



Calvary

MESSENGER

“ . . . God forbid that I should glory, save in
the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ”

Galatians 6:14

FEBRUARY 2025

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Calvary Messenger

February 2025

Purpose of Calvary Messenger is:
To propagate sound Biblical doctrine;
To stimulate a deeper study of God's Word;
To anchor and fortify the faith of Christians;
To point lost and dying souls to Christ the Savior;
To welcome prodigals back to the fold and family of God;
And to help defeated Christians find victory in Christ Jesus.

Calvary Publications, Inc., is a non-profit organization, incorporated in the State of Ohio, for the purpose of sponsoring, publishing, and distributing Christian literature. The board is elected, one member annually, by the ministers of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches, at their annual spring meeting.

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Material for *Calvary Messenger*, marriages, births, ordinations, obituaries, and general articles—send to the *Editor*. Other material—mail to their respective *Editors*.

Subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, etc.—mail to **Circulation Manager**.

When you move, please notify the Circulation Manager one month in advance, giving your old and new address in full, so that your mailing label can be properly corrected and your credit be kept in order.

This periodical is digitally available at calvarymessenger.org.

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Calvary Messenger (USPS 767-160) is published monthly by Calvary Publications. Subscription rates are: 1 year (U.S.) \$13.50, 3 years (U.S.) \$39.00. For congregations using the every-home-plan, \$12.00 per year to individual addresses. With a renewal at \$13.50 for 1 year, you may use a 1-year gift subscription free. Second class postage at Sugar creek, Ohio. Postmaster: Send address changes to Calvary Publications, Inc., 6681 Lake Rd, Hicksville, OH 43526.

The Finger of God

Kim L. Beachy, Double Head Cabbage, Belize

Ancient of Days, spoke the world into being;
Up until now, it's the same we are seeing.
“Let there be light,” waters, and firmament.
It's etched solid in the precious Old Testament.

Finger of God, His mark on tablets of stone.
Precious blood of Jesus, our sins to atone.
The laws of old were hard to uphold.
His resurrection brings grace, so we are told.

Finger of God, Belshazzar trembled and paled.
Such an alarm, Daniel had to be hailed.
Temple vessels were desecrated,
A sacrilegious moment the king had created.

Finger of God, Pharaoh's magicians were sure;
Hard-hearted Pharaoh did not want to be cured.
“Put your finger here, and see my hands,”
Said Jesus to Thomas, who doubted His plans.

Finger of God, on Miriam, Gehazi, and others;
Lord, give us strength, to pray for our brothers.
“But if I with the finger of God cast out devils...”
The Pharisees were not on Jesus' level.

Finger of God, He wrote in the sand,
No one condemned her, not one single man.
“Neither do I condemn thee,” now she was free.
Compassion of the Carpenter from Galilee.

Finger of God, still writes on soft hearts,
The joy that we feel when we are set free.
The Truth has been told and will always unfold.
Words of Jesus our King, the prophets foretold.

The Goodness of God

“And he [God] said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy” (Exodus 33:19).

The Israelites had just committed terrible idolatry in making and worshipping the golden calf while Moses and Joshua were on the mountain of God receiving the covenant. God wanted to destroy them from the face of the earth and raise up a “*great nation*” through Moses. But because of Moses’s plea to remember the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, “*the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people*” (Exodus 32:14).

However, when Moses saw the calf and the dancing, it was his turn to become angry. He melted the golden calf, ground the cooled gold to powder, strawed it upon their water supply, and made the children of Israel drink of it. He also commanded the faithful ones to go throughout the camp and kill those who had sinned. About three thousand people died

that day.

After all this, Moses said he would go up on mount Sinai to make an atonement for their sin and begged God to go with them on their journey to Canaan. God promised that His Presence would go with them. God told Moses that he had found grace in His sight, and He knew Moses by name.

Moses was encouraged by this privilege he had with God and begged to see God’s glory. Instead of promising to show His glory to Moses, God said He would make all His goodness pass before him. But He would put Moses in a cleft of the rock and cover him with His hand while He passed by. He would let Moses see His back parts, but not His face, so he would not die. And God did so.

*“And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in **goodness** and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will*

by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped” (Exodus 34:5-8).

What did it look like when all God's goodness passed in front of Moses? In previous studies of this account, I always focused on God's glory that Moses had asked to see. But God said He would make all His **goodness** pass before him. What does God's goodness look like? Why did He show His goodness and not His justice and holiness?

On Exodus 33:19, Adam Clark explains this as if God was speaking. “Thou shalt not have a sight of my justice, for thou couldst not bear the infinite splendour of my purity: but I shall show myself to thee as the fountain of inexhaustible compassion, the sovereign Dispenser of my own mercy in my own way, being gracious to whom I will be gracious, and showing mercy on whom I will show mercy.”¹

Another writer explains it here. “When Moses desires that God would shew him His glory, he is answered that God will cause His goodness to pass before him and will proclaim

His name or His glorious attributes before him; hereby intimating that to know God in His glorious attributes or moral perfections was of much greater importance than to be admitted to the immediate sight of that outward Divine Glory, even though he had been able to behold it in all its unutterable splendour.”²

So, what did God's goodness look like to Moses and the children of Israel? Most notably, it was evident in God's mercy in not completely destroying them from the face of the earth. It was evident in God's promise that His Presence would go with them on their way to Canaan despite the fact that God knew they would continue to disbelieve Him and doubt His goodness.

What does God's goodness look like to us today? We have all enjoyed the goodness of God, but do I recognize it in my daily life?

According to *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, the goodness of God is “a perfection of his character which he exercises towards his creatures according to their various circumstances and relations. Viewed generally, it is benevolence; as exercised with respect to the miseries of his creatures it is mercy, pity, compassion, and in the

2. Dr. Leland, *British Family Bible*

1. *Adam Clark's Commentary*

case of impenitent sinners, long-suffering patience; as exercised in communicating favour on the unworthy it is grace. Goodness and justice are the several aspects of one unchangeable, infinitely wise, and sovereign moral perfection. God is not sometimes merciful and sometimes just, but he is eternally infinitely just and merciful. God is infinitely and unchangeably good, and his goodness is incomprehensible by the finite mind.”

It is impossible to expound on all aspects of God’s goodness, but as I think of my journey in serving God, I am at times nearly overwhelmed with gratitude for God’s faithfulness. God keeps pursuing me and continually draws me back to Him. I do not deserve any of that mercy and love that He blesses me with as His son.

That goodness and mercy is evident especially in God’s chastening. Hebrews 12:7 affirms that when God chastens us it is a sign of ownership, of being His son or daughter. While we don’t enjoy that chastisement, it is evidence of God’s goodness in continually pursuing us and not giving up on us.

Psalms 23:6 says that “*surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*” The word “follow” can imply that God pursues us! I’m so grateful for His pursuit. It is only

because of His goodness and mercy that we are not consumed. “*It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not*” (Lamentations 3:22). What a loving Parent He is!

In the contemporary song, entitled “Goodness of God,”³ two recurring phrases say, “all my life You have been faithful, and all my life You have been so, so good.” While this genre of music is not my favorite, the reminder of God’s faithfulness, goodness, and pursuit inspires me to praise God for the ways He daily holds me in His hands, how He is close to me in the darkest night and through the fires of life, and how His goodness pursues me. My response to His goodness should be complete surrender and a life that is praising the goodness of God with every breath!

When life throws darkness and fire at you, don’t give up! He doesn’t give up on you. Remember the goodness of God and trust His promises. We can never fully understand the countless ways that His goodness affects us, but remember that if you are still alive, it is because of His goodness and mercy! And when He takes you home, it is because of His goodness and mercy. God does not give up on His children!

-AY 

3. “Goodness of God,” lyrics by Jenn Johnson

Marriage Enrichment Seminar

April 11-13, 2025

Theme: Rekindling the Flame

In this seminar, we will explore the beauty and depth of a Christian marriage. Just as a fire requires fuel, oxygen, and heat to continue burning, so too a marriage needs specific elements to thrive. Through this seminar, you will discover practical and biblical insights designed to help you and your spouse cultivate a rich and flourishing relationship. Whether your marriage is strong or struggling, this seminar offers guidance on how to rekindle the flame, ensuring that your bond becomes or remains a beacon of Christ-like love, enduring friendship, and steadfast commitment.

