

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

SEPTEMBER, 1997

WHEN LIFE LOOKS EMPTY AND USELESS, WHAT CAN YOU DO?

* * *

- *Can Small Churches Grow And Be Vibrant?*
- *We Have A Great Savior, A Great Salvation!*

GOOD BOOKS IMPART UNDERSTANDING:

Learn the Past to Grasp the Present

REVIVING THE ANCIENT FAITH--The Story of Churches of Christ in America, by Richard Hughes, professor at Pepperdine University (& formerly at Abilene). Eerdmans, 1996; 448 pages. This book, though expensive, sold out quickly at the Louisville Fellowship Week. Here's part of the reason why: Chapter 8 begins, "In 1968, **Stanford Chambers** was 91 years old. He had been among the leaders of the premillennial movement from its beginning, and now, reflecting...on decades of struggle with the mainstream of Churches of Christ, he concluded...that 'the real issue [was] not prophecy but grace'...Chambers was right, for no one in the history of Churches of Christ possessed a keener sense of grace than did **R. H. Boll**."

Chapter 7 (31 pages) covers "The Premillennial Controversy," and chapter 8 (22 pages) describes "Grace, Law, and the Fighting Style." Of course Hughes also covers other subjects of interest to many of our readers. He is very positive in his assessment of the premill movement. You probably won't agree with everything in the book (I strongly disagree even with some of his definitions in the glossary!), but you'll **learn a lot and think a lot**.

The book's regular price is \$30, but **through December** we'll offer it for \$28.50 plus postage (& 6% tax for Kentucky residents). We are not a fullscale bookstore, usually handling mail orders only. So we keep only a small number of books on hand--especially expensive ones. We got in only 3 more copies, so order now or you may be too late. And we might not stock the book any more after this, unless a demand for it continues.

THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT, by Leroy Garrett. Written in 1981, revised/expanded 1994. 573 pages. Garrett's book gives more complete coverage of the entire movement. For Hughes' book intentionally leaves gaps: he focuses on the Churches of Christ alone, and covers only what he considers to be the pivotal events and ideas in their development. In contrast, Garrett deals also with the independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ. But due to his covering many more subjects and people, he gives only a page or so to the "premill churches," though he uses glowing praise. On several topics Garrett's interpretations of doctrines and events differ from Hughes'. I myself agree with the former more than the latter. **Garrett is outstanding in drawing out lessons and principles from the past.**

\$25.00, but **through December** our price is \$23.50 (plus postage, & Kentuckians add 6% tax). Only 3 copies on hand; order soon.

[continued on Back Cover]

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Jack Blaes, News

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Editorial:

Is Trying to Understand Ecclesiastes Like Chasing After the Wind?

Alex V. Wilson

Too often we ignore the hard parts of Scripture. Oh yes, in theory we believe that "all scripture is God-breathed and profitable." But in practice we deny it by avoiding many of the 66 books. We deplore the fact that many churches minimize Biblical prophecy, and by and large restrict their study to Matthew through Jude--"The Old Testament's expired, and nobody can understand Revelation." But I'm not sure we do much better.

"We should read the Bible more, and we should read more of the Bible," said H.L. Olmstead. And he was right. So one of Word and Work's goals is to help us appreciate, understand, love and live by all of God's Word. Thus from time to time we concentrate on some of its more difficult parts. We still have copies of past issues about the OT in general ("The Old Testament is God's Word Too"), and the OT prophets, and Genesis, and Job, and Psalms. [You may order these back issues @ \$0.75 + postage. They'll aid you in private study or in class.] This month we focus on Ecclesiastes; in a later issue, on Proverbs.

"Its Meaning Seems Like Vanity of Vanities to Me"

Of course this magazine won't help you grasp Eccles. unless you *read* Eccles. But if you'll take time to read the text, then the articles here can help you get a handle on it. Most Christians know only 3 things in the book: (1)Solomon's experiment with many different activities, as he tried to find life's purpose but only concluded, "Everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind." (2)The passage that begins, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...." (3)The final passage: "Fear God and keep his commandments...." But there is so much more to it! And the careful reader discovers that though its despairing pessimism is what hits you first, there is a whole other side which most people never dream exists. One of the outstanding Christian writers of our era, James Packer, says Eccles. is his favorite book in the Bible! (See his article this month.) It has recently become very precious to me too.

Guidelines in Bible Study

Let me make a few suggestions about studying the Bible in general and Eccles. in particular. **1st, pray.** Ask the Author for understanding. Promise Him you'll follow whatever truths He will reveal to you. This is crucial. **2nd, read the book straight through at one sitting** if at all possible. This is a vital practice in Bible study, and more so in this book

than most. You can read all of Eccles. in 30-50 minutes, depending on your speed (it took me 37 minutes)--if you don't stop to ponder things as you go. Ponder later, but not during this fast first reading. During this time try to get the overall mood or thrust of the author--the big picture. Notice, if you can without slowing down, the repeated words and ideas; this will reveal his main points. But don't bother about all the questions, obscurities, and contradictions that seem to pop up time and again. You'll deal with them later. This time mainly soak up the atmosphere. And fasten your seat-belt first, for you may never be the same!

3rd, if possible re-read the whole book (or at least large sections of it at a time), **marking the main points that grab you this time through.** If you use a highlighter, or different colored pens to underline various themes, you will start noticing things you missed at first. For instance, amid the darkness and gloom a puzzling refrain pops up in chapters 2, 3, 5, 8 and 9. Since it appears at least five times, and adds up to a total of about 15 verses, it is obviously important. (I'll let you find it for yourself.) As we view life we need to evaluate this approach as well as the more obvious one that says, "Utter futility, utter futility! The whole thing is futile."

4th, now you're ready for a paragraph-by-paragraph or verse-by-verse study. Don't forget to keep praying for enlightenment. Read the passage in one or two other translations if you haven't already. Ask questions of the text. Think, meditate and review. If your Bible has cross-references, use them to locate verses elsewhere in Scripture which relate to the same topic. (Cross-references are very helpful; if you don't know what they are, ask some church leader.) Keep asking yourself how you can apply what you are learning to your attitudes and daily living. Don't leave that out.

5th, after experiencing the joy of personal discovery, you reach the time when commentaries can supplement what you have learned. If you use them much before this point in the process, it tends to stunt your ability to feed yourself. You get too dependent on other folks' study, and do too little of your own. But if you ignore commentaries altogether, you lose the benefit of those teachers whom God has specially gifted and placed among His people to build them up. (Eph.4:11-13.)

A 3rd Major Theme

Besides the themes mentioned above, another recurring idea caught my attention:

In chapter 3: "Men...cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." "Who knows...?" "Who can bring him to see what will happen after him?"

In chapter 6: "Who knows what is good for a man in life...Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?"

In chapter 7: "A man cannot discover anything about his future." "I am determined to be wise--but this was beyond me. Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound--who can discover it?"

In chapter 8: "Who knows the explanation of things?" "Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?" "No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it."

In chapter 9: "No man knows whether love or hate awaits him." "No man knows when his hour will come."

In chapter 10: "No one knows what is coming--who can tell him what will happen after him?"

In chapter 11: "...You do not know what disaster may come upon the land." "You do not know the path of the wind..." "You cannot understand the work of God..." "You do not know which will succeed..."

Wow--he makes his point, doesn't he! But what is it? Well, think about it. (Then read James Packer's article in this issue.) And here's some additional help from an old Puritan writer: "Never let what you *do not* know destroy your faith in what you *do* know."

In conclusion, here's a challenge from T. N. Sterrett's book, *How to Understand Your Bible*.

We know that God gives understanding in answer to prayer, but it is a mistake to conclude that Bible study is unnecessary. God gave the Israelites water from a rock when Moses struck it with his rod, but this was exceptional. God required Abraham and Jacob to do the hard work of digging wells. The water came from God in answer to prayer, and through hard work. We must not let our natural tendency to avoid work and hard thinking deceive us.

May God help us to excavate His Word. Happy digging!

ECCLESIASTES

Insights from Many Sources

In the following articles we have gathered numerous quotations about the book of Ecclesiastes. We have selected them from various commentators, so they reflect many different approaches and interpretations of the writer and the message of Ecclesiastes. The interpreters sometimes contradict one another, so they are not all right! We include this spectrum of viewpoints for your information, and to stimulate your own thinking too. --A.V.W.

WHO WROTE IT, and WHY?

