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Tidings of Comfort and Joy

by Peter Colón

Scrooge was not happy. “At the first sound of ‘God bless you, merry gentleman! May nothing you dismay!’ Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror.” So wrote Charles Dickens in his classic book *A Christmas Carol*. The line he quoted came from “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,” first sung in England around 1827:

*God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day;
To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

In the Dickens novel it took the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future for mean, miserly Ebenezer Scrooge to find the comfort and joy of the season. Scripture teaches that life is filled with trouble, causing some people year-round to display a Scrooge-like disposition (Job 5:7; 14:1). So where is the comfort? Where is the joy?

True tidings of comfort and joy are found in the person of Jesus Christ. He alone remains the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

Jesus Christ Our Yesterday

Jesus’ death on behalf of sinful humanity is a cardinal doctrine of biblical Christianity. It is the entire reason why He came to Earth: “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5). His purpose in coming was to save sinners: “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). The name Jesus is a precious name, and no other is sufficient for eternal salvation (Acts 4:12).

Hard to imagine that our comfort and joy begin with His suffering. But they do. King David foretold the Savior’s

death in Psalm 22:

My God, My God, why have You forsaken me? All those who see Me ridicule Me. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. They pierced My hands and My feet. ...They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots (vv. 1, 7, 14, 16-18).

He carried His heavy wooden cross through the narrow streets of Jerusalem. He allowed men to pound iron nails through His wrists and feet as He suffered the physical agony and humiliation described as the most wretched of deaths. Why was He willing? Because His death was the crowning act of God’s manifested love: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16).

The comfort and joy of the season come from intimately knowing the Christ who came “yesterday.” Christ crucified and resurrected is the greatest theme of the universe, and it accomplished the greatest purpose: the salvation of souls. “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3-4).

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In a hymn titled “Jesus, My Hope,” 19th century evangelist Dr. M. L. Rossvally wrote the following:

*The Jewish rites are all fulfilled,
The sacrifice we see,
Our hope alone on Him we build,
Obtained from Calvary’s tree
For you as well as me
Through Christ, salvation’s free.*

Jesus Christ our Today

A famous orator once was asked to recite Psalm 23, which begins, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” When he finished, the audience clapped with excitement. Then an old minister was asked to recite the same psalm. He was clumsy and not very polished in his delivery, and his grammar was a bit off. Yet when he finished, there wasn’t a dry eye in the room. People asked themselves, What made the difference? It was the elegant orator who responded: “I know the psalm, but he knows the Shepherd.”

The joy and comfort that Christ provided yesterday is the same today. Perhaps the most famous line of Psalm 23 is verse 4: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” In this life there is much suffering and sorrow, disease and death. It is the shadowy valley that God’s children often have to walk through. But Christ, the Great Shepherd, is ever present to give us His peace in the dark and gloomy world. Because “the Lord is my shepherd,” we can trust Him to uphold us during trials. His protective presence is there to guide us over the many rocks and stones in our paths, turning them into stepping-stones to strengthen our faith (Ps. 91:11-12).

“For you are with me” (23:4). He did not leave His sheep shepherdless. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus promised to send the Comforter (Jn. 16:7, 13). The Holy Spirit dwells in all believers to guide and lead us. Along with providing eternal salvation, Jesus also gave us the means to live life more abundantly (10:10).

As the Great Shepherd, He rules by His “rod” and supports by His “staff.” This means that God controls all our afflictions and, at the same time, upholds us by His grace. Comfort and joy come in knowing that Christ is always near. He conquers the fears that come in our “todays”: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand (Isa. 41:10).

Many Christians do not experience the joy of Christ today because they are stuck between the regrets of yesterday and the fears of tomorrow. Naturally, there will be times when the pathway will be difficult to see. Yet the Lord is on His throne. When God’s plans are not easily understood, hold on to His promises and trust Him: The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in

Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him (Ps. 28:7).

Jesus Christ Our Forever

Jesus Christ is the same forever. He preexisted in eternity; and when the time was right, He became incarnate: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). The name Immanuel literally means “God with us.” The night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (Jn. 17:5). He came from glory, and He returned to glory.

For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth. The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein (Ps. 47:2; 24:1).

Some think the throne of the universe is empty. Wickedness appears to control the world. Lies and falsehood seem to prosper, while truth fades into obscurity. Yet the secret of peace and joy in the midst of a troubled world is the fact that “the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!” (Rev. 19:6).