TOPICS:

- **Divine Design** - Ben Waldner
- **Fire Extinguishers** - David Martin
- **Fuel: The Little Things** - Dave Snyder
- **Oxygen: Friendship** - David Martin
- **Life Story** - Rex & Billie Blevins
- **Heat: Love** - Ben Waldner
- **Rainy Day Resilience** - Dave Snyder



*For more information or to register, please contact Deeper Life Ministries: (614) 873-1199 or info@dmlmohio.org.
Registration deadline is March 28.*

Nothing is as **STRONG** as gentleness; nothing is as **GENTLE** as real strength.

Announcement



Beachy Ministers' Meetings

April 1-3, 2025

Hosted by the Holmes County, OH, churches.

To be held at:

United Dayspring Mennonite Church
4955 W. Main St.
Berlin, OH, 44654

For information contact:

Javan Miller – (330-476-0664)
jm@alpinestructures.net

Announcement

REACH 2025

March 13-14

REACH brings together conservative Anabaptist ministries and Kingdom workers from all walks of life. Join us for this two-day program that includes 120 breakout sessions to support and equip people in ministry and all those with a desire for service. Over 60 participating ministries share their vision in focus sessions and displays. General sessions tie the event together with sermons, singing, and prayer. All are welcome!

Location:

David L. Lawrence Convention Center,
1000 Fort Duquesne Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA

Read more information and register: fbep.org/reach-2025

It seems that **heads**, **hearts**, and **hands** would settle the world's differences much better than "arms."

Announcement



The Shepherds' Institute

February 17-20, 2025

Cornerstone Mennonite Church

20000 County Road 655 Memphis, MO 63555

DAYTIME CLASSES FOR ORDAINED AND LICENSED MINISTERS

- **Servant Leadership** – Milo Zehr, Long Island, VA
- **The Preaching of the Cross** – Dave Yoder, Dover, DE
- **Introduction to Theology** – Chester Weaver, Itasca, TX
- **Round Table Discussion** – Milo Zehr

EVENING SESSIONS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

- **Russian Mennonite History** – Chester Weaver
- **The Fulfilling Wholeness of Modest Living** – Dave Yoder

Equipping church leaders to be compassionate and wise in pastoral care, church administration, and Biblical preaching.

*For more information contact: Chester Weaver • (817) 648-1863
chesterweaver@pcrnet.net • www.theshepherdsinstitute.org*

the bottom line

Reigning as a King

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

Introduction:

This paper will seek to address the crises in some churches and their institutions and in far too many homes among plain people. It is very prevalent in the

world at all levels. A case could be made for any church people to recognize it as a serious evil spirit of worldliness. Any people who claim to be practicing nonconformity should be free of this scourge in the church

and deal scripturally with it wherever it raises its menacing head. It will call attention to some deep-rooted sins in some leaders in the church and fathers in the home.

What is the creation principle of man in the home? Or the pastor to the church, especially the lead pastor or bishop? First, what is he not? First of all, he is not a king.

- Kings rise in a tiered society. They reign over people.

- They make rules as they proceed. They assign tasks to underlings.

- They choose their counselors and have many favorites.

- They know how to cut down and cut off any undesirable people.

- They groom their sons or relatives to be their successors, favoring them much.

- They seek the praise of the majority of the people under them.

- They make changes and exceptions in an unpredictable way without seeking counsel.

What was Adam appointed by God, first of all?

- He was a caretaker over all creation, a steward, and a servant.

- He was a worker, was told to dress the garden and keep it.

- His sustenance was from his labor.

- He was a partner to creation, not a competitor.

- His position was a peaceable arrangement in his world and in partnering with his wife.

Adam's two known sons became identified by their actions and words.

- Abel was a priest first of all and secondly a prophet.

- Cain was a king-type and all too soon a ruthless king.

- God favored Abel, the priestly type of a man.

- God righteously judged Cain, making his life unbearable.

In the course of time, God sought a man to represent Him as a priest.

- Abram built an altar, whereby he sacrificed to God in worship, as a priest.

- God saw that Abram would command his children in the faith after him.

- God acknowledged him for his faith and his priestly approach to living.

- Abram was first known as a priest, then secondly as a prophet.

- Isaac, a son, also exhibited priestly and servant tendencies. (He was out in the field to worship. He also dug wells).

- Jacob, a grandson, third generation, was a mix of prophet, priest, and king.

- Jacob's ten sons further exhibited a departure from the priestly type, and took on kingly stances of competitive

talk and actions.

Moses was a prophet and judge, overloaded and overworked. Knowing that laws did not cover and ensure compliance by the people, he appointed needed assistants as rulers, counsellors, and umpires. Eventually, the people called for a king to rule over them, and why? They said to fight their battles! With a king, war with other nations was generally assumed. After all, as nomads, they were a gigantic group of two million, and unprovoked conflicts ensued. Kings were competitive; by making war they became aggressive, and engaged in battle to win.

Even among our own people, what with all our claims of godly love and peaceableness, we have had family groups of less than 100 people who have had serious internal conflicts. In some sad cases, it has happened within a family group of less than 50 people, in which people have not gotten along with each other for a long time, sometimes never.

God raised up Samuel as a prophet primarily, but he also had clear priestly traits and functioned in both as such.

When did Israel become a nation? They were a people group held together by a constitution (10 Commandments) and laws to cover all categories suited to a

religious people. First of all, there were civil laws, along with business and monetary laws, handling justice for violators, and marital laws, all toward fairness and equity.

God established Samuel as a prophet in Israel (I Samuel 3:19, 20). Prior to Samuel, Eli was the priest, presiding at the tabernacle. Eli put his sons as helper-successors to himself, but they made themselves vile with the women who came to worship, exploited food from the worshippers, and perverted judgment by taking bribes. That is a pattern which continues in some worldly church leaders to our day: violations in morals, exploiting people for their money, and appropriating the high life in travel, food, and life's dainties. Eli's sons were killed in battle as a judgment from God.

Samuel, the prophet, arose to also serve as the presiding priest. His sons also took bribes and perverted judgment in lying and evil doings. Consequently, the people asked for a king, even to demanding it. God gave them their demands but sent leanness into their soul (Psalm 106:15). Saul was chosen, a humble man. But King Saul became arrogant, jealous, suspicious, and regarded himself as the top man.

God let it be known that in His kingdom, the prophet-priest is

clearly recognized as His intended and ordained position among men. Worldly kings became uppermost over all, often by an evil, grasping, and usurped position. In the succession of Israel's kings, by their fourth king, they were right there as the earthly kings of the nations, above priest and prophet and commoner. Early on, it was clear that God had intended that His duly-chosen prophets should be higher in command than the kings. Kings, by nature of their office, place themselves above everyone else, as an earthly sovereign.

Samuel was displeased when the people of Israel asked, insisted, and demanded a king, but God said, "Give them a king." Samuel duly warned them what a king would do, and it would not be good. But when it is done, it is done. (I Samuel 8)

The key word about Saul is the word "became." Kings become king-like. They are authoritarian, inconsiderate, demanding, unapproachable, impatient, political, and overbearing. What else? They are two-faced. To favorites and supporters, they are smooth-talkers, they credit cronies, and give favors to adherents. To all others, they can be aloof, and if necessary, mean-spirited.

King Saul clearly and blatantly violated the words of Samuel. Samuel was the prophet chosen by God,

whereas Saul was the king, coronated by the people's wishes, but given by the permissive will of God. The peak test came in I Samuel 15. Saul proclaimed he was doing God's bidding, but then made an exception for himself and blamed the people for his own obvious error and sin. Saul tried to backpedal, and take the well-travelled easy road by just asking for forgiveness, as in, "Let's just forget it." That has been all too common in some of our own churches today and in some homes.

As king, the verdict of God through Samuel was, "Saul, as king, you are judged and condemned." He lost his place in the kingdom in an accelerated series of judgments in a downward spiral in his remaining years.