An Apple Tree in an Orange Grove

"Like an apple tree in the middle of an orange grove stands the book of Ecclesiastes among the other books of the Bible. At first glance, it just does not seem to fit. What place does a book which flaunts the daring assertion 'Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless' have in Scripture which intends to reveal the saving work of God in history?

"Along with the book of Job, Ecclesiastes reminds us that God is bigger, and our life in this world more unpredictable, than we might think. The book invites us to take a realistic tour of life. The sight-seeing stops will likely leave those who enjoy nice tidy answers a bit perplexed if not downright frustrated.

"Our guide for this adventure is introduced by the Hebrew title: *qoheleth*. The title, which translated into Greek is *ekklestastes*, comes from a Hebrew word for assembling. It suggests a type of office-bearer. Thus we have such translations as 'the Preacher' (KJV, RSV, NASB), 'the Speaker' (NEB), 'the Philosopher' (TEV), and... 'the Teacher' (NIV)."

--Bill and Teresa Synios, in
Ecclesiastes: Chasing After Meaning

* * * *

The Common, Older View of Authorship

"There are powerful arguments that the author...was Solomon. **External Evidence:** Jewish talmudic tradition attributes the book to Solomon but suggests that Hezekiah's scribes may have edited the text (see Prov. 25:1). Solomonic authorship is the standard Christian position, although some scholars [also] believe the work was later edited during the time of Hezekiah or possibly Ezra.

"**Internal Evidence:** The author calls himself 'the son of David, king in Jerusalem' in 1:1, 12. Solomon was the best qualified Davidic

descendant for the quest in this book. He was the wisest man who ever taught in Jerusalem (see 1:16; 1 Kings 4:29,30). The descriptions of Qoheleth's exploration of pleasure (2:1-3), impressive accomplishments (2:4-6), and unparalleled wealth (2:7-10) were fulfilled only by King Solomon. The proverbs in this book are similar to those in the Book of Proverbs (e.g., Eccl. 7; 10)." --Bruce H. Wilkinson in *The Open Bible*

* * * *

Solomon's Experiences

"Keep in mind that **Solomon** is the author. It gives...added force to many of the sentiments which are expressed. Is the book the product of a late repentance? Many think so. Is Solomon seeking to atone for past follies, and to warn others from his own bitter experience? Perhaps so. When he speaks about an 'old and foolish king' and a 'poor and wise youth' who follows him by usurping the throne (4:13-16), is he speaking, with prophetic prescience, of himself, soon now to pass away, and of the scheming usurper, Jeroboam, who thereupon sets himself up as king over ten of the Israel tribes? When he speaks so bitterly of woman (7:26-29), and says that...he has not found one true woman 'in a thousand,' is he recalling his countless wives and concubines? Oh, that the gifted Solomon who began so wisely should have had to write such a book as this!" --J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore the Book*

* * * *

Another View of Authorship

"*Who is Ecclesiastes?* The term means 'assembly-man,' that is, either the man who calls a religious assembly (Num. 10:7) or one who is its spokesman, its preacher. Our spokesman was not a priest with law, nor a prophet with the word, but a wise man with counsel (see Jer. 18:18), much of whose work resembles the Book of Proverbs.

"From 1:1 it is popularly inferred that he is Solomon, first of Israel's wise men (12:9,11; cf. 1 Kings 3:12; 4:29-34); at least, part of the book was thought to reflect that sages's experiences. Yet it may be asked whether Solomon, third king of Israel, would at any time in his history have used the past tense to say, 'I was king over Israel in Jerusalem' (1:12)? Could he have confessed that the attempt to be wise 'was far from' him (7:23)? Under his efficient government would he have described oppressors as men with power against whom there was no redress (4:1; 5:8; 8:9; 10:5-7; cf. 1 Kings 4:20, 25)?" --W. Gordon Brown in the *Holman Study Bible*.

"Today most scholars agree that Solomon was not the **author**....They usually assume, however, that the **central figure** in the book is Solomon, and that the **unknown author** used him as a literary device to convey his message. He did not intend to deceive his original

readers, and undoubtedly no one was in fact deceived. Lack of certainty concerning authorship does not destroy canonicity of the book."

--Robert Laurin in the *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*.

[By the way, both Brown and Laurin believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible. --AVW]

* * * *

The Book's Purpose

"Though [the book] is in the Hebrew language, its distinctive marks of Israel are few. God's covenant name is never used; Israel is mentioned once. Our proverb-monger speaks to "the children of men" (1:13, and so forth), to *mankind*. Pointing out man's natural folly and darkness, he prepares the way for the wisdom and light of the Gospel.

"Why such a book in the canon? Here is **no blind optimism**: more than a score of life's pressing problems are too clearly seen for that. Here is **no cynical pessimism**, for the author is a believer in a God of righteousness (8:12,13 and elsewhere). Here is clear-eyed realism that faces the fun and fury, the triumphs and defeats, the light and shade, only to conclude that the whole thing is a puff of wind (1:2; 12:8; and so forth). Yet paradoxically, the whole of man's life must be reverence and obedience to God, for to Him at last one must give full account (12:13,14)." --W. Gordon Brown, in the *Holman Study Bible*

THOSE MANY CONTRADICTIONS?

William Barclay writes as follows in Bible Study Aids: "Ecclesiastes reveals the strangest contradictions. In one place it says that chance rules over all (9:11) and in another that God rules over all (3:10,11). In one place it says that of all disillusionments woman is the most bitter (7:26), in another that life is at its best with a woman you love (9:9). At one moment it hates life (2:17), and at another it says that life is sweet (8:15; 9:7; 11:7,8). At one time work is hateful (2:10; 2:18), at another it gives life meaning (3:22; 5:19). At one time there is no justice (3:26), at another judgment is coming (3:17)."

AVW writing now: There are several possible explanations for the seemingly undeniable contradictions. Here is one which Barclay mentions (along with 3 other far-out views offered by various folks): "It has been suggested that we simply have the *different moods* of one mind, each mood honestly recorded at the time." (Or, similarly, he presents his own varying beliefs which resulted from *different experiences and circumstances* throughout life: At one period his work was pleasant, at another time hollow; etc.)

A **2nd option** is that one "side" of the contradiction is the secular, "under the sun" view, while the other side is from the standpoint of "stand in awe of God," for we're responsible to Him. He shows *two basically differing outlooks and also their results*--the fruit they bear-- in order to persuade people to "fear God and keep His commands" (12:13). At one time in his life he himself held the under-the-sun view, which is why he made his numerous experiments recorded in chapters 1:12-2:26, the best-known part of the book. Having proved the emptiness of that philosophy, he warns others to benefit from his experiences.

A **3rd possibility** (somewhat like #2, but more complex) is that the author at various points in the book presents *several differing ideas or even schools of thought*--such as pessimism, hedonism, agnosticism. He presents them not because he believes them to be true, for as a matter of fact he disagrees with them--though he doesn't reveal that fact at first. His purpose in airing these views is in order to evaluate and later demolish them as he progresses with his treatise. In today's terminology, he repeatedly took the role of "the devil's advocate," hoping that his readers will see the falsity of the ideas he presents.

A **4th option** is that due to life's complexity and variety, those contradictions *don't actually contradict!* In some men's experience, woman is indeed the most disappointing aspect of life (and vice versa); others have found her delightful! In some cases work is only futile, tedious toil; others are privileged to have jobs that fulfill. Some experience the gravest of injustices even from their own governments; others have been blessed with rulers of integrity. Etc. As for the first contradiction Barclay mentioned--the conflict between God's sovereignty and man's freedom (involving chance)--philosophers throughout history have wrestled with this problem and never solved it. Thus the conflicting statements can all be true, at least at some times and to some extent.

Perhaps you can think of other solutions to Ecclesiastes' contradictions.

Of GOADS and NAILS

The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails--given by one Shepherd. --Eccles. 12:11

As noted in the preceding article, Ecclesiastes contains many baffling statements. Some seem to contradict other sayings in the book, or in other parts of Scripture. Some appear to express the secular agnosticism that is quite common in our time. Others sound like the existentialists, those totally pessimistic philosophers who influenced many college students in the 1960s and following.

Yet it also contains many wonderful truths beautifully expressed. So how do we fit all these ideas together? We need some key to unlock this book. Some Bible students feel that the above verse from the last chapter provides that key--or at least one such key. Let's think about it.

The "one Shepherd" surely refers to the Lord (Psa.23:1; Psa.80:1). So the writer is concluding his book by claiming that its ultimate source is God. He knew that at least some of his readers would be puzzled by Eccles., and tempted to dismiss it as merely a mixed-up bag of thoughts by a manic-depressive sage. So he says, "Whoa--you're wrong. The Lord our Shepherd has given me these insights, so think again!" Then he seems to explain his two-pronged approach, goads and nails.