Despite how things appear, nothing happens that is not under the Lord’s sovereign control. The child that once lay in a lowly manger is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Col. 3:1). And believers in Christ are seated with Him and “will reign in life” through Him (Rom. 5:17; Eph. 2:6).

Therefore we need not fear the future:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling (Ps. 46:1-3).

What is true about Christ will be true about Christ forever. This blessed hope makes all His promises sure and steadfast and gives us courage and confidence to face our tomorrows.

Apparently, the “good cheer” of the familiar carol in Dickens’s novel only incited contempt in crabby Ebenezer Scrooge. But eventually he experienced the comfort and joy of the season: “‘I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!’ Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. ‘The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me.’”

Biblical Christians, however, have something infinitely better to embrace: “Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God” (Ps. 146:5). Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith—the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 12:2; 13:8).

O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of comfort and joy.

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A Category of One

by Esther Wilkison

Having been a Christian school student, I remember how frustrated I was with some speakers who made sweeping statements about Christian school students all being apathetic and hypercritical. They often praised the Christian teens in public schools because they seemed more authentic. And growing up in California, I discovered when I moved to the East that many assumed I would be wild, even wicked. What else could I be since I was born in Hollywood and reared on the left coast?

Whether prejudice is based on academic pedigree, denomination, race, social status, or anything else, it has the same consequences.

1. It ruins one's relationship with God. Arrogance in thought, word, and deed is not something that slips His notice. Inflating oneself and deflating others builds a barrier between oneself and the Savior. God resists the proud.

2. It limits ministry. There would have been no revival in Sycar if Jesus had looked down on harlots. How often has revival gone unfulfilled because the inconsequential people were brushed aside?

There is hope for those of us who are on the receiving end of such prejudging. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." God longs to do extraordinary things with us – whether we have prestigious backgrounds or not. That consideration does not influence Him. Nor does it present Him with any obstacles to performing His will on our behalf.

Jesus was willing to take every person exactly where he was – a tax collector in a tree, a fisherman in a boat, or a child being pushed away by adults. He knew exactly how human

each one was and yet reached out in a way that showed no condescension.

While Jesus takes us right where we are – He never leaves us there. He wants to raise us up and make us heirs of God. What point to criticize fellow heirs with Jesus Christ because they didn't come through the same educational systems or grow up in the same place or have the same heritage?

If you ever find yourself prejudiced into a category you know is faulty or one where you just do not belong, then do these things:

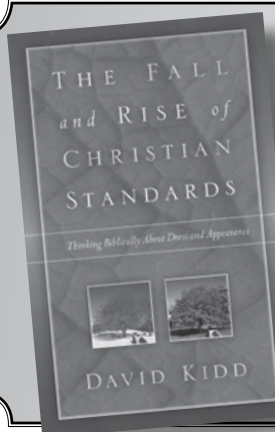
Take comfort in the fact that Jesus doesn't prejudge because He knows exactly how it feels to be on the receiving end of such treatment.

Follow Christ's lead in how to respond. When despised and rejected of men, he stayed quiet and actually forgave them because they knew not what they did. People really are clueless on how they hurt us. Not guiltless, mind you, but clueless. Even if they do mean it for harm, God still turns it for good.

Translate the feeling. You likely have lots of experience in being misunderstood, so consider how others feel when you misunderstand them. Let the experience of being prejudged tenderize you and inoculate you against joining the mass of humanity that is infected by the arrogance.

All students are not the same, despite what school they attend. Nor are all Californians comfortable being in one category. Each person is in his own category as a human whom God created and died for. A category of one.

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Let Us Guard Our Candlestick

by J. Ward Shank

In the opening chapter of Revelation John records his vision of seven golden candlesticks, which represented seven churches (Rev. 1:12-20). In their midst was a glorious personage, who was identified as “one like unto the Son of Man.” From Him John was given a message to each of these seven churches, and to the very first one was given a warning to repent and come back to true principles, or this church’s candlestick would be removed out of its place.

These messages to the seven churches are representative of churches in all times and places. In one sense, they represent the churches of different ages. In another way, they are a recognition of the individuality or distinctiveness of churches, and of the responsibility of any recognizable church group for the nature of its life and witness. The principles doubtless apply in a denominational, a regional, or in a local sense—in whatever various forms a church is discernible or recognized by the great Head of the Church.