David became the next king of Israel and did very well in many ways, except... All the world, then and now, knows of his series of violations involving Bathsheba. It has caused sinners far and wide to blaspheme God, assuming that all the righteous are hypocrites. Why do people, saint and sinner alike, not give equal time and emphasis to King David's deep remorse and repentance for his sin? Because that is not the example they want for their lives. By their own "lesser sins," in their faulty minds, they can better overlook their own guilt.

The main point of this message is this: fathers, as kings in the home, are generally destined to not be good, or even godly fathers! Examples abound in our time that cause tears in my eyes again, as one who weeps for the fathers in many counseling centers, some who end up for years in prison for their departure from the prophet-priest model, having selfishly taken up a kingly streak of control over their children, notably, their daughters.

Solomon succeeded his father, King David, thus beginning a kingly dynasty. King Solomon inherited a godly heritage generationally, plus an abundant measure of wisdom from God. His 40-year reign became the golden era of national Israel, wherein every experiment and enterprise resulted in unprecedented fame, riches, and power. The model of his father, King David, became a driving force of expansion in endless kingdom subdivisions of social, material, and governmental growth into a world superpower.

For instance, in sexual prowess, instead of maneuvering to take another man's beautiful wife, as did his erring father, he took to himself 700 wives, and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3). That marital "experiment" included some promiscuous women who were the daughters of heathen

kings. That marital experiment turned directly into a religious experience of oppressive gods. That experiment, of course, turned into an inhouse experience of bowing to the demands of those outlandish gods. Mention is made of the terrible god Moloch, the abomination of the Ammonites, by whom they burned babies alive in the redhot arms of this terrible god.

The Bible says in the next verse, "*And likewise did he for all his strange [heathen] wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods*" (I Kings 11:8). Whereupon, the next verse has the heart-rending words in God's arresting verdict, "*And God was angry with Solomon, because his heart was TURNED FROM THE LORD GOD...*"

With all of his multitude of earth's involvements, how could he be a good, upright family man as a fitting model to follow? His kingly pursuits left little room for any prophet-type work under God, (representing God to his children) or any priest-type work (representing his children and grandchildren to God). His kingly performance offset and finally overrode the great measure of wisdom given by God.

Solomon died. Son Rehoboam assumed the kingdom, and reigned. The old counselors under Solomon

advised Rehoboam to ease up on the taxes. They said to Rehoboam (all church leaders and fathers in our homes, take special note), “*If thou WILT BE A SERVANT unto this people, (1) and wilt serve them, (2) and answer them, (3) and speak good words to them, (4) THEN THEY WILL BE THY SERVANTS forever*” (I Kings 12:7). This verse speaks of doing and speaking. Church leaders have far too often erred seriously by not being candid about their shortcomings—their own wrongs—but instead projected a kingly façade. Instead of being a servant-leader, they take the assumed role of a king-monarch.

The unfortunate crises in our churches could most often be traced to a bishop or lead pastor who is trying to administrate with king-like applications. Despite our emphatic messages at the annual minister’s meeting, as needing to be servant-leaders in our churches, going home again and entering the heat of the battle, some of us slide sideways into various defensive positions. I have seen and heard about more of these than I can remember, but I do recall quite a few.

Background: quite a few of our church leaders, past and present, did not grow up in a more or less ideal church. The excesses of those

leaders’ experience as a layman can weigh heavily on their discharge of administrative procedures. Many have come from a very plain background and, under pressure, revert to heavy-handed, autocratic, Rehoboam-type ultimatums that quickly spawn Jeroboam-type, knee-jerking reactions, which then quickly spread as shock waves, as from an explosion. Instead of kneeling in humility and weakness as a servant-leader, the kingly-type leader stands stiffly erect on his platform with his head up in the air, ready to be the last man standing. The people revolt and soon find a Jeroboam to be their leader.

O Rehoboam, where art thou? Remember the day when the old men said, “*If thou wilt be a servant unto the people...*”

Sadly, very sadly, there have been many more people on the opposite end of this spectrum who have forsaken their plain upbringing, who are so disappointed, disillusioned, and even disgusted by all the trappings of orthodoxy, that their reaction causes them to wade into a gradual and increasingly worldly lifestyle. Plenty of space is out there for them to merely have a professed faith in tandem with an optional obedience, considered as average, or nearly enough so, by their newly-

chosen peer group.

While, typically, they can easily praise their heritage, yet despise and reject in their own lives the biblicism in precept and principle that their forebears had upheld. Their children and continuing posterity can gradually, naturally, and easily be assimilated into the world and its tenacious system of another king-type control and expression.

The unfortunate crises in our homes could likewise often be traced to a dad who operates like a king, rather than like a prophet (representing God to his wife and children) or a priest (representing his wife and children to God). As a king, some dads have been verbally abusive, and physically injurious, or sexually violating biblical and state laws. These unchristian and ungodly excesses in Anabaptist-land USA need urgent and diligent attention. These kinds of king-like escapades are known here and there among our communities, generally more often in those church groups that are more orthodox. Why? The “I-am-king” mentality usually has a stronger grip there.

The church model should be a model for people in their marriages and with their children. Adam was given dominion over the earth. Nowhere in the Bible is man, as an individual, to have the ultimate

control over any other person, neither in marriage as a man over his wife, neither as a wife over her husband, nor as father or mother ultimately over their children.

Our many years of living among the plain people in business and social interaction have evoked in us a profound respect for their discipline and hard work. The thrust here is how certain disciplines in excess tend toward causing needless reactions, bitterness, and extremes, then, in discarding some worthwhile values for a whole new, worldly lifestyle. That said, there have been cases where a family appeared on the surface to be outstanding, well ordered, and a promotional model for others, but turned out to having actually been abusive in a very deceptive and serious coverup.

While it is not widespread, the incidents have been frequent enough to where many counseling centers are facing overloads of applicants, requiring long-term residency in remedial thought patterns and habits. There seem to be numerous cases where the king-style, over-the-cliff-type excesses are much more than good, close relatives can handle, even beyond the local church’s capabilities, for a variety of reasons.

God has placed people in families. The home is the safest place for

babies to be born and raised through the wonderful stages of childhood, adolescence, and youth. It is marvelously ideal and beautifully wholesome, but only in a home guided by prophet-priest fathers. Nothing can be better; no system can be devised that has the possibility to be more effective to preparing offspring in a 20-year period to adulthood. On the other hand, one year or even less of parental abuse can damage a precious soul for a lifetime, or require years of scripturally-guided counseling, monitoring, and emotionally-directed therapy along biblical principles. In extreme cases, some never fully recover their God-given sensitivities and callings to noble virtues.

This is an urgent appeal to the “kingly reign” type of errant fathers and church leaders to repent! Seeking forgiveness for deeply entrenched sins is not enough! For too long, we as churches have preached with heartfelt appeals to seek forgiveness, which merely became a supposed easy way out of deep-rooted sins. A mere forgiveness only lays the cost on innocent victims who were abused, causing great loss of decency and dignity. A counselor might bring a perpetrator of sin to seeking forgiveness in an hour or even less, in which he bears little or no

inner personal cost. Repentance, by contrast, is the means to bring the violator to see how he has violated his victim(s) at great cost to their mind, soul, and spirit. Repentance sees the need to confess the sinful bile within, to confess “with the mouth,” as the Bible puts it, with sorrow and grief for the loss of joy, peace, and inner freedom laden on his subjects.

Church leaders who have reigned as kings too often think of themselves as above having an evil heart because they think they do God service by holding people back, or, as kings, suppose they must subdue people from any legitimate forward advancement within biblical principles or Christian participation in true spiritual activities. Administrating as kings is a carnally-motivated control thing, so they sally forth as a religious “lone ranger,” quite above anyone else’s jurisdiction, in the church or its institutions.

Alongside this is also an urgent appeal to the kingly-reign type of fathers in the home. Fathers, who like their countertype church leaders and are not approachable, are usually unwilling to discuss the evident friction. The verbal silence of these men screams so loudly at times that it becomes woefully evident of hidden sin within. The selfishness of controlling others


somehow is seen as being best able to maintain its unspiritual and unbiblical grip by not being open and honest in being either brotherly or fatherly conversant on the issues. This has been a part of the reason for some unbrotherly excommunications and grievous divisions. There are numerous cases to support this heartrending appeal, situations that cannot righteously be given here in print, either in general or in detail.