Richard De Haan analyzes this in his book, *The Art of Staying Off Dead-end Streets*:

The people who lived during biblical days were familiar with goads, for they saw them in use every day. The farmer, walking behind a yoke of oxen pulling a plow, always carried a long stick with a sharp point. He used it to keep the animals moving and to control them. These creatures, though powerful and relatively docile, do not respond to verbal commands the way a horse does. Nor are they inclined to move briskly. A goad was necessary, therefore, to prod them into a steady pace, and to turn them left or right.

The nails Solomon mentioned were either long spikes or tent stakes such as might be used today. Driven deeply, they held securely against all onslaughts.

We may contrast the nails and goads of Ecclesiastes in this manner: The *nail* represents stability, solidness, an anchor. The *goad* signifies a sharp sting, arousing a person from lethargy or driving him in a direction he had not intended to take. (*End of Quote*)

So far, so good. But what *are* the goads and nails? In the two verses preceding this one the Teacher claimed to be wise, and that he "*searched to find just the right words*, and what he wrote was upright and true." Then he explains that wise teachers sometimes must goad

their students awake. They use words to shock and startle them and stimulate their thinking. They may play the Devil's advocate, arguing for views they themselves reject, in order to prepare the students to face the hard questions of life. The Teacher himself has done this at various times in Eccles.

But if that is so, then how can we discern which of his words are true and which are false?--which he believed and which he denied? The key here is his expression, "*collected sayings.*" They are the firmly embedded nails. So if we would profit from his wisdom, and gain the stability he wishes to impart, we must not take sentences or paragraphs in isolation. We must study his collected sayings, taking his book as a whole. Then we can make sure we get the big picture as he presents it.

More Lessons from Ecclesiastes

GOD'S WISDOM -- IMPARTED TO US!

James I. Packer

God is wise in Himself. He also seeks to impart wisdom to us His creatures. The Bible has a great deal to say about the divine gift of wisdom. **Wisdom is required** of Christians: "Walk...not as fools, but as wise...be not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without." **Prayer is made** that wisdom may be supplied to them: "That you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom." (Eph.5:15ff; Col.4:15 & 1:9.)

Where can we find wisdom? What steps must we take to lay hold of this gift? There are two prerequisites, according to Scripture. First, we must learn to **revere God**. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). Not till we become humble and teachable, distrusting our own thoughts, can divine wisdom become ours. Second, we must learn to **receive God's word**, to apply ourselves to God's revelation. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col.3:16).

What Will God's Wisdom Do for Us?

But what sort of thing is God's gift of wisdom? What effect does it have on a person? Here many folks go wrong. We can make clear their mistake by an illustration.

If you stand at the end of a platform on the York, England railroad station, you can watch a constant succession of engine and train movements which, if you are a railway enthusiast, will greatly fascinate you. But you will only be able to form a very rough and general idea of the overall plan in terms of which all these movements are being determined. That is, you won't really grasp the operational pattern set out in

the working timetable, modified if need be on a minute-to-minute basis according to the actual running of the trains. If, however, you are privileged enough to be taken into York's magnificent electrical signal-box that lies across platforms 7 and 8, you will see on the longest wall a diagram of the entire track layout for five miles on either side of the station. Little glow-worm lights, moving or stationary on the different tracks, show the signalmen at a glance exactly where every engine and train is. At once you will be able to look at the whole situation. You will see why it was that this train had to be signalled to a halt, and that one diverted from its normal running line, and a third one parked temporarily in a siding. The why and the wherefore of all these movements becomes plain, once you can see the overall position.

Now, the mistake that is commonly made is to suppose that this is an illustration of what God does when He bestows wisdom. Many believe that the gift of wisdom consists in a deepened insight into the providential purpose of events going on around us, an ability to see why God has done what He has done in a particular case. People feel that if they were really walking close to God, then they would discern the real purpose of everything that happened to them. It would be clear to them every moment how God was making all things work together for good. Such people spend much time wondering why God should have allowed this or that to take place, and what they should deduce from it.

Christians suffering from depression may drive themselves almost crazy with this kind of futile enquiry. For it is futile: make no mistake about that. It is true that when God gives us guidance by application of principles He will on occasion confirm it to us by unusual providences. In such cases we recognize them at once as corroborative signs. But this is quite a different thing from trying to read a message about God's secret purposes out of every unusual thing that happens.

We ask again: what does it mean for God to give us wisdom? It is like learning to drive a car. What matters in driving is the speed and appropriateness of your reactions to things. You do not ask yourself why the road should narrow or twist just where it does, nor why that van should be parked where it is. You simply try to see and do the right thing. To drive well, you have to keep your eyes peeled to notice exactly what is in front of you. Likewise, to live wisely, you have to be clear-sighted and realistic in looking at life as it is. There is one book in Scripture that is expressly designed to turn us into such realists--the book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes

"Ecclesiastes" means simply "the preacher." The book is a sermon, with a text ("vanity of vanities..." 1:2; 12:8, KJV), an exposition of its theme (chapters 1-10), and an application (11:1-12:7).

"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." In what spirit, and for what purpose, does the preacher announce this text? Is it the confession of an embittered cynic, a selfish and callous old man of the world who found at the end nothing but dire disillusionment? Or is he speaking as an evangelist, trying to bring home to the unbeliever the impossibility of finding happiness "under the sun" apart from God? The answer is, neither--though the second suggestion is not so wide of the target as the first.

The author speaks as a mature teacher giving a young disciple the fruits of his own long experience and reflection (11:9; 12:1,12). He wants to lead this young believer into true wisdom, and to keep him from falling into the "York-signal-box" mistake. Apparently the young man was inclined to equate wisdom with wide knowledge, and to suppose that one gains wisdom simply by diligent study of books (12:12). Clearly he took it for granted that wisdom, when he gained it, would tell him the reasons for God's various doings. What the preacher wants to show him is that **the real basis of wisdom is a frank acknowledgment that much of what happens is quite inexplicable to us, and that most occurrences "under the sun" bear no outward sign of a rational, moral God ordering them at all.**

The Message of the Sermon

Look, says the preacher, at the sort of world we live in. What do you see? Aimlessly recurring cycles in nature (1:4 ff.). Times and circumstances over which we have no control (3:1 ff.; 9:11 f.). You see death coming to everyone sooner or later, but coming haphazard (7:15; 8:8). Men die like beasts (3:19 f.), good men like bad, wise men like fools (2:14, 17; 9:2f.). You see evil running rampant (3:16; 4:1; 5:8; 8:11; 9:3): scoundrals succeed, good men don't (8:14). Seeing all this, you realize that God's order of events is inscrutable. You can't make sense of it (3:11; 7:13 f.; 8:17; 11:5).

But once you conclude that there really is no rhyme or reason in things, what "profit"--value, gain, purpose--can you find in any sort of constructive endeavor? (1:3; 2:11, 22; 3:9; 5:16). If life is senseless, then it is valueless. And in that case, what use is it working to create things, to build a business, to make money, even to seek wisdom--for none of this can do you any obvious good (2:15f., 22f.; 5:11). It will only make you an object of envy (4:4); you can't take any of it with you (2:18ff.; 4:8; 5:15f.); and what you leave behind will probably be mismanaged after you have gone (2:19). What point is there, then, in toiling at anything? Must not all man's work be judged "vanity (emptiness, frustration) and a striving after wind"? It is to this pessimistic conclusion, says the preacher, that optimistic expectations of finding the divine purpose of everything will ultimately lead you (1:17-18). And of course he is right. Rarely does this world look as if a kind Crea-

tor were running it. Rarely does it appear that there is a rational power behind it at all. The God who rules it hides Himself. Be realistic, says the preacher. Face these facts; see life as it is. You will have no true wisdom till you do.

Many of us need this admonition. For we get caught up with the "York-signal-box" misconception of what wisdom is. And we feel that, for the honor of God and also for our own reputation as spiritual Christians, it is necessary for us to claim that we are already in the signal-box: We here and now enjoy inside information as to the why and wherefore of God's doings. And then something very painful and quite inexplicable comes along, and our cheerful illusion of being in God's secret councils is shattered. Our pride is wounded; we feel that God has slighted us. Unless at this point we repent and humble ourselves thoroughly for our pre-sumption, our whole subsequent spiritual life may be blighted.