There is also a personal element in the addresses to these churches, as, for example, the promise to the faithful overcomer that he will be clothed in white raiment and will not have his name blotted out of the book of life (Rev. 2:5). So, as individuals we must live so victoriously as to keep our names in the book of life; and as churches we must keep our candlesticks in place among God’s faithful churches.

In what sense or from what causes might our church candlestick be removed?

In the first place, our church could lose itself in a close identity with modern Protestantism. It could so allow itself to become assimilated into the general cultural life of the Protestant churches around us that it would lose its occasion for being. This is a present danger, and in our secret desire to be like the churches around us it is a greater danger than we are generally willing to admit. As the life of the churches becomes more and more decadent, the contrast between them and a true church fellowship will become the sharper. In our present trends this line of distinction is in many areas being willingly blurred, and no pragmatic considerations, such as temporary advantage in cooperative endeavor, should be allowed to endanger the place of our candlestick.

In the second place, our church could lose its sense of purpose as a church. That purpose is to win men to Christ and to establish them in the truth. It is to first bring them to Christ and then to provide a fellowship where disciples can walk in truth...In our recent emphasis on evangelism we have neglected the second phase of the church’s purpose—that is, to indoctrinate. The situation is so lopsided, so serious, that a disintegration of belief has set in. We have disparaged doctrine

and plain old fashioned orthodoxy to our mortal danger. We have elevated individual experience to a place of lordship over specific principles. The nature, place, authority and purpose of the church has suffered in consequence and the place of our candlestick is endangered.

In the third place, we could lose the truth itself. Someone may ask, “How could that be? Look at our excellent institutions, our superior literature and our great heritage?” But we should not be so complacent. It has happened to hundreds of churches. Creeds and confessions and constitutions are under wholesale revision everywhere. The very integrity and authority of the Scriptures are under new attacks, and the subtle, unseen force is in a new type of orthodoxy to which the Mennonite Church is increasingly exposed. As we have alluded before, doctrine is more and more under question, and individual experience is the rule of right instead. When the doctrinal framework supporting the church has been weakened there soon comes a time when there is no place for that church’s candlestick.

In the fourth place, our church could have its candlestick removed because it harbors a large proportion of unregenerate membership. This had been the downfall of many churches. In fact, the Mennonite Church came into being because it regarded other church candlesticks to have been removed for this very cause. It was formed out of conviction that the purity and power of the New Testament church could be maintained even in a hostile world.

The final judgment between wheat and tares is reserved to God Himself. But God does give to the church the responsibility for discerning of spirits, and to remove such as are known to be antagonistic to truth, and out of fellowship with God. This is a difficult task in church administration, but it appears that we are leaning to the side of coddling a weak and unregenerate membership. When the proportion of tares to wheat has become so great that the appearance of the tares dominates the landscape the time is long past for remedial action, and the candlestick of that church has already been removed.

Let us guard our candlestick. Let us be mindful of the fact that our church has no guarantee of perpetuity outside of obedience and devotion to her Lord. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church only in the sense that God will always have His faithful people; but it is entirely possible for the Mennonite Church to become so far removed from true principles as to have her particular candlestick removed from its place.

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Schools of Character

by Glenn E. Auker

Disciplined homes are schools of character that teach crucial lessons for our children's spiritual and social development. They learn key lessons that prepare them for a right relationship with God, a proper relationship to the brotherhood, and a healthy relationship with their fellow men.

As we view society about us, a significant loss of discipline in home life is evident due to the rejection of Scriptural concepts regarding the issue. Child psychologists teach that a child should be allowed self-expression even if that self-expression includes open defiance. Many consider it abusive to use corporal punishment or even to have children do daily chores. Conduct frequently observed in the supermarkets demonstrates the fallacy of this unscriptural approach.

It is possible for us to believe that the discipline in our homes is Biblical when we are merely trailing the world by a generation or two. This misconception is deepened because many religious books on the subject are influenced by worldly philosophy. A Biblically disciplined lifestyle is far more than being less undisciplined than society.

Disciplined homes ingrain the fear of God. Following a father's instruction relates directly to understanding the fear of the Lord (Prov. 2:1-9). As children learn the joy of obeying their parents and the pain that disobedience brings, they gain a respect for their parents that prompts a fear and reverence for God.

We must not replace the Scriptural use of the rod with modern child psychology's approach of persuasiveness and bribery. Although we will discuss issues with our children, both parents and child must understand that the child will submit to the parents' decisions.