Both certain church leaders and some errant fathers have “lowered the boom” with specific threats or punishments that were not warranted. Maybe it was used as a carnal way to stop all the heated contention, or perhaps it was a way of having the last say to the wearisome frictions, hate words, and schisms.

What shall we say to these things? Just now, I did my first review of what was written so far. Immediately, God gave me this passage. “*Now ye are full [of self], now ye are rich [no need], ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you*” (I Corinthians 4:8). Interestingly enough, it is in the context of judging people in the church. Corinth was a church worthy of salvation, worthy to be called saints (1:2), having set the

sailing vessel on the sea of life toward heaven, but early on encountered rough sailing.

Equally interesting is the parallel figure of speech in verse 15. Besides reigning as kings, Paul also says, “*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, YET have ye NOT many fathers.*” See the core of their problems: having many kings, but not many fathers, as models of being a servant of Christ. Also in this chapter four, he says in three different places of them being *puffed up* (vv. 6, 18, 19). And again in 5:2, he says, “*And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned.*” Both fathers and some church leaders have been puffed up when they should have lowered themselves and been mourning in their whole spirit, soul, and body.

The Bottom Line: This is a call to repentance on these serious matters for those, either as church leaders or fathers in the home. We hardly do this anymore, but these violations warrant a confession before the church and/or our families. It really is a church issue, the heritage of Christ as His bride, pure and spotless. Children also are an heritage for the parents, given by God. God’s two-fold heritage in our midst deserves to be maintained in high value in holiness and respect to God. 


marriages

May the homes established by these marriages be little substations of heaven, where God reigns and His blessings flow.

Gingerich-Miller

Bro. Jeremy, son of Mervin and Anita Gingerich, Arthur, IL, and Sis. Marnita, daughter of Leroy and Ada Miller, Fredericksburg, OH, on October 19, 2024, at Sunnyside Mennonite Church by Wilbur Gingerich.

Lapp-Rutt

Bro. Elijah, son of David and Mary Lapp, Gap, PA, and Sis. Aubrey, daughter of Arlin and Jody Rutt, Reading, PA, on December 7, 2024, at Pequea Baptist Church by Mike Burkholder for Faith Mennonite Fellowship. 

cradle roll

The children which the Lord hath graciously given . . . Genesis 33:5

Apuy, Urias and Leanna (Ulrich), Covington, TX, third child and daughter, Britany Joy, December 6, 2024.

Bontrager, Aaron and Barb (Schrock), Sullivan, IL, fourth child, first son, Nolan Kenneth, October 22, 2024.

Byers, Trevor and Rosalinda (Ulrich), Hillsboro, TX, first child and daughter, Adeline Jade, October 17, 2024.

Byler, Kevin and Rhoda (King), Utica, OH, third child, second son, Creed Ellington, October 7, 2024.

Chupp, Brad and Lucy (Steiner), Atwater, MN, third child, second daughter, Ava Skye, November 16, 2024.

Chupp, Daniel and Jana (Miller), Atwater, MN, eighth child, sixth son, Isaac Joseph, October 21, 2024.

Eby, David and Sarah (Glick), Sullivan, IL, second child, first son, Anthony Lavern, November 20, 2024.

Eicher, Willis and Stacy (Hochstedler), Altamont, KS, third child, second daughter, Aven Ren, December 15, 2024.

Gerber, John and Tanya (Jantzi), Millbank, ON, eighth child, sixth daughter, Mikayla Grace, November 9, 2024.

Kauffman, Owen and Delores (Strite), Lott, TX, fourth child, second daughter, Jasmine Grace, November 14, 2024.

King, Brandon and Julianna (Beachy), Cottage Grove, TN, second child and son, Maverick Beau, November 8, 2024.

Mast, Jordan and Alisa (Burns) Goodspring, TN, second child and son, Alexander (Lex) Casimir, November 12, 2024.

Mast, Ryan and Monica (Yoder), Mechanicsburg, OH, second child and son, Dominic Reid, December 4, 2024.

Mehle, Jacob and Heather (Oswald), Grantsville, MD, fourth child, second daughter, Lois Rose, November 22, 2024.

Miller, Bradley and Charity (Yoder), Millersburg, OH, fourth child, third son, Joash Wesley, November 6, 2024.

Miller, Earl and Sheri (Kuhns), Cadwell, IL, third child and son, Lincoln Hayes, October 14, 2024.

Miller, Joshua and Kathryn (Stoltzfus), West Lafayette, OH, second child, first daughter, Janalyn Fe, December 3, 2024.

Miller, Merlin and Kimberly (Miller), Washington, IA, fifth child, fourth daughter, Alana Kate, November 14, 2024.

Miller, Philip and Sherilyn (Beachy), Paint Lick, KY, fourth child, third son, Jason Dwayne, October 1, 2024.

Schrock, Galen and Carrie (Herschberger), Tuscola, IL, third child, second son, Zander Reid, November 21, 2024.

Smucker, Otoniel and Jennifer (Paniagua), Cleburne, TX, second child, first daughter, Melanie Joy, September 23, 2024.

Stauffer, Toby and Isabel (Zimmerman), Paint Lick, KY, third child, first daughter, Jessica Ann, October 8, 2024.

Weaver, Ernest and Patricia (Miller), Grandview, TX, eighth child, fourth daughter, Emma Ruth, October 18, 2024.

Wengerd, Raymond Jr. and Leona (Yoder), Crab Orchard, KY, seventh child, third daughter, Grace Joanne, November 19, 2024.

Yoder, Caleb and Sherilyn (Troyer), Partridge, KS, fourth child and son, Rhett William, August 5, 2024.

Zook, Matt and Carrie (Hostetler), Martinsburg, OH, second child, first daughter, Thea Clementine, July 6, 2024.

Zook, Nelson and Beth (Otto), Humboldt, IL, third child, first son, Brently Malachi, December 8, 2024.



Kind words are short to speak, but their echoes are *endless*.




ordinations

May the grace of God be upon our brothers as they minister faithfully. Let us pray for them.

Bro. Kevin Diener, 37, (wife, Treva Hostetler), Arthur, IL, was ordained minister for Pleasant View Church on November 10, 2024. Preordination messages were given by Bill Yoder. The charge was given by Matt Bontrager assisted by Bill Yoder and Wilbur Gingerich. Sharing the lot were Duane Horst and Galen Schrock.

Bro. Clifford Gingerich, 37, (wife, Leanna Hostetler), Arthur, IL, was ordained minister for Trinity

Christian Fellowship on July 21, 2024. Preordination messages were given by Roman Miller. The charge was given by Wilbur Gingerich, assisted by Roman Miller and Matt Bontrager. Steven Helmuth, Ryan Farmwald, Kyle Diener, Larry Yoder, and Jason Beachy shared the lot.

Bro. Lowell Miller, 42, (wife, Martha Miller), Paint Lick, KY, was ordained bishop for Gospel Light Fellowship on November 24, 2024. Preordination messages were given by Jim Yoder. The charge was given by Josh Yoder, assisted by Gary Raber and Ethan Stutzman. Marlin Stoll shared the lot. 

obituary


Overholt, Mart, 79, of Aroda, VA, passed away on December 1, 2024, at his home. He was born on June 25, 1945, to the late Joseph M. and Mary Ann (Hershberger) Overholt.

He was a kind and generous man who loved the Lord and was a member of Oak Grove Mennonite Church. He was a dairy farmer in Madison County for over 50 years. He also loved softball and fishing.

He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Mary Miller; daughters: Loretta (Timothy) Nisly and Virginia (Philip) Glick; sons: Martin (Robyn), and Daniel; sisters: Lena (J.R.) Miller, Verda (Glenn) Stutzman; brothers: Simeon, Rudy

(Elsie), Lavern (Nellie), Paul (Darlene), and John (Susie); grandchildren: Michael (Kaylie) Nisly, Russell Nisly, Megan Overholt, Brooklyn Overholt, Erin Overholt, Ryan Glick, Parker Glick, Emily Glick, Ray Mart (Ali) Bowman, and Mary Merchant.