God's Wisdom, and Ours

There is a lot of joyless apathy today in Christian circles. It is marked by personal spiritual inertia combined with critical cynicism about the churches and haughty resentment of other Christians' activities and zeal. Behind this deadening condition often lies the wounded pride of someone who thought he knew all about the ways of God, and then learned by bitter, bewildering experience that he didn't. This is what happens when we do not heed the message of Ecclesiastes. For the truth is that God in His wisdom--to make and keep us humble and to teach us to walk by faith--has hidden from us almost everything that we should like to know about the purposes which He is working out. "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things" (11:5, NIV).

But in that case, what is wisdom? The preacher has helped us see what it is not. Does he give us any guidance as to what it is? Indeed he does, in outline at any rate. "Fear God, and keep his commandments" (12:13). Trust and obey Him, reverence Him, worship Him, be humble before Him, and never say more than you mean when you pray to Him (5:1-7). Reject, even in secret, things of which you will be ashamed when they come to light at God's judgment-day (12:14). Live in the present, and enjoy it thoroughly (7:14; 9:7ff.; 11:11:9f.), for present pleasures are God's good gifts. Though Ecclesiastes condemns flippancy (7:4-6), he clearly has no time for the super-spirituality which is too "spiritual" ever to laugh and have fun. Seek grace to work hard at whatever life calls you to do (9:10), and enjoy your work as you do it (2:24; 3:12f.; 5:18ff.; 8:15). Leave to God its results; let Him measure its ultimate worth. Your part is to use all the good sense and enterprise

at your command in using the opportunities that lie before you (11:1-6).

This is the way of wisdom. Clearly it is just one facet of the life of faith. For what underlies and sustains it? Why, the conviction that the inscrutable God of providence is the wise and gracious God of creation and redemption. We can be sure that the God who made this marvelously complex world, and who brought to pass our redemption from sin and Satan, knows what He is doing. And He "does all things well," even if for the moment He hides His hand. We can trust Him and rejoice in Him, even when we cannot discern His path.

Thus the effect of His gift of wisdom is to make us more humble, more joyful, more godly. It makes us more resolute in doing His will. It makes us less troubled (not less sensitive, but less bewildered) than we were at the dark and painful things of which our life in this fallen world is full. This wisdom, which God waits to give to those who ask Him, will bind us to Himself. It will find expression in a spirit of faith and a life of faithfulness.

[Condensed & adapted from chapter 10 of **KNOWING GOD**.
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The MOODS and MESSAGES of Ecclesiastes

Negative and Depressing

"Many of the Philosopher's thoughts appear negative and even depressing. But the fact that this book is in the Bible shows that Biblical faith is broad enough to take into account such pessimism and doubt. Many have taken comfort in seeing themselves in the mirror of **Ecclesiastes**, and have discovered that the same Bible which reflects these thoughts also offers the hope in God that gives life its greater meaning." --Note in the **Good News Bible (TEV)**

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Demolishing to Build

The Preacher "is demolishing to build. The searching questions he has asked are those that life itself puts to us, if we will only listen. He can afford to ask them, because in the final chapters he has good news for us, once we can stop pretending that what is mortal is enough for us, who have been given a capacity for the eternal [3:11]....

"The function of Ecclesiastes is to bring us to the point where we face the appalling inference that nothing has meaning, nothing matters under the sun. It is then that we can hear, as the good news which it is, that **everything** matters--'for God will bring every deed into judgment.' That is how the book will end. On this rock we can be destroyed: but it is rock, not quicksand. There is the chance to build."

--Derek Kidner, in *A Time to Mourn*

* * * *

Life's Blessings -- Used as Means or Ends?

"The primary aim of the author is to show from personal experience that all earthly goals and blessings, **when pursued as ends in themselves**, lead to dissatisfaction and emptiness. The highest good in life lies in reverencing and obeying God, and in enjoying life while one can. Thus the author was a man of faith; he was skeptical only of *human* wisdom and endeavor." --Robert Laurin, in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*

"In themselves, and rightly used, the basic things of life are sweet and good. What spoils them is **our hunger to get out of them more than they can give.**" --Derek Kidner, in *A Time to Mourn*

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God Uses Life's Vanities

"First [the writer] sees that life is full of 'vanities' which mock men. Then he sees that these 'vanities' are **meant** to mock men. Then he sees that these 'vanities' are not just meant to mock men cruelly, but with a **benign purpose**, namely, to lead men to seek their true happiness in God Himself. He sees that these things are "from the hand of God" (2:24). And he sees that these things are allowed because God 'hath set eternity' in men's hearts (3:11), and seeks to lead them to a true view of life in relation to material things." --J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore the Book*

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Causes and Cure of Pessimism

What causes Koheleth's sombre pessimism? "First, he views life **selfishly rather than socially**. He has lived to get, instead of to give. And he has found what all such persons find, namely, that the more one lives for self, the less do earthly things satisfy....Lord Beaconsfield's famous words seem all too true--'Youth is a mistake, manhood a struggle, and old age a regret.'

"[Then] Koheleth views human life as **bounded by the grave rather than as having destiny beyond**. Man dies as the beast, he says; and this is his greatest problem of all (3:19-20)....

"What then? Well, **Koheleth was wrong**. No man can have a true view of life who looks at it selfishly rather than socially...and as bounded by the grave. And when all the available data are considered, no man **needs** to view it as Koheleth did. **Nor did Koheleth himself so view it at the time when he wrote his treatise**; for it must be remembered that he was describing how he had thought **earlier** (as his use of the past tense all through the book indicates)." --J. Sidlow Baxter, in **Explore the Book**

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Judgment is Good News as well as Bad, Comfort as well as Warning

"The highest good at present open to man is a wise, temperate, grateful use and enjoyment of the present life (11:9,10), combined with a steadfast faith in God and in the life to come (12:1-7). This is what the preacher says:

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for youth and prime of life are vanity.

Remember also Thy Creator in the days of thy youth, [before] the evil days come, and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say: I have no pleasure in them...and the dust return to the earth, as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it.

"In the above quotation, the words, 'But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment,' have been gravely misunderstood....We get the sense more truly by changing the 'but' into 'and.' The fact of a righteous judgment hereafter is mentioned not as a scare but as a comfort, because it is then and there that the ironies and enigmas which make this present life vanity, even to the righteous and the wise, will be answered by a final explanation, restitution, and compensation. It is an anticipation of Paul's word in Romans 8 20, that although the creation has been made 'subject to vanity,' it has been thus subjected 'in hope.'

"Admittedly, the thought of that final judgment is meant **also** to be a deterrent to folly and sin; but the main thought here is that of **hope** in it. That is why the preacher, having mentioned it, immediately adds,

'Therefore, remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh.' It is important also to realise that the advice to 'eat and drink and enjoy,' in Ecclesiastes, has nothing of Epicureanism or godly, fleshly indulgence in it. It is simply [a condensed term] for living in a legitimate comfort and prosperity (see Jer. 22:15), due to Jehovah's bountifulness."

--J. Sidlow Baxter in **Explore the Book**

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Getting a Handle on the Book (We end with a good starting-point!)

"A proper perspective on any book demands that we first come to terms with the author's intention....There are three places to which we can go to obtain that information. We can read the preface or **introduction** to a book; we can flip quickly to **the concluding chapter**...; or we can skim the contents of the work for any **repeated refrains**."

--Walter Kaiser, Jr., in **Ecclesiastes: Total Life**

* * * *

Getting the Big Picture by means of the above method

Ecclesiastes is frequently "summed up in such negative terms as...pessimistic, fatalistic, skeptical, cynical...and the like. But certainly those negative estimates reflect a superficial reading, for if the book is a unit, it **also expresses an impressive list of positive ethical and spiritual injunctions.**

"For instance, there are those repeated exhortations to (1) 'fear God' [7 times]; (2) receive all the 'good' things of life as a gift from God [4 times]; (3) reflect on the fact that God will judge the righteous and the wicked [5 times]; and (4) remember that God presently reviews the quality of every man's life-style [7 times]." Also the "Hebrew rootword meaning 'joy, gladness, pleasure,' along with the verb meaning 'to be glad,' appears 17 times in Ecclesiastes." --Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. in **Ecclesiastes: Total Life**

GROWTH AND CHANGE IN A SMALL CHURCH

Gary Pearson

Conclusion

(In the first part of this article, the writer--a preacher in Maryland--set forth the thesis that "If we work with God to build a better church, then the church will grow naturally by attracting and retaining more people." His first recommendation is, Maximize your base. That is, concentrate on people who are most likely to be attracted to your kind of church--without overlooking others too. 2nd, Encourage long-term ministry by being good to your preacher. This month he says more about point #2, then gives three more recommendations.)