Disciplined homes provide a moral compass throughout life, teaching the absolutes that are sorely missing in society. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). As children are taught that right is always right and wrong is always wrong, a moral compass is established that always points to truth.

Discipline must be consistent. Lying, cheating, unkindness, and similar wrongs must always be punished firmly. Our children must understand that we always discipline for the sake of principle.

Disciplined homes teach prompt and willing obedience. Proverbs repeatedly begins instructions with "My son, hear" or "My son, attend" or "My son, keep." Children need to learn that yes means yes and no means no.

Parents must insist that children respond cheerfully even though the command counters their natural inclinations. We can too easily excuse disobedience, halfhearted obedience,

and grudging obedience. This laxity will become evident as our children relate to other authorities in school, in church, at Bible school, and in society.

Disciplined homes develop wholesome interpersonal relations. Obedience is directly related to finding favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man (Prov. 3:1-4). As parents teach the lessons of submission, orderliness, self-control, and proper etiquette, children are prepared to relate well to others.

Insisting that children share their toys cheerfully prepares them to relate to others. Displays of temper must not be allowed. Children need to learn to absorb offenses, understanding that life will not always seem fair.

Disciplined homes teach orderliness. The emphasis of order in the Bible reveals God as a God of order. As children are taught orderliness, they are prepared to serve God.

Orderliness is first taught by having an orderly home. A regular daily schedule, including regular times for rising, family worship, meals, and retiring for the night teaches orderliness. Children should also be taught to pick up their toys and to keep their bedrooms clean.

Disciplined homes nurture self-discipline to face the unpleasant aspects of life. Performing tasks, however unpleasant, teaches children to act on the basis of right rather than on the basis of feeling. This virtue will greatly help a child both in the tasks of life and in the spiritual warfare. Shirking the unpleasant engenders handicaps, both in everyday life and in the spiritual warfare.

Insisting that children eat every food on the table is a valuable lesson; it teaches them to choose the good even though it seems unpleasant. They are being taught to act on the fact that the food is nutritious, rather than on the feeling that it is unpleasant.

Disciplined homes develop beauty of character (Prov. 1:8, 9). This beauty of character brings rest in the home, paves the way for effective contribution in the church, and lets our light shine to the world. Even those who accept the world's philosophy appreciate the results of Biblically disciplined home life.

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The Worship of God

by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

We believe that all true worship must be biblical. That is, both the form and content of corporate worship must be ruled and guided by the Bible. Worship is to be biblical in its every aspect. The first question of Christian worship is not, What musical style should we use? Or what do people like or want? Or what will attract seekers? Or what are other churches doing? But rather, How does God want to be worshiped? And that question can only be answered from the Bible.

For our worship to be biblical in all its aspects means (1). that its substance and elements, its content and parts, are in accord with Scripture; (2). that it is Spirit-gathered, Spirit-dependent, Spirit-engendered, and Spirit-empowered, in accord with Scripture; (3) that it is simultaneously a communal response of gratitude for grace, an expression of passion for God, the fulfillment of what we were made and redeemed for, a joyful engagement in a delightful obedience, and a corporate Christ-provided encounter with the Triune God, again in accord with Scripture; and (4) that it aims for and is an expression of God's own glory, and has in view the consummation of the church triumphant's everlasting union and communion with God.

When the Bible guides our worship, biblical elements (like singing, praying, reading Scripture, preaching, administering the sacraments) are the main features of the service. When people are guided by the Bible, they will care more about biblical preaching than having a contemporary worship style; more about God delighting in the worship they give to Him than about singing the kinds of songs they want; more about a service permeated with the Bible than a service that caters to their likes.

Worship should be simple, spiritual, and scriptural. Such worship will be both heartfelt and reverent. What does this kind of service look like? Well, an apt motto for it might be "Read the Bible, Preach the Bible, Pray the Bible, Sing the Bible."

We are to read the Bible in public worship. Paul told Timothy "give attention to the public reading of Scripture" (I Tim. 4:13) and so, worship services should contain a substantial reading of Scripture (and not just from the sermon text!). The public reading of the Bible has been at the heart of the worship of God since Old Testament times. In the reading of God's word, He speaks most directly to His people.

We are to preach the Bible. Preaching is God's prime appointed instrument to build up His church. As Paul said "faith comes by hearing" (Rom. 10:14, 17). Faithful biblical preaching is to explain and apply Scripture to the gathered company, believer and unbeliever alike. This means expository and evangelistic preaching, squarely based in the text of the word of God. People who appreciate the Bible's teaching on worship will have a high view of preaching, and little time for the personality-driven, theologically void, superficially practical, monologues that pass for preaching today.