He was preceded in death by sisters: Arlene Yoder, Sarah Mae Kramer, Lilly Overholt, Carolyn Overholt, Marilyn Kanagy, Margaret Mast; brothers: Elmo and Donnie.

The funeral service was held on December 5, 2024, at the Oak Grove Mennonite Church with interment in the church cemetery. 

In recent months I've done a bit of reading, conversing, and observing the wonder that encapsulates the responsibility of parents to nurture and guide children. This opportunity is simultaneously sacred and exhilarating, sobering and fulfilling; a stewardship and an investment.

I'll share here a quote from John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople from his "Admonitions for Parents."

"Let everything take second place to our care for our children; our bringing them up in the discipline and nurture of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide. If a child learns a trade or is highly educated for a lucrative profession, all this is nothing compared to the art of detachment from riches; if you want to make your child rich, teach him this. He is truly rich who does not desire great possessions or surround himself with wealth but who requires nothing. This is how to discipline and teach your child; this is the greatest of riches. Do not worry about giving him an influential reputation for worldly

wisdom, but ponder deeply how you can teach him to think lightly of this life's passing glories, thus he will become truly renowned and glorious. Whether you are poor or rich, you can do this; these lessons are not learned from a skillful professor but from divine revelations.

"Do not ask how he can enjoy a long life here, but how he can enjoy an infinite and eternal life in the age to come. Give him the great things; not the little things. Do not strive to make him a clever orator, but teach him to love true wisdom. He will not suffer if he lacks clever words, but if he lacks wisdom all the rhetoric in the world cannot help him. A pattern of life is what is needed, not empty speeches; character, not cleverness; deeds, not words. These things will secure the Kingdom and bestow God's blessing. Do not sharpen his tongue but purify his soul. I do not mean that worldly learning is worthless and to be ignored, but it should not be an exclusive preoccupation."

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About eight years ago, I wrote the following in this Observations column.

"I got a phone call from an

individual who offered to come to our church community and give a presentation regarding estate planning and related services. He represents a law firm in a distant state. In a follow-up email he indicated that he had visited a number of plain communities and that he is often hosted in the fellowship hall or a similar venue. The gentleman seemed friendly enough, but since we knew nothing about this man, we tried to learn what we could from independent sources. It turns out that he had spent some time in prison for a felony conviction from a problem that arose with an estate where his services were employed. The names listed as beneficiaries to the estate were altered in a manner that benefited him personally. We chose to decline his offer to come and share his presentation.”

After that was printed, I was contacted by various folks who were interested in this account. From what I understood, this individual had indeed contacted a number of our churches and visited some of them.

I do not know if the incidence of being swindled by “too good to be true” money schemes is higher among plain people than other demographics, but most of us are sadly aware of situations in which friends or acquaintances are left

with regrets after some scammer left with their money. As we age, our ability to keep track of competing factors often tends to erode. This makes it more difficult to notice cautions when we are focused on more pleasant possibilities. When our diminished ability to notice cautions is paired with the fact that we are part of a culture of trust that is a really important component of our Christian/Anabaptist culture, we have a recipe that makes us quite vulnerable to scammers. I do not wish to erode the laudable elements of that culture of trust. However, this does underscore the wisdom of having someone we do trust, like a family friend or another person without a financial interest in our decisions, to help us work through this type of scenario.

Fraud Aware is a non-profit group that was organized by a group of Amish and Mennonites who were concerned by the vulnerability of plain people to financial scams. I know very little about those who have organized this effort. Their website, fraudaware.us, has a number of resources focused on identifying the earmarks of scams and other tips to help make good decisions. This advice is obviously not limited to the plain community but is targeted to plain folks.

• • • • •

Jimmy Carter, former president of the USA, passed away on Sunday, December 29, 2024. His 100th birthday was last fall. This makes Carter the president who has lived the longest of any of the US presidents. The closest was George H. W. Bush who passed away before his 95th birthday. Carter’s hometown of Plains, GA, is situated about 30-35 miles southeast of Montezuma, GA.

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On January 21 of 1525, Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, and others gathered and experienced believers’ baptism. This radical step constituted a clear departure from the centuries-old practice of infant baptism, putting them at odds with the state church. This event is regarded as the beginning of Anabaptism. Of course, we understand that much discussion and careful thought preceded this event.

It has now been 500 years since that time. Faith Builders Resource Group is offering a 13-part study that can be used as a quarterly for adult Sunday School relating to this milestone. It has been said that understanding our past is key to charting an appropriate path for the future.

I’m sure we agree that we are living in a different time. For the early Anabaptist, identifying with this

radical movement often meant death. If not death, then certainly a serious infringement on whatever liberties they found normal at that time. From time to time, I wonder if the zeal of our forefathers for pursuing the Kingdom and God’s plan above all else is similar or different than the priorities we express today. It might be pretty difficult for us to know the difference, but I think it is still worth asking ourselves if our interest in religious freedom is primarily focused on Kingdom growth and health or is it primarily self-serving? Candidly, I would need to admit that both priorities are important to me. I wish I could say with confidence that my motives are entirely unselfish. Mixed motives don’t make a desire for religious liberty wrong, but a bit of self-awareness can help us temper our attitudes with humility.

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In 2019 the life expectancy in the USA peaked at 78.79 years. The average life expectancy in this country didn’t reliably rise above 70 years until about 1970. Since that time there has been steady growth in that number to the peak in 2019. But 2020 and 2021 saw marked declines to 76.98 years and 76.33 respectively, trimming close to 2.5 years off that figure. Some of us may recall that this was also the time when we were

trying to find our way through the infamous COVID-19 pandemic. The number rebounded to 77.43 years of age in 2022, which is the most recent number available. For 2022, the UK

reports an average life expectancy of 82.06 which is more than 4.5 years longer than the US. Canada comes in just behind the UK at 81.3 years life expectancy for 2022.

RJM 

I Saw a Beautiful Thing

I Saw It At The Sewing

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

It was the second Tuesday of the month, our regular gathering for the Sisters' Sewing. The space at our still-new church building was a welcome contrast to our previously-crowded fellowship hall with its low ceiling. As I step inside the well-lit area, the quiet buzz of friends chatting in the lovely room greets me.

On the left, I see a handful of ladies facing each other over a quilt, heads bent and hands busy. On the other side of the room, children's toys are strewn about and toddlers work on the age-old puzzle of figuring out who is in charge of what. To my right, two comforters in frames are pinned and ready to have their layers stitched together. Against the walls, more women are busy, tucking conversation in and around the hum and whine of sewing machines. At the far end of the room, the kitchen

emits promising aromas as still others prepare a tasty meal for all to share. Threading their way here and there from cluster to cluster, those tasked with leading give directions and answer questions.


From my spot at the side of the room, I watch with pleasure. Yes, the children squabble and mothers, or those nearby, intervene. Sometimes, a youngster straggles in from outdoor play, wailing and in need of a Band-Aid and comfort. And it's not unusual for an awkward silence to punctuate the easy conversation around the quilt when a sensitive topic is mentioned. Usually, at some point, there will be quiet tears as one overwhelmed soul shares its burden with a sympathetic listener. Aren't these all normal things part of what it means to be a family doing life together?

Of special joy is what I see at

the comforter-top station. Usually, comforters are knotted by teen-aged hands, those not yet comfortable quilting or with other tasks requiring technical skills. But today, a proficient seamstress well beyond her teens, stands there knotting with those who could be her daughters, were she married. I keep stealing glances as I work: this mixing of ages is just too lovely to miss! The young twosome (as far as I know) is knotting for the first time, and they stand on tiptoes to reach! My friend offers guidance and engages them in conversation as she coaches their efforts. The whole scene is one of comfortable companionship. Pun intended.

I haven't always seen the value in having a monthly sewing, but now I appreciate the opportunities it affords. It is for *our* good also to

lay aside work at home to give to those in need. At our church, we all homeschool and children are a part of the sewing day: it is good for them to practice charity in playing with others. It is important for sisters in church to have informal interaction: it is good for us to practice engaging in thoughtful, purposeful conversation and not only sharing news and views. The mixing up of typical age groupings is good for everyone, helping us to learn from each other.