An important part of treating your preacher well is refusing to tolerate antagonists. Antagonists are professional critics who drain a preacher's energy and effectiveness by continually attacking him or undermining his ministry in more subtle ways. It is inexcusable for churches to give antagonists a free rein. Yet it happens all the time. Owen Cosgrove hit the nail on the head on this subject in an article in Firm Foundation back in 1979:

Troubled people often are troublesome people. The person with a very poor self image feels insecure. He is like the problem child whose ego is buoyed and supported by the amount of confusion that he can cause. Because we sometimes think of "the members" as permanent and the preacher as temporary or expendable, one or two unruly people are a perpetual source of criticism and resistance to preachers.

If just one person would exercise some discipline or control - if just one time, the elders would say, "Brother _____ or Sister _____, we simply will not allow this kind of thing to go on," it could be stopped. But elders and others stay mum and the preacher is left to face the wolves alone.

Some elders seem to think, "It's his problem. Let him work out of it the best way he can." So the preacher's family starts hunting boxes, and the troublemaker continues unabated. Meanwhile, the church dies a slow, painful, cancerous death. (January 30, 1979)

The third recommendation is to *approach change slowly but intentionally*. When it comes to change in the church I think of the old analogy of the road with the ditch on either side. One ditch is the extreme of rushing into change that has not been well thought out. The other ditch is the extreme of refusing to change at all.

We have made a number of significant changes in Westminster over the years. For most of them we began the process well before the actual change by being very up front with the congregation about what was being contemplated. We then went through a time when dialogue and study about the proposed change could take place. Sometimes that time

would include open congregational meetings when anyone could speak and/or an appropriate series of study in our adult Sunday School class.

Our last major change was the incorporation of special music into our worship assemblies on a regular basis. We preceded that change by studying the theme of worship in our adult class using Dan Dozier's book *Come Let Us Adore Him* as a text. That allowed for a lot of discussion to take place in a relaxed environment. In the end we made this change without a single objection from within our congregation. We did have one strenuous but courteous objection once from a visitor from a sister congregation. Otherwise the response has been very positive.

By approaching change slowly but intentionally we sometimes frustrate those who want rapid change as well as those who would be happy with no change at all. What we avoid, though, is having one group despair of ever seeing the change they want as well as the other group feeling like change is being crammed down their throat.

In some cases we've taken as long as two years to consider a proposed change but it has always been time well spent. In every case we've ended up with a consensus, not a unanimous decision always but always a consensus. That has made it possible for us to avoid having to implement a change with the congregation being sharply divided.

We don't let a few individuals have a veto over change but if a substantial minority doesn't support a change then that's a signal to us that we're trying to go too fast. So we have waited to make changes until we have a consensus but not until it is unanimous. If every member must agree with a proposed change in order for it to take place, then very few changes will ever occur. That's a good way to kill a church because it gives one or a few people a stranglehold on the church.

The fourth recommendation for growth and change is to *emphasize the worship assembly and strive to make the worship experience as meaningful as possible*. For several years now we have been very intentional about our worship assemblies.

Specifically, in the beginning we formed a Worship Committee that met monthly to plan our worship assemblies. In our case the need for the Worship Committee was only temporary. As the congregation became comfortable with worship changes and the anxiety level subsided, then the attendance at the Worship Committee meetings dropped off until it was little more than our worship leaders. Other than one Sunday each month that is planned by our Senior High youth group, our worship leaders now plan our assemblies.

Having a Worship Committee was helpful to us, though, in making the initial changes in our assemblies. Anyone who felt strongly about worship was invited to be part of this committee. If someone com-

plained, they were invited to be a part of the committee. If they didn't come, they basically lost their right to complain. If they did come, then their concerns were reflected in our worship time together. Their concerns may not have been reflected as strongly as they like, but they did become part of the blend that was the result of the committee's work.

The specific change that produced the most tension was transforming our hymnody. I have wondered at times if many Christians would not accept changes in the canon of Scripture more easily than we accept changes in our hymnody! We started out like most Churches of Christ of the time with a hymnody of maybe fifty or sixty songs that we sang over and over again year after year. Now if I had to break it down, our hymnody is about 40% contemporary, 40 % from our traditional Church of Christ hymnody and 20% "high church" classical type hymns that one of our worship leaders has taught us over the last seven years.

While some of our members deeply resented the changes at the time, I don't sense any of that now. Most of our folks seem to genuinely appreciate the breadth of our hymnody. We think we may have the broadest hymnody in the brotherhood. We tell newcomers that you really have to come a month to hear the range of hymns and songs of praise that we sing. One Sunday may be quite different from the next. We had to endure two to three years of some tension to make this transformation but most of us now feel that we are nourished spiritually by our hymnody.

Other specific changes we've made in the '90's include: greatly increasing the amount of Scripture that is publicly read, including responsive readings on some Sundays; having a time of Joys and Concerns in which anyone can share with the congregation; sometimes separating out the invitation or exhortation as we then call it from the sermon; and on one or two Sundays a month including special music from our Music Ministry Group.

Some Sundays of course are better than others but, overall, our earnestness about improving our worship assemblies has proven to be a draw for us in terms of growth. Our assemblies are more effective now in helping our worshipers to encounter God in worship and that makes them want to come back.

What I'm recommending in worship is part of a broader recommendation and that is to strive for excellence in all that is done in the church and in the name of the church. Smaller churches do not have to settle for mediocrity just because of our size. We may not be able to do things on a grand scale but we can strive for excellence. People are attracted to excellence. A church that strives for excellence in all that it does is much more likely to grow than one that just mindlessly perpetuates the status quo without thought or creativity.

The fifth and last recommendation is to *make what we do in the church over and above the basic scriptural essentials build the church up and not drag it down*. Some things we do because we find them in Scripture and we do them in imitation of the early church. Beyond those things, we should choose what we do very carefully and with a specific purpose in mind.

The format of our meetings is one of the most obvious areas in this regard that comes to mind. For years we continued on with a traditional meeting format that included Sunday and Wednesday evenings. Our attendance at them had stagnated at about 35 even after our membership had passed 100. Over half of those 35 did not really want to be there but came out of habit and loyalty to the church. Finally, in a congregational meeting, someone had the courage to ask why we had these meetings. No one had a good answer. I won't go into all the details of the transition but we have ended up for several years now replacing Sunday night and Wednesday night with a small groups program and we're much better off.

What it comes down to is that if we're doing something as a church because it's part of our faith, that's fine. But if we're going to do something extra, it ought to be something that really counts. Congregations only have so much energy and it's a shame to waste it on routine activities that are benefiting almost no one. These routine activities that we do just because we've always done them sap away the energy primarily of our core numbers, the very ones whose energies we should be conserving and directing in the most productive directions.

These five recommendations are for the long-term and not the short-term. I don't know how to help the church grow spectacularly in the short term. That has not been our experience in Westminster. Our growth has not been spectacular even in the long term but it has been solid and steady and, as the years have gone by, substantial. At the end of 1983 our "family membership" (members and their attending children) was forty-one. Now ('97) it is 171.

Most of our congregations can grow. If we take a long-term approach and begin to position ourselves for growth we may not see much numerical growth in the first year or two but over the course of a decade we will.

When we dismantle the internal obstacles to growth that most of our churches have, we will start to see God grow his church once again. We can't make the church grow. Only God can. But we can get out of his way and stop sabotaging the exercise of his power in the local church.

IX. OUR GREAT SALVATION

Alex V. Wilson

Last month we studied sin. Now we consider salvation. May our minds be gripped and our hearts stirred as we begin delving into this glorious subject. Too many Christians take their salvation for granted. They are like rescued captives who have no enthusiasm for their deliverance or deliverer.

Contrast Paul. Wow! He seemed constantly amazed that Christ had redeemed him. He could never get over it. He loved to contemplate all the various aspects of the great and costly gift he had received.

By 'salvation' Paul is using a word with the broadest possible concept. It includes the past, the present and the future. It describes God's liberation of man from all the ravages of sin in the conscience, the mind, the heart, the will and the body; in his relation to God, the world and himself. To use Paul's own words, it comprises the believer's **justification** (his acceptance before God), **sanctification** (his growth in holiness), **edification** (his life in the Church) and **glorification** (his perfection in the eternal glory). Or more simply, it makes him a son and a saint, a brother and an heir.

--John Stott in *Basic Introduction to the New Testament*.

