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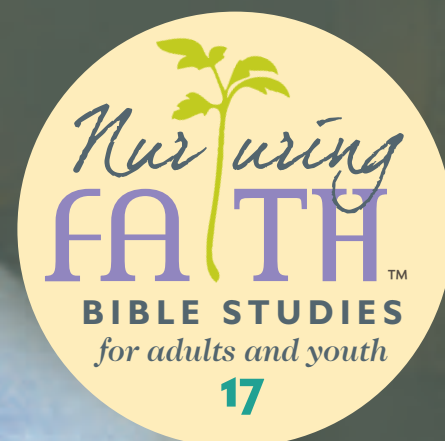
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Cover photo by John Pierce. Exter Hardy, pastor of Pole Line Baptist Church in Davis, Calif., trains foster parents and offers his services as a counselor to the progressive university town. **Page 4**



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Beyond the Bible Belt

Exter Hardy's westward call still compels him to serve

Davis, Calif. — It's not an easy route to the pastorate of a Baptist congregation in this progressive university town on the West Coast from the veterinary medicine school at the University of Tennessee. But then, Exter Hardy followed a divine tug rather than the easy route.

“I'm annoyed at how many people have a negative view of Christianity here,” said Hardy, pastor of Pole Line Baptist Church in this tidy town that's home to the University of California, Davis. “But we're trying to change that.”

Conveying love and support to a suspicious community is challenging, he said. But it's possible through service-oriented programs such as parents' night out.

“We want them to know that we're here and we care,” he said. “If people need something, they can call on us.”

When he describes his congregation as loving and accepting — and with “a reputation for caring” — he speaks from personal as well as professional experience.

Hardy began attending the church first, then “filling in” when the pulpit was vacant before eventually assuming the pastorate. The congregation warmly welcomed his family and stuck with him through divorce.

Of his four children — two biological and two adopted — two have special needs.

'GIFT OF FINGERS'

Exter preaches in sign language and English each Sunday. With two deaf sons, he knows the importance of reaching as many people as possible.

His early interest in sign language confused his college friends who knew his vocational plan at that time was to become a veterinarian.

“Are you going to work with deaf dogs and cats?” one of them asked.



Conveying love and support to a community that is often suspicious of churches is a challenge, said Exter Hardy.

Though a long-held career goal, he felt “miserable” in veterinary school and dropped out. He was being pulled in another direction.

And his sign language would become an important gift as a foster parent, parent and pastor. He also served as a missionary to deaf persons in Sacramento, Calif.

Videos of his sermons are made available online for deaf persons without access to weekly preaching and teaching. A congregation in Nova Scotia, without a pastor, makes use of them.

“Instead of the gift of tongues, I have the gift of fingers,” he said.

BEYOND THE BIBLE BELT

While a college student, Hardy attended a Baptist Student Union conference in Tennessee at which Baptist mission leader Keith Parks gave a compelling message to leave the familiar for Christian service.

“I couldn’t stay in the Southeast after that,” Exter recalled saying in response to the call.

That call was reinforced when Hardy, then serving as youth minister at Central Baptist Church in Waycross, Ga., visited Mercer University to hear seminary representatives. He learned of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary near San Francisco.

“I felt called to missions and thought I needed to get out of the Bible Belt to prepare,” he said.

He began his seminary studies on the West Coast in 1983 — and has remained in California ever since, except for a six-month ministry experience as a seminarian in Australia.

ROOTED, GROWING

Hardy’s first pastorate was in Winters, Calif., a rural setting where his undergraduate degree in agriculture made him a good fit.

Challenging times would follow, leading Exter to resign and find temporary work. Following the birth of a second child, who had severe medical problems, Exter became a full-time caretaker who stayed in an RV — parked at the hospital — that was provided by a family in Pole Line Baptist Church.

In March 1991 he became pastor of that church which had been so caring to him.

“They had five nurses and three medical students,” he said of his church family who provided support and helpful information in caring for his son.

That son is now 23 and has a part-time job to which he walks two miles each day, his proud father said. “He’s our walking miracle.”

An adopted son from Brazil is also deaf. So Hardy’s inclination long ago to become fluent in sign language is greatly appreciated today — at home and at church where other deaf persons attend.

