'll never forget an old preacher saying, that when the women in society start acting like men in how they talk and act, society is in for a downfall.

Anyone who has ever watched a movie or television would have to admit that there is little difference, if any, in the language and behaviour coming from most women on the screen and their male counterparts.

Along with the “F” word, profaning the holy name of Jesus Christ seems to be the darling of most foulmouthed “stars.”

Would you like to view some sexual scenes? Well, you don't have to sneak down a dark alley and buy something off



the black-market. Just turn on your TV or stroll on over to your computer. Maybe that's why the television in our home is seldom on.

Don't you think “conscience” has something to do with being embarrassed? I do. The medical experts and psychological junkies may disagree, but what do they know?

God has a way of just saying it like it is. So, here's what God says about it.

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (Titus 1:15&16).”

Isn't it obvious that our conscience has a lot to do with “why we don't blush anymore?” Our consciences are corrupted. The KJV says they are defiled. I can't argue with that.

If you really want a clear picture of why we no longer blush, read Romans 1:18-32. This is one scary Scripture passage, basically because every word of it describes our society to a tee.

I think it's clear now that our consciences are like a rotten head of lettuce. They're gross

and stink, but let's move on with this next verse that comes to mind.

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:1&2).”

Have you ever asked yourself how some people can do and say things in public and never miss a beat? No embarrassment at all. The only blush from them is powdered on with makeup.

We have lost the ability to blush because our consciences “have been seared as with a hot iron.” Nothing bothers us. Nothing makes us uncomfortable. Nothing in our soul is telling us, “This is wrong and I can't do this.”

The guilt feelings have flown the coop.

Nothing should be scarier to a human being than to no longer have a conscience. When our conscience no longer bothers us, we are dangerously far from God. A person can likely not be saved, not because Jesus can't do so, but because they have no interest in Jesus.

Blushing is an outward ex-

pression of an inward state – the conscience. If we are past the point of being embarrassed, we need to take immediate action and allow God to restore us (if we are a Christian). If we are not a Christian, we need to ask Jesus to save us and tenderise our conscience.

Paul in the last two Scripture verses gives Timothy some good advice that would benefit us all.

“Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:18-20).”

Why do so many Christians have such a wishy-washy faith? Some have not held, “on to faith and a good conscience.” Instead of clinging to faith and a good conscience, they have rejected both and sailed far from God.

Let us not gauge our Christianity by how much we do or do not blush. However, if little to nothing no longer embarrasses us, maybe we have allowed ourselves to wander from the sheepfold. If we are His sheep, Jesus will always be our Shepherd, but have we wandered away from Him and lost the fellowship we had when He saved us? It can easily be restored if we draw near to Him.

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:22&23).”

WATCH & PRAY

Thanks to
Elizabeth Kendal

ARRESTS TRIGGER CONVERSION CRISIS IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's Department of State Security Services (DSS) has arrested, without warrant, a Christian engineer Simput Dafup (33), alleging he abducted Nabila Sanda (19) and forcibly converted her from Islam to Christianity. The DSS also kidnapped Nabila, who had already decided to follow Jesus while studying at Bingham University – a Church-owned university in Nasarawa State. Nabila had travelled to Jos to talk to Simput about her decision to convert. Concerned, Simput took Nabila to seek advice and assistance from a local pastor, Jeremiah Datim. Furious, Nabila's father – a powerful Muslim elder in Biu, Borno State – requested the DSS to intervene. However, as Pastor Datim reminded the media, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees religious freedom.

Tensions are soaring. Please pray for Nigeria and its Christians.

CHRISTIANS IMPERILLED IN BURMA AND SYRIA

Aiming for full control of Kachin State's amber and jade mining regions, the Burmese military has launched a winter offensive against the Christian Kachin in Burma's north. The Burmese-Buddhist regime's war against the Christian Kachin is motivated by greed, fuelled by ethnic-religious hatred and prolonged by silence and geopolitics.

Manna for mahala!

If you'd like to receive Peter Pollock's Daily Manna devotional, which will also take you through the whole Bible in a year, then go to our website (www.prepare.co.za), and on the home page go to the "Daily Manna Sign-up" at the top, fill in your details and we will e-mail it to you every morning. What's more, it's absolutely free!