Besides the somewhat technical terms he often used to explain various features of salvation (for example, justification), Paul used several different expressions to describe the message he proclaimed. Like flashes from the facets of a diamond, these expressions sparkle with insight concerning our salvation. At one time Paul liked to consider the subject from this angle, at another time from that angle.

1. Salvation's Source: God's Grace

“. . . the ministry which I received . . . to testify the gospel of the **grace of God.**” “I commend you to God and to the word of his **grace.**” (Acts 20:24 & 32; also 14:3).

Why did the apostle call his message the gospel of grace? Surely because **God's gracious character is the SOURCE** from which salvation springs. No goodness of ours compels God to act on our behalf. He loves us, not because we are lovable, but simply because He is loving.

Abe Lincoln once was invited to give a speech. As he walked to the appointment dressed in formal attire, he saw a pig caught in a mud hole. He could not bear to leave it struggling vainly there. So he rescued the pig and satisfied his own sense of compassion. But his muddy clothes shocked the waiting audience's sense of dignity. That incident

gives a feeble reflection of God's coming down into the muck and quicksand which trapped us, and pulling us free. Perhaps at incarnation-time some of the angels murmured to themselves, "How shocking! How undignified to empty Himself of His glory in such a way! Why does He do it? Why? Because of grace. Paul exclaimed, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Some evangelists think they preach the gospel even though they do not proclaim God's grace. But that's like explaining the origin of honey without even mentioning the bees!

2. Salvation's Basis: Christ's Cross

"The word of the cross is . . . the power of God." "We preach Christ crucified." "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor. 1:18 & 23; 2:2.)

The gospel is the word of the cross, the message of the divine Messiah executed as a criminal. The cross is the BASIS of salvation. Even though God in His grace wanted to save us, He could not have done it without the cross. For since He is just, sin must be judged. He could not allow it to remain unpunished. His problem was, how could He Himself be just and yet graciously justify us who are unjust?

The cross was the solution. There Jesus assumed "responsibility for the sins of the world. As **man** He could represent men. As a **sinless man** He had no sins of His own for which atonement needed to be made. As the **Son of God**, His life had an infinite and eternal value and could be given in exchange not just for one lost person but for the whole world." (Stott)

The cross shows, as nothing else can, how monstrous our sins are. If nothing short of the death of God's Son Himself could pay the penalty we deserve, then the depth of our guilt must be staggering.

The cross demonstrates, as nothing else can, how infinite God's love is. Once in Manila, a neighbor confronted me. He said, "I can't believe God loves us, because there is no much suffering in the world. Even the innocent suffer." He repeatedly mentioned a baby who had been born deaf and also without any arms or legs. "A loving God wouldn't allow that." My reply did not satisfy him but it satisfies me: Yes, there are problems, but I know God loves you and me because His innocent Son voluntarily died for us. The cross gives unshakable evidence. "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

3. Salvation's Purpose: Life and Reconciliation

Paul once summarized his ministry and message thus: "Christ . . . gave unto us **the ministry of reconciliation** . . . having committed unto us **the word of reconciliation.**" And he told the Philippians to hold forth "**the word of life.**" (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Phil. 2:16.)

Wonderful words of life! Salvation makes dead people alive (Eph. 2:1f.). Christ said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Later He explained what He meant: "This is life eternal, that they may know you, the only true God (the Father), and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). No one is really living unless he knows God. But how can we get to know Him when our sins separate us from Him? That brings us to the fact of reconciliation.

A president may for some reason pardon a criminal, but still dislike him. Probably he will never get close to the man. But the heavenly King and Judge is not like that. When He pardons a convict He invites him home to live with Him and be His lifelong friend. That is reconciliation: peace and friendship are established.

"While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10). Not only forgiveness but also friendship is the GOAL of salvation. Christ wants to be not only our Savior but also our Friend "I no longer call you servants . . . Instead I have called you friends" (John 15:15).

Salvation's source: God's grace. Salvation's basis: Christ's cross. Salvation's purpose: God's friendship. What a great salvation! But there is more.

4. Salvation's Greatest Goal: Christ's Glory

"The god of this world has blinded . . . unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of **the gospel of the glory of Christ**" (2 Cor. 4:4; the King James version is inaccurate here).

I can do nothing better here than quote from another writer:

What phrases come to your mind when you think of the content of the gospel? The sinfulness of man, justification by faith, eternal life, redemption, belief in Christ? These are all Biblical but there is one I seldom hear mentioned. It is "the glory of Christ." Paul says that the gospel concerns the glory of Christ.

These are days of confusion concerning the content of the gospel. Some say that the gospel concerns "the four facts every man should know": all have sinned, the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life, so receive Him. It is true that this is part of the theological backbone of the gospel but many non-Christians have

been confused due to the final phrase "receive Him." Rather the Christian should say "believe it" if all he has presented is theology. The question of non-Christians is often this: "Who is He?"

In presenting the gospel we must present theology, but the words of Ruth Paxson are still true, "**The gospel involves something to be believed and someone to be received.**" Do we place all our emphasis on the first half? The Bible is both theological and personal. The gospel concerns the glory of Christ. We must present Him as glorious if we wish the non-Christian to receive Him. Until we present something more excellent than the unbeliever yet knows, why should he abandon his present satisfactions, even though they are slight?

As a corollary to this verse, would it be fair to say that the one who has never beheld the glory of Christ is not a Christian?

--Paul Fromer in His Magazine

What a message we have to proclaim: the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of the glory of Christ, the word of the cross, the word of reconciliation, the word of life. To the best of our ability (for who is sufficient for these things?), let us enjoy and preach and teach all these aspects of our great salvation and our great Savior.

VOICES from the FIELDS

Eugene Mullins, Sr. Garland, Texas July 14, 1997
Trip to Matehuala and Monterrey, Mexico

I have just returned from one of the best fishing trips I have been on in a long time. At my age, I am still learning how to fish. (See the statement in Matt. 4:19, "Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men.") And on the trips I have made to Russia and Mexico I have begun to see what Jesus meant. In Mexico, under the leadership of a man of God named Arnulfo Santillan, whom God has taught to fish successfully, I have learned much. I left Dallas early on the 8th of July, and arrived in Monterrey, Mexico. Brother Santillan met me. Then we went out to the site of the Medical Clinic being built by members of Iglesia De Cristo Cervantes, where the Lord has given Arnulfo a vision. He is being led of the Lord to build a Medical Clinic.

Working that day were three men. Only one is being paid for this project, an older man, Ishmael Santillan is a brother of Brother Santillan; he is a medical doctor who travels with the team that goes on the medical campaigns. He loves the Lord, and seeks to help those hurting in need. We took with us a preacher, whose outstanding characteristic is he is blind, and helping to build the clinic. Pablo, the blind preacher, was mixing cement, and mortar, and shoveling it in a wheel barrow. He never missed it! Late in the afternoon we went back to Brother Ar-

nulfo's house and were greeted by a large group of young people, who are part of a Bible study group Sister Santillan teaches each Tuesday evening in their backyard.

God is showing me the art of fishing. Brother Santillan leads a group of people once or twice a month to very poor villages, and meets the needs of people, spiritual as well as physical, in those villages. Part of the results this year is 80 souls have been added to the kingdom of God since the first of the year. This was not the reason for my going on this trip. (However, I did rejoice the first Wednesday evening when a young man surrendered to Jesus Christ and was buried with his Lord in the watery grave of baptism.) I went because Brother Santillan is constantly preparing fishermen for the Kingdom. He wanted me to come and teach the Word of God to help the student fishermen to know Him better.

I took over \$200.00 worth of books to teach English as a Second Language. I taught seven, three of them new teenagers, for seven hours on Saturday. It was thoroughly enjoyable working with young people who would listen, and wanted to learn. That was the beginning of a week filled with blessings from the Lord.

On Thursday we drove to Matehuala, and immediately I began teaching the word of God. I taught Exodus for 17 hours Thursday afternoon and Friday. This was at the Matehuala School of Preaching. The young men who attend the school, the youngest of whom is sixteen, study Monday through Friday, Friday afternoon they hand out tracts and spread the Word. Then they go home and preach on Sunday. All these men are from very poor families. There are three more who want to begin in August, but funds have to be raised for these men. The Eastern Hills congregation helps sponsor the school. They all attend on Scholarship. During their time of schooling Brother Arnulfo raises their support, and after they finish the three years of study the Mexican church supports them. (It costs about \$125 to \$150 per month for the young men to stay in school.)