I am grateful for these good gifts created by interaction around quilt, comforter, and table. It's helpful to have sharp needles, sharp scissors, and sharp minds, but sharp tongues are not needed. Behold, how pleasant it is for sisters to stitch together not only fabric, but friendship! 

history matters

500th Anniversary Celebration (Part 2) **A Question of Obedience**

Tim Miller, McKenney, VA

“**S**hall we obey the Word of God no matter the consequences?” was

the simple question that the group of men wrestled with the night of those first rebaptisms. Although the

validity of infant baptism had been questioned by others, including Zwingli, for several years, the Swiss Brethren were the first reformers to put this belief to practice. What made this step especially significant was doing so under threat of punishment for disobeying a direct order from the local government. Until January 21, 1525, reformers had been careful to make religious changes under the protection and with the support of political rulers. The Swiss Brethren's bold declaration that obedience to Scripture must be separated from political loyalty ignited the "free church" movement that later spread across northern Europe and Great Britain in other forms.

The response of the Zurich Council to that disobedience was swift and intense. The original mandate declared punishment for disobedience to be banishment and confiscation of property. The first imprisonment of 14 men and seven women happened in March 1525 with the entire group being able to escape, on April 5, 1525, probably with help from the inside. The first Swiss Brethren congregation established in Zollikon, four miles from Zurich, existed only from February to May of 1525 before being dispersed by imprisonment, banishment, and recantations. The death penalty for

rebaptism was instituted in Zurich in March of 1526 with Felix Manz being the first person executed under that statute in Zurich on January 5, 1527. Anabaptism spread rapidly throughout Canton Zurich but the persecution of the Council was so persistent (at one time in 1637 there were 70 men, 100 women, and 300 children in prisons around the canton) that by 1660 there were few Anabaptists left. Most had emigrated to the Palatinate in Germany 250 miles up the Rhine River. Of later interest, it seems that up to 75% of Amish and Mennonites who emigrated from the Palatinate in the 1700s to the present Lancaster, PA, area originated in Switzerland from this movement out of Zurich and surrounding areas.

Anabaptism, as it came to be called, spread rapidly throughout Switzerland, Germany, northeastern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and Moravia. On several occasions, baptisms numbered in the 100s on a single day. Leenaert Bouwens, a leader baptized by Menno Simons in 1551, kept detailed records of the 10,378 baptisms he performed in 31 years of ministry. If we base our numbers simply on arrest records in these countries, there were tens of thousands of Anabaptists in the first generation alone. Many others were

sympathetic to Anabaptist beliefs but would not make the final declaration of rebaptism.

Anabaptists were persecuted heavily for a time by both Catholic and Protestant governments so there were few places of refuge for them. Moravia provided the most safety and, despite several persecutions there, various Anabaptist groups including the Hutterites found sanctuary there. Missionaries from Moravia, going back to their home countries to evangelize, often became martyrs after having taken their families to safety.

The union of church and state had become so entrenched in the European religious and political mindset that the fear of chaos due to free church ideas motivated harsh responses from most church and government leaders. It is impossible to know how many Anabaptists were martyred from the first execution of an Anabaptist, Eberli Bolt, on May 29, 1525, to the likely last one, Hans Landis, on September 30, 1614, both in Switzerland. Many records were destroyed in subsequent wars or lost in other ways. Additionally, many areas did not keep records of executions of Anabaptists, with teams of “Anabaptist hunters” employed who were charged with killing suspected Anabaptists

without trial as soon as they were caught. Recorded executions number in the thousands with likely at least that many unrecorded. In Swabia alone the number of special police employed to catch Anabaptists had to be increased from 400 to 1000 strong. A government official of the County of Alzey in the Palatinate is quoted as saying, “What shall I do? The more I kill the greater becomes their number” after the total of Anabaptists killed had reached 350 in that small area alone.

One effect of the severe persecution was that many who had been rebaptized and joined Anabaptist congregations recanted and renounced their faith under the pressure of interrogation, torture, and the threat of death. An example of the extent of this was the five other church leaders arrested with Hans Landis in 1614: he was beheaded, two others escaped, and the three remaining recanted their faith. Simon Stumpf, quoted in the preceding article speaking out so boldly, rather quickly recanted in the face of banishment and the loss of his pastorate. In some areas over 50% of those arrested recanted, possibly due to the spiritual immaturity of new believers facing intense interrogations about beliefs they couldn’t explain well. There was significant discussion

among Anabaptist churches on how to respond to those recanters who later wanted to return to the church after they had been released from prison. As time went on, the authorities dealt with them by only reducing the severity of punishments rather than acquitting and releasing them. For example, in some areas, usually Catholic, the death sentence was upheld but the method was “reduced” from burning at the stake to drowning or beheading for those who recanted. Our admiration for those who remained strong in the face of repeated, unspeakable torture can blind us to the immense pressure that can be brought to bear on the human spirit in various ways. May we be prepared with humble dependence on God’s strength for faithfulness and fortitude should such an experience become ours.


Another effect of the persecutions was the rise of a varied group of those called by William Estep “the inspirationists” (which seems to me most accurate) and by others “the spiritualists.” These groups began to emphasize individual illumination by the Holy Spirit over scriptural teaching and inner faith over the outer life of faith. One direction led to the apocalyptic violence of the Batenburgers and Jan Matthys’ followers at Münster. Another

direction led to many claiming to hold the truth in their hearts while going through the outward forms of Catholic or Protestant worship, not being rebaptized or not openly declaring opposition to established religious doctrine and so avoiding persecution.

How did the movement survive and thrive to overcome the opposition it faced? The seven articles of the Schleithem Confession, drawn up in late February 1524, provided a clear, succinct definition of key differences from Protestant and Catholic beliefs and practices. This Confession and other writings were widely circulated and helped bring cohesion of belief to widely scattered believers. The writings of leaders like Menno Simons and Dirk Philips helped bring stability to congregations experiencing both the effects of persecution and the heresy of Münster and the influence of the inspirationists. The Schleithem Confession’s admonition to immediately replace pastors who were arrested or killed was especially important for seeing that the work of the church would continue on in the face of intense persecution. One man, Leonhard Scheimer, was exposed to Anabaptism in May 1527. He joined the church through rebaptism in Vienna, Austria, a few weeks later.

He was ordained a minister and began mission work in Austria and surrounding areas. He attended the Martyrs Synod in Augsburg in August 1527 and was sent from there to Rattenburg. According to his account, he was appointed to lead the brethren there as bishop and was arrested the next day, November 25, 1527, to be executed seven weeks later on January 14, 1528. When the persecution was intense, most leaders were not able to serve very long and the practice of quickly ordaining another leader from among the

congregation provided a needed stability in time of crisis.

Other teachings, such as the priesthood of all believers, the responsibility of every member to be evangelizing, local rather than professional church leadership, and the congregational style of church government were factors in the sustainability of Anabaptist churches. In the next article, we will move on to look at how “a question of obedience” led to various conflicts and some of the impacts on later church development. 

mission awareness

The Tragedy of a Lost Soul (Part 2)

Floyd Stoltzfus, Gordonville, PA

Some years ago, Le Grand Melvin, a 25-year-old entertainer, was in the middle of his act in a nightclub in La Tuque, QC. Dressed as a vampire, he was playing with his two and one-half-meter-long boa constrictor. “If I am not on my feet in 20 minutes,” he told the audience of some 150 people, “you can put me in my coffin right away. It will have been the end for me.” Tragically, it was just that, for minutes later the snake wrapped

itself around his neck and crushed him to death.

Many men play with sin and laugh at the idea and think it will get better for them. But sin is not to be played with, for it eventually makes victims out of those who indulge in it. Only Christ can set people free from the crushing power of sin. Sadly, this was not the end for the entertainer.

-The Prairie Overcomer,
January 1979

Last month we wrote about the tragedy of “9/11.” It was the memorable day when America called for help—the day when the World Trade Center collapsed. We reviewed what Jesus said about those who do not believe in Him. Really, the tragedy is now! There are also Scriptures that clearly speak of the tragedy of the lost soul at the judgment day. This month we will get a biblical glimpse that the tragedy of a lost soul is eternal.

We will install part of a scripturally-sound article from the *Sword and Trumpet*.