We are to pray the Bible. The Father's house "is a house of prayer" said Jesus (Matt. 21:13). But pastoral prayer has almost disappeared in many churches. Our preachers need to once again pray prayers full of the language and thought of Scripture.

We are to sing the Bible. (Ps. 98:1; Rev. 5:9; Matt. 26:30; Neh. 12:27; 46; Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). What we mean by "sing the Bible" is that our singing ought to be biblical, shot through with the language, categories, and theology of the Bible. It ought to reflect the themes and proportion of the Bible, as well as its substance and weightiness. Nothing trite or trendy. "Our songs should be rich with biblical and theological content. The current divisions over music are at the heart of our worship wars. Yet some principles should be easy enough to identify. First, what does a Christian worship song look like? Answer, it looks like a Psalm. The Psalms provide the model for Christian hymnody. If the songs we sing in worship look like Psalms, they will develop themes over many lines with minimal repetition. They will be rich in theological and experiential content. They will tell us much about God, man, sin, salvation, and the Christian life. They will express the whole range of experience and emotion. Second, what does a Christian worship song sound like? Many are quick to point out that God has not given us a book of tunes. No, but He has given us a book of lyrics (the Psalms) and their form will do much to determine the kinds of tunes that will be used. Put simply, the tunes will be suited to the words. They will be sophisticated enough to carry substantial content over several lines and stanzas. They will use minimal repetition. They will be appropriate to the emotional mood of the Psalm or Bible-based Christian hymn. Sing the Bible." (Terry Johnson)

Taken from www.fpcjackson.org

Called But Not Going

by Dr. Bill Commons

Tears fell as one woman said, “When I was a teen God called me to missions, but I never went.” This confession took place during a missions conference when she came forward with a broken heart over the blessings she felt she had missed because of disobedience.

Similar confessions have been repeated countless times over the years—sometimes even from pastors or their wives. Often young people make a missions commitment and then enter local church ministry after graduation from college or seminary to gain maturity and ministry experience. Before long their concern for the spiritual needs of people in the United States overwhelms their former passion for unreached peoples in distant lands.

Marriage and starting a family maximize concerns for the well-being of children. Safety and security become priority concerns, and the heart for missions fades. How easy it is to forget that “the safest place is always in the center of God’s will,” wherever it takes us and whatever it involves. Besides, where do we find safety as a priority value emphasized in Scripture? If the early apostles had built their ministries on concerns for safety, the gospel would never have reached us in America. Where are those who determine to follow Christ to the dark corners of the world, whatever the cost?

Educational debt after college and graduate school is often seen as a hindrance to entering missions. True, it is often wise to work for a year or two after graduation to reduce debt, but the tendency is to buy more “stuff” on credit, and so financial freedom fades away along with plans for missions. God always provides a way for those who determine to obey Him.

There are always good excuses not to go: family priorities, safety concerns, indebtedness, the multitudes of unreached people in the United States, other home church priorities. This has always been true in every generation, in every family, in every church, and in every land. Thus, many are dissuaded from following through in their early missionary commitment and carry in their heart a sense of loss and lack of fulfillment. Disobedience carries a heavy price tag.

But praise God for those who are faithful, who persevere, who face the obstacles honestly but by faith overcome them. “I can do all through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13) is their credo. They are overcomers—not great men (and women) of God, but little men with a great God. May their tribe increase!

Reprinted by permission from ABWE Message, Fall 2006

Leprosy of the Soul

by David Ravenhill

Sexual sin along with its many ensuing diseases stems from rebellion: rebellion against God, His Word, and His law of natural order. When Israel was without a King, she did that which was right in her own eyes. In like manner, when we refuse to submit to the King of kings we end up living in self-will and suffering the consequences for it.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus gave His disciples authority to heal every disease but one? They were told to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons but there was one disease they could not heal; instead it had to be cleansed. That disease was leprosy.

Jesus made it clear that they were to cleanse the lepers. The word cleanse is the same word John used in his epistle when he wrote, “If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Any serious student of the Bible will know that it is important to understand “types and shadows” to be able to grasp the mysteries of God’s Word. While the majority of believers know that leprosy is a type of sin, few seem to realize that it usually typifies one specific sin—rebellion!