If you would like to help in spreading the message of the Gospel of Christ to a hungry people, send gifts to me through the Eastern Hills Church of Christ, 1710 Wynn Joyce Rd., Garland, Texas 75043. Make checks payable to the church for tax purposes for the Lord's Mexican work. More than anything else pray for the Lord's leading in that open door.

Michiya Nakahara Shizuoka City, Japan August, 1997
Report from Bob M. Yarbrough, treasurer

First, some good news about Teruko Nakahara, in Dallas. She is about to be grandmother times seven. Michiya and Tomoko are ex-

pecting in October. Teruko is very excited. Her husband, Shichiro, was the seventh son of his own family. Now there will be seven grandchildren for her. Teruko has moved in with her daughter, Annette, and her children. She has remodeled a large upstairs room into a small apartment.

Michiya made a quick visit to the USA in July to see all his family and help his mother get settled into her new apartment. Stephanie came in from Chicago to see him. Teruko said it had been nine years since all the family had been together - that's a long time. I had the opportunity to visit with Michiya while he was here. The work in Japan is slow and difficult. It seems that money and education are gods, while traditional religions are very resistant to Christianity. Michiya left me a list of Thanksgivings and Prayer Requests which are listed below.

Thanksgivings

1. Having a regular visitor, Mr. Hatai, come to the worship services seeking the truth.

2. Maintaining the unity in our group by love and the prayerful example of our church leaders.

3. The increasing spirit of commitment to serve the Lord since the seminar we conducted last summer.

4. One baby girl was born in July and two more will soon be born-- thus more children for our Church family.

5. God's abundant blessings both spiritually and physically upon my family: Tomoko and I are expecting our second child in October.

Prayer Requests

1. Pray for Mr. Hatai to receive Christ as Savior. He is very careful and thinks that he should know more about the Bible before he responds.

2. Pray for our church to grow more spiritually and be more knowledgeable of the Word and more effective in witnessing to our neighbors.

3. We are still seeking the Lord's guidance about the purchase of the adjoining property facing the street for future growth. It is so very expensive.

[Bob Yarbrough's new address is 19930 County Rd. 324, Terrell, Texas 75160, Ph. (972) 524-8571.]

Martin Brooks

Mozambique

July, 1997

The church at Chibonbo has a new church building made of woven palm branches. We were told the church was started six months ago when a woman was delivered of demons. It had reportedly happened

right there by our make-shift dinner table. On the ground was a small "tree." It looked like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree, about 18 inches high, a few branches and no leaves. Several multi-colored cords were attached to it. Beside it lay a coffee mug and a small wooden cross with more cords attached. There was a doughnut shaped indentation in the dirt around the tree where the people had danced a well worn path. Typically, a person desiring some "blessing" kneels at the tree. Others dance around the tree and kneeling person. Prayers are offered by a prophet, prophetess, priest, pastor, deaconess, or someone with some other title. They also attempt to beat the evil spirits out of a person kneeling by the tree. All of this is in the name of Christ.

The cords are also tied to various parts of the body and draped from the interior of the churches. They are nearly always present in the homes. It is especially difficult for the mothers to give up tying them to the children. Even their chickens had strings tied around their legs. When we see the cords, we know that traditional African religions have been mixed with Christianity. The combinations are always interesting. Usually the medicine men have influenced the mix considerably. The people believe the ancestral spirits must be appeased, and they believe the medicine men know how to do this. The medicine men "bless" the cords, and then sell them to the people. They also sell the necessary sacrificial animals (chickens, goats) to ward off upset ancestral spirits, curses placed by disgruntled neighbors, sicknesses, etc.

After some discussion concerning in whom our faith is placed, they asked if Don wanted to pull up the little tree. My recent Bible readings have been in 1 & 2 Kings. I think there is a parallel between the Asherah poles and these places of worship scattered throughout Africa. They told Don they no longer needed the tree "because now we have a church building." Don pulled up the tree and crushed it in the Name of Jesus. Immediately, a baby began to cry. Perhaps it had been crying all along, but now I became aware of it. Any bad thing is perceived as a result of angering the ancestral spirits. This is especially true in a transitional time when the first steps of faith are being taken. The baby had a stomach ache, but we had also just destroyed a sacred object. We prayed for the baby, the stomach ache passed. Please pray for the people of Chibonbo that the Lord will orchestrate events to strengthen their faith. It is a new church and they need a lot of teaching. They want to please God, and they want to be taught. Pray too, that the Lord will raise up more teachers. Maybe you.

We had fun with the people too. I attempted to carry a water bucket on my head. I wanted to see from where our water was coming. They had a nice little spring. Later, I preached in Portuguese as Horcio, our guide, interpreted into Changaan. I think he embellished my words considerably. He is quite a communicator. After the sermon, the people presented us with gifts. We received a couple of coconuts, cassava

roots (potato like staple), fried mandioca (granola like snack), a bowl of peanuts, and a bowl of corn kernels. Once again, I was humbled by people who sleep in mud and grass huts and yet are so generous.

Don and I are talking with Hor cio about where to offer classes. We want to do it in Inhambane, and he wants us to do it in Panda. Please keep us in your prayers as we attempt to sort things out.

I want to mention what a blessing it has been for Betty (Susan's sister) to have been with us the last several weeks. She went to the bush with us and helped Juanita distribute medicines. I think we have de-mystified Africa for her. No longer is Africa "the dark continent." It is a place where people live day in and day out. They don't wear feathers and animal skins; they wear clothing you donate to Goodwill and the church clothes closets. The food they eat is a little different, and their perspectives on life are somewhat different, but they have big hearts. They are not what we think of as "natives;" they are working people trying to make enough money to buy food and get by. In many ways, the African people are just like you and me. Many love the Lord, and many still need to meet the Lord. This is the field God has given us. There is a lot of work to do and too few hands to do it.

We are currently teaching Church leaders using programmed learning text books written in Portuguese. They give a little information to the students and then ask questions about the information. As the student progresses through the book, he sees the same information in subsequent paragraphs. The books are good about using African examples to help the student grasp the applications of the materials. By the time a student goes through our two year Bible study program, they will have completed sixteen books. These books are about 200 pages each and cost around \$1.75 each. This is not much for us, but for the students, it is a days wage. We recently purchased 400 of them and printed another 200.

Some of you have asked about tangible ways in which you can help the ministry here. The teaching is patterned around 2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." For \$28 you can buy all the textbooks for a student's two year study program. The students will then have the beginnings of a reference library to help him prepare lessons and teach others.

If you want to help, that is one way. Another way is to write us, often. Thanks so much to all of you who take the time to send us notes through e-mail: **BROOKS@ZEBRA.VEM.MZ**

WALTER SCOTT

by Leroy Garrett

[Brother Garrett's original title for this article was "Happy 200th, Walter Scott!" But since he published it back in December, 1996, we are too belated to use such a title. We also have condensed it a little.--AVW]

The 200th anniversary of Walter Scott's birth (Oct. 31, 1796) has not gone unnoticed in Stone-Campbell circles. Dean Newell Williams of Christian Theological Seminary (Disciples of Christ) in a recent study of Scott in *Discipliana* notes that while earlier historians saw his contributions as positive, more recent studies have viewed Scott more negatively. He named histories by Henry E. Webb and Richard Hughes in particular, the first of which charged that Scott hardened Campbell's position on baptism, while the second accused him of radicalizing Campbell's *Christian Baptist*, which set the course for the sectarian Churches of Christ.

I agree with our earlier historians and take exception to some of these more recent interpretations. Walter Scott was into the Person of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit too much to be blamed for any of our sectarianism. Instead of hardening or radicalizing anybody, Scott simply outlined what the apostle Peter preached in Acts 2:38.

Unlike many in the Churches of Christ of the 20th century, Scott didn't preach the church or baptism or some plan. He preached Christ and him crucified. That is the "golden oracle" of the Bible, as he saw it; Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world!

Once he had preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, he told sinners how to respond to the gospel, as Peter did in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And so his so-called five-finger exercise: faith, repentance, baptism (the sinner's response to the gospel), remission of sins, the Holy Spirit (God's gifts of grace). If that is sectarian, then the apostle Peter was sectarian.

Scott was not unfaithful to us; we have been unfaithful to him. The Churches of Christ fouled up his five-finger exercise by revising his order into a "five step" plan that included only what man does, as if it were a works salvation: Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Baptized. The Independent Christian Churches also revised Scott's order. We both left out the Holy Spirit!