CARE, COMPASSION

In 1998, Exter told his congregation that his marriage had ended and he offered his resignation, which they refused.

“They said you’ve walked with us through our tragedies,” he recalled. “We’ll walk through yours with you.”

In addition to his two seminary degrees, Exter received a Masters degree in marriage

and family counseling from California State University, Sacramento.

He offers his services to those beyond the congregation. Mixed reviews followed his efforts to simply hand his business card to employees of local businesses he frequents, with the words: “If you ever need anything...”

Three persons sought out counseling, and another wanted help with a funeral.

Yet an irate grocery store manager threatened him and told him not to come back. However, the new store manager said it was OK for him to shop and to offer his services to employees.

“I’m a foster parent too and I teach foster parenting classes,” said Exter, noting that he is not identified as a pastor in that role, but a counselor whose education and experience are emphasized.

LARGER PRESENCE

The eight Christian congregations in Davis work closely to create a positive image and to better serve their shared community, Exter said. Together they do 58 different mission projects “to help the city see we are not fragmented and that we really do care.”

The Pole Line congregation, after a careful study of Baptist beliefs, voted unanimously to move from its longtime connections as Southern Baptists and align with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Next year, Exter will serve as moderator of CBF West, a regional fellowship.

“We’re focusing on being the presence of Christ,” he said.

Because the church has personal relationships with some Southern Baptist missionaries, he said direct support keeps them from “abandoning those we are close to.”

Relationships are what matter to Exter, he said. “I want God using me to change individual lives.”

Change rarely comes quickly, he admits. But he acknowledges that “God has given me persistence.”

Exter can greet people in 15 different languages, and the congregation now hosts Spanish and Korean missions along with other small congregational groups.

“Our church has the attitude that this is not our building, but God’s,” he said.

Openness to ethnic diversity and to persons with disabilities mark the congregation’s welcoming spirit that makes strangers feel at home and those with special challenges to feel included.

The message he and his congregation seek to convey is very simple, he said.

“No matter who you are, you’re going to be loved.” **BT**

Balancing self-denial with self-care

Exter Hardy, pastor of Pole Line Baptist Church in Davis, Calif., gives much attention to a needed balancing act in the lives of ministers and other Christian leaders.

It is the tension between the call of Jesus to deny oneself and the promise of Jesus to give abundant life.

He tackled this issue as part of his doctoral work that led to the publication of a workbook titled, *Does Ministry Have To Hurt So Much? Helpful Observations from the Life of Jesus*.

“In many ways this is my life journey in a workbook,” he said of the ongoing struggle to give of oneself without depleting oneself.

In the workbook’s introduction, he warns of the danger that can come from being out of balance.

“Some Christians even feel guilty if they take time or resources to do something for themselves,” he writes in the introduction. “However, when we Christians do not take care of our own personal needs, we often become discouraged and even burn out in our ministry.”

No one is exempt from Sabbath, he said. And Exter has his own way of staying in check about this balance — and it’s based on Jesus’ words in John 10:10.

“If I’m not experiencing the abundant life, then I’m out of God’s will,” he said. “...I live by that.” **BT**



Pastor Exter Hardy (right) of Pole Line Baptist Church in Davis, Calif., talks with church member Wil Bowers (left) and Bruce Gourley of Bozeman, Mont., who serves as current moderator of CBF West, a regional network of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches.

quotation remarks

“There are 80 million Millennials in the U.S. and approximately the same number of suggestions for how to bring them back to church... The number one predictive factor as to whether or not a young Christian will retain his or her faith is whether that person has a meaningful relationship with an older Christian.”

—Drew Dyck, managing editor of *Leadership Journal* and author of *Generation X-Christian*, in a blog titled “Millennials need a bigger God, not a hipper pastor” (aspengroup.com)

“I love the Bible as much as I ever have. I’m just as passionate for Jesus and for the gospel as I ever have been, though I understand them differently too. But I can say this: Reading the Bible is a terrific cure for fundamentalism. That’s exactly how many of us so-called liberal Bible scholars got our start.”

—Greg Carey, professor of *New Testament*, Lancaster Theological Seminary, who joined a Southern Baptist church in Alabama in his teens (HuffPo)

“Above all, Addie Davis was faithful to following God even at a time when she had no role models and very little encouragement.”