Meanwhile, conflict is escalating between the Syrian government in Damascus and the al-Qaeda-linked jihadists in the "rebel" enclave of Eastern Ghouta. On January 8 and 9 Christian homes and churches in the historic Old City of Damascus were struck by "rebel" mortar fire. Amidst the destruction were miracles of deliverance. Syria's Christians will require much wisdom, grace and divine protection as their situation grows more complicated through 2018.

Please pray for Burma and Syria and for their embattled Christians.

MEXICO: MORE NON- CATHOLICS FORCIBLY EXPULLED

Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports that, on December 4, officials in Tuxpan de Bolanos, an indigenous Huichol community in the north of Jalisco State, forcibly expelled 64 non-Catholics. The group, comprising 22 Protestants (including 15 children) and 42 Jehovah's Witnesses, were dragged from their homes, loaded into trucks and driven into the mountains where they were dumped and abandoned. To deter them from returning, officials also destroyed their homes.

May justice and righteousness roll down like a river in Mexico (see Amos 5:21-24).

PAKISTAN: CHURCH TARGETED IN TERROR ATTACK

On Sunday morning 17 December, four Islamic terrorists attacked the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta,

the capital of Pakistan's Baluchistan Province. More than 200 Christians were participating in the "Sunday School Christmas Programme" when gunfire erupted outside. Two gunmen had shot dead church gatekeeper George Masih, paving the way for two bombers to invade. Security guards stationed around the perimeter and on the church roof returned fire, killing one bomber, wounding the other and forcing the two gunmen to flee. Unable to make it inside the church, the wounded bomber detonated his explosive vest outside.

ASIA BIBI, CHRISTIAN PRISONER IN CRISIS

The November showdown between the Pakistan government and the hardline Islamists of the Tehreek-e-Labaik political party could well have a devastating impact on Asia Bibi's appeal. Asia Bibi was imprisoned in June, 2009 after being accused of blasphemy and was sentenced to death by

hanging in November, 2010. Her appeal is currently pending in the Supreme Court. However, to end the siege of Islamabad, the government acquiesced to numerous Islamist demands, including: that there would be no difficulty in registering blasphemy cases; that no leniency would be given to those convicted by the courts of blasphemy; and that Asia Bibi will not be allowed to leave Pakistan and that her execution will be expedited. Asia's lead counsel, Attorney Saiful Malook (a Muslim), is risking his life to defend her. Malook prosecuted the case against Malik Mumtaz Qadri, the security guard who assassinated Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer in January, 2011 over his support for Asia Bibi. Tehreek-e-Labaik was formed in the wake of Qadri's February, 2016 execution and Malook has been on an Islamist kill-list ever since. May Asia Bibi not be sacrificed on the altar of appeasement.

Prepare the Way days 2018 February 4, June 3, November 4

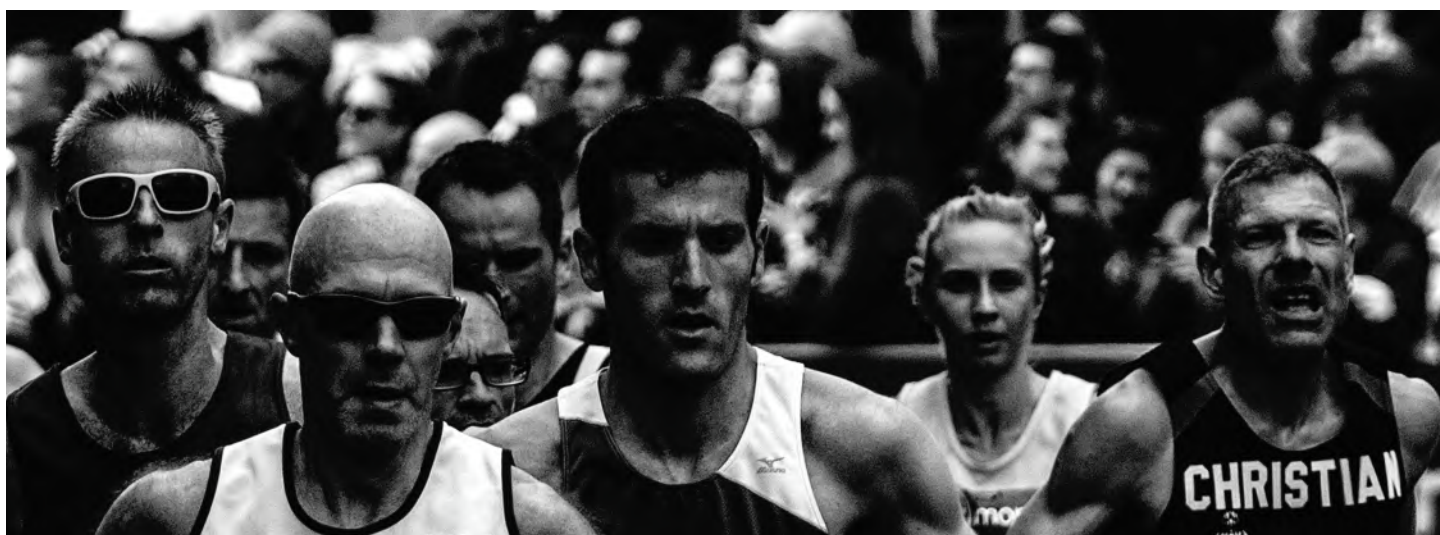
These are the dates for this year's *Prepare the Way* days at Mount Zion Church, Merrivale (near Howick, KZN). Please come and join us as we bring the ministry of this magazine before the Lord. Peter Pollock will be ministering at all three events, and you're welcome to stay for (free!) lunch.