If we had preserved Scott's passion for the Holy Spirit's ministry to the church, we would be a more spiritual people today. He had a unique way of describing the Holy Spirit as "a missionary to the church." As a missionary to the church, the Spirit's mission is to conform the believing community into the likeness of Christ. What a beautiful truth!

Scott's theology was in terms of mission. God's mission was to all the universe as creator and preserver. Christ's mission was to the world as Lord and Savior. The apostles' mission was to the world as envoys of the gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit's mission was to the church as comforter and teacher.

He saw this arrangement as crucial. If you make the Spirit a missionary to the world as an enabler to faith instead of the apostolic gospel, as in Calvinism, you foul things up. The gospel brings them to faith (the church); the Spirit as a missionary to the church conforms believers into Christlikeness.

This emphasis may explain why Scott was such a spiritual man, one of deep devotion and prayer. And he was a passionate preacher, eloquent in divine oratory, an irresistible persuader. A sinner was hard put to stay in his seat in the face of his pleading. Once when he preached near Bethany, he brought Alexander Campbell himself out of his seat praising God! Lest we forget, this man, our greatest evangelist, brought sinners out of their seats to be baptized at the rate of a thousand a year.

Recent historians have made a big deal out of Scott's claim that he had in 1827 "restored the gospel" according to the primitive order. A bold, sectarian claim, they say, one that even Alexander Campbell bought into for a time.

If it were an overstatement, it was understandable and forgivable, for insofar as Scott knew he was the only one since Pentecost who had preached the gospel like Peter did. Years later Scott modified his claim, explaining that it was the "practical application" of the gospel that he restored in 1827, not the gospel itself.

Let's face it, when it comes to the glorious heritage we have in Walter Scott, "the voice of the golden oracle," we have blown it. To make him some kind of radical sectarian is not only a grave injustice to a great and good evangelist but it is also a betrayal of our history at its best.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaes

A Surprise For The News & Notes Editor

(We snuck this in on brother Jack.)

On July 28 Jack Blaes turned 80. A surprise party was held for him the day before. He never saw it coming! A large crowd thanked God for our brother's faithfulness in many ways, such as: Preacher of God's word in St. Louis, and at Antioch Church near Frankfort. A Barnabas to many folks. A substitute teacher in public school, and a regular teacher at Portland Christian School later on. He helped get Antioch Camp going. Was chairman for years of the American Cancer Society drive. Was active longterm in the Christian Businessmen's Committee in Frankfort. Also had a radio program there. Has been an elder at Highland Church for years. A man of patriotism, who has prayed and worked hard for better local and national government and for family values.

Other comments: "He's a Christian every day." "He's a friend, advisor and example to his grandchildren." "He serves God with joy." Someone recalled the time (don't imitate this!) when Bro. Jack swallowed an Alka-Seltzer tablet, then drank water. The result was an internal volcano. We're thankful for you, brother Jack.

Available For Supply Preaching

... in and around the Louisville area:

Jim Goodwin taught at Portland Christian School, ministered to Salem Church of Christ in Harrison County; Kentucky Ave. & Ralph Ave. in Louisville. Contact phone # (812) 246-8142.

Dan Ford of Sullivan, Ind. is now ministering for the Jennings, La. church.

African Young People Seek Pen Pals

These names are taken from a magazine John Kernan publishes for Christian youth in Africa. Anyone who feels like this is something he can do to minister to these people may do so. Pray for wisdom and love for the people you write to. If you select someone please let us know who it is. When you have something to share with W&W readers (just some excerpts from their letters) send it in. --JWB

Crence Mogale was 21 on May 20th. He is a body-builder; likes going to church and sings in the choir; reads the Bible before going to bed each night. 420 Phooko Section, 1832 Katlehong, Republic of South Africa

Miss Kundai Mazwi wants pals from 13-15 years old. Likes reading & TV. Loreto Secondary School, P/Bag 9024, Gweru, Zimbabwe.

Roseline Gunda wants pals who like volleyball, reading books, listening to the radio. Please send photo. Chikwira Secondary School, P/Bag 2040, Glendale, Zimbabwe.

Liphi Ndebele wants pals outside of Zimbabwe; either sex; aged 16-29; likes going to church and visiting friends. Photo if possible. 4290 Lobengula West, P O: Magwegwe, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Locust St. Church of Christ

To Russia, With Love ... was the title of Paul Kitzmiller's

"made-for-missions" movie, which aired last Sunday during our evening service. We were greatly encouraged to learn that God is blazing new paths for the gospel in the old Soviet Union.. We were also challenged by the tremendous need these opportunities have revealed. A total of \$432 was contributed to aid Paul and Virginia in their upcoming service. Let us continue to support this vital ministry through our prayers and love.

Jennings, La. Church of Christ

Bro. Stan Broussard was to return home Friday, but was to keep in touch daily with his doctors for some time. Please continue to pray for him and Sis. Nan as they mend.

Acadiana Bible Institute: The first class in Old Testament Survey will be taught by Bro. Val. Classes will be each Thursday Evening in September, beginning at 7:00 p.m. and lasting two hours. The lessons are college level, and are taught at the Avenue E. building in Crowley.

Good news continues . . . besides the five baptisms at Christian Youth Encampment last week, there were three rededications and others who came, asking prayers about specific concerns. Pray for these young Christians in their efforts to please God.

Gallatin Church of Christ

Summer and the month of August have ended on a high note! Since our last bulletin we have witnessed these decisions: Chad Koch, Sarah Starnes, Alex Moss, and Eric Beaty completed their commitments to Jesus Christ by being baptized. In addition Kelly Starnes placed her membership as did David and Wanda Moss.

At the end of countless study sessions, our youth who participated in this year's Bible Bowl were rewarded with a wonderful experience in Cookeville. They

found themselves among more than 1,000 young people in a lively contest.

Everyone in the group are winners by virtue of the reward that comes with studying God's Word. Two of our teams scored high enough to be in the finals. In the senior division of the sixteen semifinals our team was composed of Jennifer Cox, Krystal Cox, Sarah Stambaugh and Holly Vaughn. One of our junior teams continued to the "final four" contest and placed third overall! congratulations to this team of Drew Schreiner, Joel Cox, Barrett Schreiner and Susan Vaughn.

Portland Church, Louisville

We have Prayed, God has Answered.

During the first 9 months of LAST year, Jan.-Sept. '96, *only 1 person* received Jesus as Lord and Savior! As a result, the elders called on the church to observe a time of FASTING AND PRAYER on at least one day every month.

During the last 3 months of that year, 3 people came to Christ.

During the first 8 1/2 months of *this* year, as we have continued our fasting and praying, 8 people have been baptized. Give God thanks, and keep on fasting and praying for His blessings on us--that even more will be truly converted and born again.

Did You Leave These Behind?

After the Louisville Christian Fellowship Week was over, we found these items left at the Portland Church. They were together, no doubt left by the same person: 1 "Voices from the Past" video; 1 Living Messages--1948 book; & a ballpoint pen. If you left them, notify W&W & we'll send them to you. You may pay the postage, please.

RACCOON JOHN SMITH, by Louis Cochran. College Press; over 300 pages; \$10.99.

This is an accurate biography, written in interesting novel form, of a colorful and powerful preacher on Kentucky's frontier in the early 1800s. He was a "character" of great humor, yet faced many heart-breaking struggles with the wilderness and with closed minded people. He was a leading pioneer in the effort to unite the Lord's people.

CLOSEOUT BARGAINS:

A NEW SPIRIT. Numerous quotations from Carl Ketcherside, arranged topically. \$3.00 before, now only \$1.50; only 4 copies left.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM, by George Ladd. Very helpful. Deep insights clearly presented--and applied to our actions & attitudes! Analyzes various interpretations, then focuses on Jesus' teachings. \$10.00 e, now only \$6.50; only 1 copy on hand.

A FIRST BOOK OF DAILY READINGS, from the writings of the late Martyn Lloyd-Jones. A page for each day of the year, by one of England's outstanding preachers. \$9.99 before, now \$5.00; only 1 copy.

We'll add the cost of postage; Kentuckians add 6% tax.

We regret that the following books are NOT available any more:

FOR FREEDOM (the biography of J. N. Armstrong)

AM I NOT FREE? (commentary on the N.T. by John May)

PILGRIMAGE OF JOY (autobiography of Carl Ketcherside)

The above are now out of print except for the 3rd, and it is available only if bought as part of a set of all the many writings of brother Ketcherside. That set may be ordered from College Press, Joplin, MO.

WORD and WORK

2518 Portland Ave., Louisville KY 40212

Questions: call Louise Wells, 502:775-8243