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The Neglect of Hell

by David Cloud

Hell is a major and fundamental doctrine of the Bible. Hell is a neglected doctrine today, and this is one of the reasons that the fear of God is not before men’s faces. America does not fear God because the vast majority of its preachers do not preach the fear of God. Hell is not the sweet, positive type of religious message that people want to hear because they have been nurtured on sugar candy theology rather than the pure Word of God. Jesus said, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate,*

and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13,14). Hell is the place of punishment and imprisonment for those who rebel against God. It was created for Satan and the rebellious angels (Matthew 25:41), but unsaved men and women will go there as well (Matthew 25:41-46).

The Bible descriptions of Hell and the lake of fire:

- *“Cast him into outer darkness”* (Matthew 22:13).

- *“Shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 24:51; 25:30).

- *“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire”* (Matthew 25:41).

- *“The fire that never shall be quenched”* (Mark 9:43, 45).

- *“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (II Thessalonians 1:8).

- *“Everlasting destruction”* (II Thessalonians 2:9)

- *“Tormented with fire and brimstone”* (Revelation 14:10)

- *“No rest day nor night”* (Revelation 14:11)

- *“Tormented day and night forever and ever”* (Revelation 20:10)

What are the conditions in Hell as described in Luke 16:19-31?

This is not a parable. Parables never have the names of people. Hell is a place of consciousness and feeling; a place of fire; a place of no comfort, help, or mercy; a place of unfulfilled desires and unanswered prayers; a place without hope of escape; a place of remembrance and regret.

The Lord preached much about Hell because He deeply loves mankind and does not want anyone to go there. The occupants of Hell will be resurrected to appear before the great white throne judgment and then be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

-Used by permission

Here is the first verse of an old song written by Bert Shadduck.

I dreamed that the great judgment morning had dawned and the trumpet had blown;

I dreamed that the nations had gathered to judgment before the

white throne;

From the throne came a bright shining angel, And stood on the land and the sea,


And swore with his hand raised to heaven, That time was no longer to be.

And oh, what a weeping and wailing, As the lost were told of their fate;

They cried for the rocks and the mountains,

They prayed, but their prayer was too late.

-Public Domain

There is an endearing, warmhearted, threefold invitation near the end of Revelation from our precious Lord Jesus: “*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*” (22:17). 

A Woman After God's Heart

Growing Soldiers

Susan Schlabach, Ripley, OH



Alex and Willy strode purposefully as they talked about the event planned for the coming Saturday. The youth

were extending an invitation to the youngsters from their church, treating them to a day at the zoo. Each youth,

paired with one child, would simply enjoy the day together.

Alex sniffed hesitatingly. "You know this really isn't my kind of thing. I mean, really, what are we going to do with them rowdies?"

Willy turned toward his friend without missing a beat. "Guess what, Alex, this invitation—this activity—this excursion, is not all about you."

The zoo story carries the burden of this article. Do our children grow up thinking that the *excursion of life* is about them? Are their comforts and preferences the primary forces for decision-making in our homes?

Lamentations 3:27 says: "*It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.*" Joseph and Daniel are prime examples that yoke-bearing begins early. In II Timothy 2:3 Paul instructed young Timothy: "*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*"

The instilling of the *soldier mindset* happens younger than we might imagine. Parents quickly discover that the perfect little cherub God gave them is actually an imperfect little sinner. It's not realistic to think we can indulge our infants and toddlers and expect to cover the hard part later. Toddlers can actually learn that the universe does not revolve around

them. A childhood in plush, padded palaces grows poor soldiers of Jesus Christ.

But soldier training is challenging, especially in light of the fact that our own lives have taken on shades of indulgence. Do the comforts we enjoy militate against the training of the next generation of Jesus' soldiers? Do we eat the king's food but hope for Daniel's fortitude?

For sure our lives have acquired more ease and softness than our parents' lives. Our moms and dads shook a teaspoonful of instant coffee granules into the cup of hot water and called it coffee. We, by contrast, give ample kitchen counter space to machines that grind, tamp, foam and steam lattes, americanos, and more. We also call it coffee.

In wild imaginings years ago, we mused about what it would be like to talk with someone on the phone and see them at the same time. Today, technology in my open hand spans the ocean to *attend* a school program or to help coax my new grandbaby's smile. We fly around the globe to lands that were once only pictures in our Social Studies textbooks. We have machines to wash our dishes and to vacuum our floors while we sleep. Our *easy-life list* is endless and growing.

My own worldview and view of

suffering has everything to do with the way I prepare my child for the rigors of life. If I think the *excursion of life* is about my children's pleasure, I will devote my best efforts to pursue their choices. If the *excursion of life* is about the pleasure of the One Who enlists us (II Timothy 2:4), I will devote my best interests in pursuing His choices. We choose to do the hard things. By watching us, our children learn to do hard things.

Growing soldiers is to think with the mind of Christ: "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant*" (Philippians 2:5-7). Christ embodied servitude, suffering, and humility. We crave for more of His mind within us, and within our children. We pursue His mind as if our very life depended on it. (Because it does.)

Our children need to wrestle with us as we address the question of suffering. To come to grips with the God Who *is* yet the God Who *doesn't* at times. We learn to ask less "Why, God?" and more "What, God?" We make much of Joseph and Job. The brothers meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Job suffered *because* he was righteous

and showed others what it looks like when God's children go through hard things yet continue to love the One Who gives and takes. We show our children what it looks like to live with the tension that although God may seem to be an unjust Judge at times, we know that He will *one day* make right all that is wrong.

Here are a few quotes from sermons by Dave Stoltzfoos and Glenn Coblenz: Suffering happens to all of us. In suffering we begin to resemble Jesus. We don't post on our walls "*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you...and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad,*" but maybe we should. Do we expect to be resurrected with Christ, without Gethsemane and Calvary first? Did we become Christians to live our best lives here and now? Suffering is the closest thing to hell the believer will ever see.

An 80-year-old saint says that when he encounters trials he rejoices because it reminds him of how much God loves him. Suffering is a mark of ownership by God. It shows that we are being favored by God. Suffering grows us.

I share a few suggestions for growing soldiers of Jesus Christ. I do not speak as one who has achieved but as another soldier-trainer in the

trenches of a padded comfortable life.

1. Restraint emphasis

Since normal life can be fairly snug and lavish, I must look for ways to grow the muscle of self-discipline, to build an arbor where God-likeness can grow. I can make rules for myself. I don't have to buy a Blizzard every time I drive past a Dairy Queen. I don't need to check messages before I hear from God in the morning. I don't need to buy something just because I like it, or can afford it, or my sister has one like it. I must ponder my excesses and my loves.

We don't refrain from DQ blizzards to earn brownie points with God. There is no life in these rules. We practice restraint because we live in an indulgent world and need to look for ways to tell our flesh who's boss. I hesitate to mention ice cream abstinence at the same time I talk about suffering, as if the two fit under the same heading. And yet, perhaps, the lesser discipline *is* a beginning exercise that positions us to serve the One Who calls us to be a soldier. Soldier training begins in tiny ways. If a child learned to eat peas as a three-year-old, he will probably master eating *ugali* in Kenya, years later.

2. Long-term emphasis

Let's teach our children delayed gratification. Instant gratification becomes a habit. We learn to delay the

urge for immediate pleasure in favor of long-term fulfillment. That is long-term growth. She can't party all night and expect to do well on tomorrow's exam. Saving instead of squandering. It hurts right now, it's not fun or easy, and it's uncomfortable, but it makes us stronger.

3. Big picture emphasis

In the middle of anxiety or sorrow, focus on a wider angle. Our view is through a keyhole. God owns the big picture, like the words of the poem:

God Knows What He's About

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man, and skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man

To play the noblest part...

When He yearns with all His
heart

To build so great and bold a man
That all the world would stand
amazed.

Then watch His methods; watch
His ways.

How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts
him

And with mighty blows converts
him

Into trial shapes of clay
That only God understands,
While man's tortured heart is
crying,

And he lifts beseeching hands!
How he bends but never breaks
When man's good He undertakes.
How He uses whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses
him;

By every act induces him
To try His splendor out—
God knows what He's about!