—Baptist Women in Ministry executive director Pam Durso, honoring the late trailblazing female minister who was ordained by Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., 50 years ago (ABP)

“While religion is central to Southern life and Southerners more openly display their religious beliefs than citizens in other parts of the country, they also embrace the secular notion that there is a proper time and place for religious expression.”

—From a report on findings by University of Connecticut sociologists that employers, even in the South, prefer applicants who are not public about their religious affiliations (CNN)

“The myth we are trying to shatter is that conservatives all support the death penalty... Conservative policies are supposed to be ... pro-life, fiscally responsible and limited government. We risk taking innocent life, it costs more than life without parole, and I can’t think of a bigger government program than one where you can kill your citizens.”

—Marc Hyden, advocacy coordinator for *Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty* (RNS)

“Critics within the [Southern Baptist Convention] noted that many of its recent public ventures, based on Convention votes, did little to advance the Baptists or change the culture... Voting ambassadors at Baltimore did the predictable Baptist thing: they urged prayer. Baptists will not be the only Christians on their knees in the squally times ahead.”

—Church historian Martin Marty (Sightings)

“I’m trying to learn Spanish, in part because El Salvador is the top country of birth for immigrants in Virginia —followed by India, Mexico, the Philippines and South Korea. It’s hard to share the gospel if you don’t know how to say ‘hola.’”

—John Chandler, leader of the *Spence Network* (ABP)

“It’s like some people decided to stop mowing the lawn and then decided to come to church. No one dresses up for church anymore.”

—John DeBonville, rector of the *Church of the Good Shepherd* in West Springfield, Mass., until his death on July 5 (CNN)

“In my adult life there is one thing I have missed most about my childhood. I miss sitting on the porch ... I miss being still — and all the learning, relaxing and praying without words that go with it. This summer I’m going to be still more — whether at my house or yours. I think the world will get along just fine anyway, and I know I’ll be better off.”

—Pastor Bill Coates in a newsletter column to the *First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga.* ([First Connections](http://FirstConnections))

“Any one can become a pastor. [Anyone] can open a church.”

—Professor Eduardo Refkalefsky to *ABC News’ Nightline* about the rise in self-anointed miracle workers in Brazil including child faith healers

“There should be some sort of approach to God that will include certain steps to honor the God that is not our buddy but fully The Other.”

—Constance M. Cherry, professor of worship at *Indiana Wesleyan University*, on personal preparation for worship (CNN)

“Many of these books and movies have sought to describe heaven from a subjective, experiential source, mainly via personal testimonies that cannot be corroborated...”

—From a Southern Baptist Convention “Resolution on the sufficiency of scripture regarding the afterlife,” following expressed concerns over the popularity of so-called “heaven tourism” books and movies

The value in knowing what we don't know

For some people there are no unanswered questions. Mystery is feared more than ignorance that masquerades as truth.

Therefore, a couple of new personal rules have been added to my daily disciplines in an effort to save time and sanity:

First, don't read comment streams that follow thoughtful articles. Those who say the most generally have the least to say. (That applies to situations other than comment streams as well.)

And, second, leave online conversations when a religious know-it-all dives in to dominate a discussion — or, really, what had been a discussion. Scripture, logic and common courtesy get victimized.

There is great value in knowing what we don't know — and seeing such limitations as a strength rather than weakness.

Experience and knowledge verify our limited grasp of all things rather than eliminate them. Perhaps that's why those who are most cocksure about the Bible and everything else in life often have an underserving of both.

Living and learning can lead to the welcomed discovery of fresh spiritual insights and helpful theological concepts — as well as an

increased awareness of one's limited grasp of the divine and life's myriad complexities. Yet, again, there is great value in acknowledging that there remains much that we don't know.

Conversely, there are those who seek to learn little over time (and accomplish that goal) — believing they hold a full measure of truth. Authoritative about matters large and small, they are eager to dispense their certainty.



Often such so-called truth is rooted in well-fortified belief based on select portions of the Bible and everything heard on talk radio.

The problem: Such dispensers of truth don't know what they don't know.