For instance, when Miriam went against Moses’ authority she was struck with leprosy and was excommunicated from the congregation for seven days. When Gehazi disobeyed his master Elisha he became a leper. King Uzziah usurped the rightful position of the priests by trying to offer incense to the Lord and was also smitten with leprosy.

Rebellion like leprosy spreads quickly—therefore the leper has to be isolated for the protection of the rest of God’s people. This had its counterpart in New Testament church discipline—a much needed but no longer practiced doctrine. For the leper to be “cleansed” he had to show himself to the priest—a sign of submission to authority. Submission and rebellion cannot co-exist.

Pornography and sexual sin have become huge problems in the modern Church, but I’m convinced that the deeper issue is the heart rebellion that is making a way for believers to give over to sin in the first place. Until people truly learn to submit themselves to the lordship of Christ, this kind of problem will continue to surface. As long as Christians take a pick-and-choose approach to obedience, sexual sin will persist as a spiritual blight in the midst of God’s people.

So what is the answer for those in sexual sin? Those in its clutches must submit themselves to the High Priest Jesus, repent of their rebellion to His authority, and then they will be cleansed of the leprosy that has contaminated their souls.

Reprinted with permission from Unchained, Spring 2007

Technology – Master or Servant?

by Chester Weaver

Western society has been trained to hold technology in high esteem. Technology has proven humanly beneficial in many ways. Technological advances in medicine relieve suffering, save lives, and speed recovery for those afflicted. Travel is much faster and easier today than it was just one hundred years ago. Cars, trucks, and airplanes have made a great difference.

Computers have made record keeping easy and thus have freed manpower to be more creative in the workplace. Children no longer even need a typing teacher; a computer program does the teaching. In fact, if we have a problem, one of the first things we tend to think about is how the computer could help solve it. Why be inconvenienced if it's not necessary? We have learned to think of turning to technology to solve many problems. This kind of thinking is not all bad, but it is not all good, either.

Recently when the iPhone was released, people stood in long lines for the privilege of getting one immediately. The iPhone combines a cell phone, and iPod, and a PDA into one fun-to-use unit. Suddenly the previous cell phone, the iPod, and the PDA were outdated! Any “thinking” person can see the advantages! And so it goes.

Technology proceeds with one improvement after the other. And there is no end in sight. Mankind steps back in awe and says, “What hath man wrought? I must have one!”

Is technology a gift from God? Where is God in all this? With all the problems technology has solved, has technology improved marriages? Has a sense of needing and being needed deepened? Has our relationship with God been enriched? Has family life improved? Are people becoming wiser about the issues of life because of internet access? Are children more satisfied now than they were before computer games? Has moral sensitivity increased? Has technology moved man closer to God – and to his fellow man?

Keeping pace with all the advancements of technology seems to produce a brisk consumerism. “Everybody” seems to “need” technology. Do we all need cell phones and computers? (or Web access, or iPods, or PDA's or whatever is available next) When we have this mindset, we seem to look for whatever is new that we could possibly use.

Selfishness seems to be at the heart of craving for instant pleasure and convenience. We spend our money on more good food (thank God for good food!) while our middles expand. We buy more “toys” so we can have more fun (God wants us to enjoy ourselves!) while our Bibles get used less and less. We need so much stuff that we soon need a storage barn to keep it dry (good stewardship!). And the landfills – they increase in size every day!

Where does all the money go? Into souls, into service, into sacrifice, or into technology? Where have our lives gone? Into mammon (wealth) or into people? Into materialism or into

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Jesus? Into myself or into you?

Each little gadget snatches a bit from its owner. A bit of time, a bit of money, a bit of personal attention. And when all the bits are lumped together, what do they amount to? If a man gains the whole world and loses his own soul, what does he have in the end? A starved and puny soul instead of a heart vibrant with life from God.

Here is a test: If I had adequate food, clothing, and shelter for a year and during that year I spent no money or time on computers or electronic gadgets, but instead poured my energies into people, how would I fare? By focusing on enduring values, I would be better off at the end of the year than at the beginning.

Things do not satisfy. Technology does not meet our deepest needs. Only God satisfies the inner longings of the heart. Our lives are fulfilled only when they are engaged with God and with people.

As communication becomes easier with those we do not see, we may find ourselves spending less time cultivating good relationships with the people we do see. I think cell phones tempt us to ignore our families and to be less considerate of those around us.

The choices people make as they pursue technology give evidence of the strong, yet subtle, enticement technology exerts upon the natural desires of man. Technology—servant, not master!

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