(author unknown)


4. Humility emphasis

We dare not take ourselves too seriously. A proper view of God ensures a proper view of ourselves. Jesus made Himself of no reputation.

5. Relationship emphasis

When in deep sadness, respond to the relationship God offers. Jesus cried. He held little ones. He

lovingly addressed weeping ladies. Tell your sons and daughters, "Find your God." God chastens whom He loves, but He deeply loves whom He chastens. God understands grief, loss, and rejection like no one else. Learn to know Him. Teach your children to talk to Jesus, and sometimes groan to Jesus.

A relationship with the One offering a yoke is the true formula for soldier formation and yoke bearing. Matthew 11:28-30: "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" 

junior messages

Answers to Prayer

Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

God watches over all of us. There are huge terrible wars and many disasters in our world today. Yet God cares about each one of us individually. He loves when we come to Him with our needs. God hears our big prayers. He also cares about and hears small and

ordinary prayers. He does not say yes to every prayer we pray, but He is always a good Father Who delights in blessing His children.

Safety at a refugee camp

We were working at ARC (Anabaptist Refugee Committee) on the Texas/Mexico border. One

Sunday we were invited to go along with ABM (Anabaptist Border Ministry) to two refugee camps in Mexico for church services. I wanted to go. What an opportunity to visit a refugee camp.

I wondered about safety. I had heard so many stories from migrants who were kidnapped and robbed in Mexico. The camps are surrounded by drug cartels who often rob the poor migrants.

So far they have not bothered the Mennonite Christians who come to work and minister there. I felt uneasy when the ABM group crossed the border and shared God's love in those camps three or four days a week.

I asked friends from our home church and other friends to pray for our safety.

Two van loads of Christians left for the border on that warm Sunday morning. We drove through the city and then eventually bumped over country dirt roads.

At the camp we had time to walk around and chat with refugees. These refugees hardly have any earthly goods, but they hope for a better future in a better place.

A group of enthusiastic lovers of Jesus sang four songs in Spanish and the Hallelujah Chorus, directed by Mark.

When God leads, fear need not

keep us from walking in places that are not the safest. God was with us and we had the opportunity to share His good news. God heard our prayers for His protection.

Prayers for grandchildren

February was unusually warm. Two small grandsons and I went on a walk to the creek. We walked slowly on our quiet county road, paused to listen to birds singing, and looked for birds. The boys enjoyed throwing stones into the creek. It was a happy time.

We sauntered home; they played in the sandbox while I made lunch. When my daughter-in-law came for her sons, she said a big dead tree had crashed across the road. That tree came down right in the path where the grandsons and I had walked. I was so grateful that we were safe and that the tree did not fall on any of us. I pray that God will protect our grandchildren. I praised the Lord!

The lost wallet

Mose and his family were getting ready to leave the ARC work in Texas and travel the long road back to their home in Ohio. Mose could not find his wallet. He asked the youth and families at the base to pray that he would find his wallet. How could they travel home without his wallet? This was disconcerting.

We prayed. Mose, his wife, their six daughters (the ones who were

old enough) and one son prayed. The youth prayed. Hours later, he still had not found his wallet.

Mose traced back in his mind where he had been the day before. Oh yes, they had taken the children to San Padre Island for a picnic on the sand by the water. And then he knew the wallet must be in the van. He had left his wallet in their big white van. He rushed out to look and sure enough, there it was! What a big hallelujah and praise the Lord!

A kitchen prayer

God, please help me find my Cutco scissors, I prayed this morning. I hadn't seen that handy kitchen tool since we returned from our stint in Texas. Had I left the white-handled scissors in the garden? Those scissors belonged in the knife block on the kitchen counter, but they were not there.


After breakfast I decided to search

through kitchen drawers. The fourth one I checked held the prized scissors. I don't know why they were there. I thanked the Lord that they were found.

Prayers at an airport

We were flying home from Texas. You can travel through crowded airports all day and hardly see any other women dressed modestly or veiled. I was sitting at a restaurant when Mark came in and told me he saw a Mennonite couple. He was delighted.

Later, we met and chatted with this couple from Missouri who was traveling to Costa Rica. There is a blessed connection with believers of like faith. Mark told me he had prayed that morning that we would meet another veiled Christian. That was a sweet answer to a prayer.

Be encouraged and strengthened by sharing answers to prayer. 

youth messages

Wise Men Still Seek Jesus

Josh Kooistra, New Concord, OH

As I sit writing this, I reflect back on the nearly five years that I have been writing and editing the youth column. Overall,

it has been a great experience for me and pray that it has been an encouragement to you as readers. This is my last official article as acting

Youth Editor for *Calvary Messenger*.

My family and I have been called to serve in Nakuru, Kenya, in the role of business manager and assistant pastor. Little did I know that my time serving as the youth editor would be preparing me for a new chapter in my life. I have joked to my wife that the 27th of the month (our deadline to have articles submitted) comes around so much quicker than it did before I started writing for *CM*. My new responsibilities will include preaching about once a month. You never know what God may be preparing you for!

Anyone who has read this column for the last several years knows that I have a passion for service, both domestically and abroad. I did several interviews with people who have served, were still in service, or were recruiting for service units. I tried to get input from your peers, for I felt it may lend more weight to my arguments. I pushed. I know I did, and I hope that it wasn't too much, but I encouraged you to be willing to serve when God calls and it is the right time.

Shortly after taking the position of Youth Editor, we were asked to consider the very position that we are now committed to serve. We will very likely be replacing the family who took the position that we turned

down back then. I can honestly say that I sometimes felt guilty writing so much about service when I had just turned down a position, but the timing didn't feel right. We had a desire to go, just not right then. Our answer to the mission board was to ask again in ten years. This time when we were asked, my wife and I both felt clearly that God was calling us. The time was right. Our families and our church gave their support and blessing. Any other possible hindrances that could be used as an excuse were removed with no effort on my part. It really felt like God was giving us no option. This time when He tapped us on the shoulder, He was saying "Go!"

God doesn't call all of us to Africa. In fact, many of us may never set foot on foreign soil and that is a wonderful thing. God wants us to serve wherever He has us, wherever He calls, and whenever the time is right. Saint Patrick was taken to Ireland as a slave when he was 16. He escaped back to Britain at the age of 22. After becoming a cleric, he waited 20 years before he was called back to Ireland as a missionary. Those who stay at home and support the local church and help to support those whom they send to missions are just as important and can often be just as involved as those who go. Without

their support, we would very well struggle to operate and maintain our missions.

My thoughts were drawn to the words of Paul in Colossians. *“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light”* (Colossians 1:9-12).

Thank you to my readers for the prayers and support that you gave. Thank you to those who were kind enough to reach out with encouragement; you have no idea how much that meant! Thank you too, to those who contributed articles, answered questions, and gave input. Thank you also to those who shared constructive criticism. I'd like to think that I've grown as a person as a result of those interactions. I have learned that you

shouldn't write anything you aren't willing to defend. Also, pointing out mistakes or information that could be misinterpreted was good for me and helped me clean up my writing. Thank you, Aaron Yoder, for your patience and encouragement. It was a pleasure working with you.

A big thank you goes out to my dad. I have leaned on his wisdom and experience in navigating published writing. His input and advice were invaluable. Some of the first few articles I wrote came back from review with so many red notes that I almost despaired. Now, I still get input but not to the level I once did. Thank you for helping me grow as a writer and teaching me so much about it.

Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord. Whether He calls you to teach school, build barns, drive truck, or be a missionary in China, serve Him. Serve Him with everything you have and don't hold back. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God! Submit to serving Him. You'll never regret it.

“The world has yet to see what God can do with a man who is fully consecrated to Him.” -Henry Varley

God bless you! 

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• • • • •

To speak kindly does not hurt the tongue.

• • • • •

Always measure people's character around the heart.

• • • • •

He does not love what is good who does not hate what is evil.

• • • • •

Give to God what's right—not what's left.

• • • • •

Any fool can find fault, but it takes maturity to find good in all people.

• • • • •

The best place to spend your vacation is somewhere near your budget.

• • • • •

A man doesn't own his wealth—he owes it.

• • • • •

Energy spent in getting even is better spent in getting ahead.

• • • • •

No one is as busy as the man who has nothing to do.