"I believe..." has its proper place — especially for those of us who are indeed Christian believers. Yet, in many cases, "That's possible..." is a better response to the many aspects of life that are beyond our fullest grasp.

The irony is that we are to be lifelong learners. Yet a part of knowing more is to recognize that we know less in terms of the enlarged world being discovered. Also ironic is that as the world gets smaller, in terms of communication and access, it get larger in terms

of breaking down the little worlds in which so many are isolated for life.

Acknowledging our limited knowledge is a good spiritual practice to both produce needed humility and to keep us from squeezing God into tiny molds of ourselves.

Our finite minds cannot fully grasp the infinite God and the vastness of creation. Nor can we rightly and completely mine all the truths of Holy Writ. Admitting so is a sign of faithfulness, not failure.

There is actually comfort that comes from an enlarged perspective of a greater God and truth beyond what we can know and fully understand. And reveling in mystery is more meaningful and perhaps more faithful than compiling and dispensing know-it-all truth bombs.

The late Baptist theology professor John W. Eddins would tell his students: "What we don't know about God is consistent with what we do know about God through Jesus."

That assurance should be enough — enough to see the folly in acting like we have it all figured out.

... Enough to know, appreciate and confess that we too see through cloudy glass.

... Enough to be faithful to what we do know through Jesus — but have not lived up to yet. **BT**

"Acknowledging our limited knowledge is a good spiritual practice to both produce needed humility and to keep us from squeezing God into tiny molds of ourselves."



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One in five Americans see Bible as 'fables, legends and history'

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey
Religion News Service

America could be experiencing a decline of literalism and the rise of secularism, according to one interpretation of a recent Gallup Poll.

The poll, which measured Americans' beliefs about the Bible, found that 28 percent of Americans believe the Bible is the literal word of God — close to the lowest point ever found in the survey. About 40 percent of Americans said the same thing in the late 1970s.

Meanwhile, about one in five Americans view the Bible in secular terms, described in the poll as ancient “fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man.” This was up from 10 percent in the late 1970s.

About half (47 percent) of Americans continue to say the Bible is the “inspired” word of God not to be taken literally, which has remained relatively stable over time.

Overall acceptance of the Bible as being the “inspired” or “actual” word of God is about the same percentage of Americans identifying themselves as Christian: 76 percent.

At the same time, the 21 percent of Americans who view the Bible in more secular terms closely mirrors the 22 percent who identify with another religion or no religion.

The poll comes after a survey found that a majority of Americans use an older translation of the Bible.

More than half of Americans use a King James Version Bible. Just 19 percent read the more modern New International Version, according to a recent study by the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis.

Bibles continue to sell well, with publishers finding new variations on a theme, such as breast cancer or patriotism. Thomas Nelson will publish *The Duck Commander Faith and Family Bible* in October. **BT**



Sale of Glorieta for \$1 was 'tough decision' says LifeWay's Rainer

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

Glorieta Conference Center would have been worth millions of dollars to a commercial developer, but it was sold last year for \$1 because leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention agency owning the property say they wanted the New Mexico campground to continue as a Christian ministry.

“We could have sold Glorieta for several million dollars, according to the appraisal, but it would have been sold to a commercial entity, and we don't know what would have been at the place called Glorieta,” LifeWay Christian Resources President Thom Rainer said in a June report to messengers at the SBC annual meeting in Baltimore.

“I would rather sell Glorieta and see the gospel continue than to see a casino go on what is this sacred ground,” Rainer said in response to a question from John Yarbrough, a retired Southern Baptist minister and one-time home missionary who says he purchased a home on leased property in the spirit of revitalizing the 2,400-acre mountain campus that had mounting deferred maintenance needs.

Yarbrough said the decision to sell the property “brought injury” to him and other homeowners because a buyout offer from the new owners was below fair market value.

“So I'm asking you, Dr. Rainer, would you provide a fair market value to homeowners and churches that were invested in the campus of Glorieta?” asked Yarbrough, a messenger from First Baptist Church in Carrollton, Texas.

Rainer said he feels sympathy for the

owners of about 65 homes at Glorieta standing on property typically secured through one-year leases, anticipating the day might come when the agreement would change.