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A New Year's Resolution

by Jeff Colón

EVERY year after the holidays, most people look to the new year before them as an opportunity for change and a new start in life. We have come to know these fresh commitments as New Year's resolutions. All kinds of decisions will be made during this time to alter things about our lives for the better.

Inevitably, dieting and exercise end up on the top of the list for most, as evidenced by the many books we will find displayed in stores on how to shed those kilos we gained over the holidays.

That may be fine for our earthly life, but we also need to consider the spiritual weight some of us have allowed to accumulate...

God's word warns us about allowing those extra kilos to hinder our spiritual lives: "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... Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it (Hebrews 12:1, 1 Corinthians 9:24)."

If we claim to have put our faith in Jesus Christ, we have entered the race spoken of in these verses. The question is how are we doing? Are we running like the one who will receive a prize, or have we slowed down, gotten out of breath, fallen down or worse yet, have we dropped out of the race?

If we aren't running as we should, we need to consider what is being said here. Just think about it, can you imagine a 200-kilogram man trying to compete in a marathon? Of course not! That man

wouldn't have a chance of winning.

The people at the head of the pack are lean and at peak performance the day of the race. It's no different for us; we can't compete and run the course God has set before us if we are encumbered by excess weight and sin.

The weights spoken of in these verses can be anything that stifles our spiritual life in God. When that happens, sin isn't far behind. I have been counselling people in sin for many years and there is always a common denominator about their lives – a minimal or nonexistent prayer life!

We live in a world today that is constantly vying for our affections and our time. Nothing will slow you down and get you side-tracked more than allowing the things of this world to rob your time with God.

We've lost our will to fight

We all have choices every day about what we do, where we go, and how we spend our time. Nevertheless, many of us have lost our will to fight because we have become undisciplined and slothful in our daily lives with God.

Just like an athlete who trains for an event is disciplined and follows a strict regimen of diet and exercise, we also have to learn in our spiritual lives to be temperate in all things and to discipline ourselves unto godliness.

It's time for Christians to get off the couch and to put away the junk food of this world. A lot of us have become spiritually fat and content to watch oth-

ers pass us by. But now is not the time to get side-tracked and bogged down by our temporal lives in this world, especially when we can see the finish line quickly coming into view.

Like no other time in history we need to start redeeming our time for God.

This is a spiritual race and we need spiritual strength and fortitude that only comes from spending quality time with God. Our diet needs to be His word and our spiritual gym needs to be our time spent in prayer.

Martin Luther once said, "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory throughout the day."

When we think about how much time, sacrifice and effort a gold medalist puts forth to win that prize, how much more should we discipline ourselves and bring ourselves under subjection to God. "Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:25)."

I know for myself, I have learned one thing about this race. If I fall down, I can get up, wipe the dust off and get back in the race. It's no different for you. Simply repent of any sin you have allowed to ensnare you and turn to God. Then make a resolution to get back on God's diet and renew your membership at His gym.

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