Rainer said the buyer, a Christian camping organization out of Texas called Glorieta 2.0, was under no legal obligation to compensate the lessees in any way, but offered options including purchase for a maximum of \$100,000.

Rainer said part of the problem in determining a fair market value is the fact the properties on which the lodgings were built are leased and not owned by the homeowner.

“Some would say very little,” Rainer said. “They [homeowners] would certainly say more.”

Rainer responded to criticism that the new owners are not Southern Baptists by reminding messengers: “We offered Glorieta to every national entity in the Southern Baptist Convention for a dollar. We made it available to any state convention, including New Mexico, for the same.”

After exhausting options for keeping the camp under the Southern Baptist umbrella, Rainer said LifeWay leaders were left with a “tough decision.”

“Do we continue to lose millions of dollars, because we get no Cooperative Program money and continue to find ways to underwrite that where we do not have funds, or do we go on and sell it to a Christian ministry?” Rainer said.

“We made the decision to sell it to what was then called Camp Eagle, a Christian camp out of Texas, and now called Glorieta 2.0, for the very reason that they want to continue the ministry that is there,” Rainer said. **BT**

Has the Internet led to more pulpit plagiarism?

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey
Religion News Service

Thou shalt not steal another pastor's sermon? Recent cases of high-profile pastors who have been accused of lifting others' material are raising questions about whether pulpit plagiarism is on the rise — and whether it has become a more forgivable sin.

Seattle megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll was accused last year of plagiarism in material he wrote with Tyndale House Publishers and InterVarsity Press. "Mistakes were made that I am grieved by and apologize for," Driscoll said in a statement.

More recently, popular Oklahoma City-based megachurch pastor Craig Groeschel has been accused of plagiarizing the work of writer and comedian Danny Murphy. Groeschel is the pastor of Lifechurch.tv, a tech-savvy megachurch founded in 1996 that has quickly grown to one of the nation's largest churches, with 80 weekly "worship experiences" across 19 campuses in five states.

On his blog, Murphy suggested Groeschel used material that Murphy wrote in the now-defunct magazine *The Door* in 2000. The material was later used by Groeschel in a sermon and in a book now titled *Love, Sex, and Happily Ever After*, printed by Multnomah Books. Murphy's name never appeared with it.

It's not the first time Murphy has found his work in the hands of others; he was "minding my own business in the back row of a church" when he heard the preacher use the same material from the article in *The Door*. When questioned, the pastor said he had found it in the best-selling book *Not a Fan*, by Kyle Idleman.

Murphy flagged the issue for the publisher, Zondervan, and the attribution was fixed in the next printing of the book, he said. According to Murphy, Multnomah has also inserted a footnote with attribution in Groeschel's text, although Groeschel never admitted to lacking earlier attribution, maintaining the content was his.

"I feel strongly about giving credit and have done so over and over again in sermons and books," Groeschel said in a statement.

"We first used this idea in a sermon illustration video, which I sincerely thought was an original concept developed before the author's article. To be above reproach, I asked my publisher to give this author credit, which is already reflected in the most recent reprinting of the book where this illustration is used."

As more instances of plagiarism are being alleged, it's unclear whether plagiarism is more common, or if it's being reported more often.

The ease of the Internet could be a double-edged sword for some pastors looking for material. With sermons and books so easily

searchable online, watchdogs have better means of cataloging, searching and reporting offenses.

Last year, an Episcopal priest in Massachusetts, John E. McGinn, was accused of plagiarized sermons from Sermons.com. He was suspended by his diocese and said he planned to retire.

Richard Land, who was president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, came under fire in 2012 after being accused of plagiarism in his radio broadcasts. He has since become president of Southern Evangelical Seminary.

Preachers have always borrowed and quoted and voiced other preachers, said Richard Lischer, a professor of preaching at Duke Divinity School. "Christianity is not as focused on issues of copyright as other sectors in academics."

Congregations might also be more willing to forgive a pastor who has plagiarized than they might have been in the past, said Ron Cook, a professor at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary.

"Not giving credit is not stigmatized as much as it was a quarter-century or even a decade ago," Cook said. "In some cases I've known in recent years, the congregations are more willing to give their pastor a second chance." **BT**

(Greg Horton contributed to this article.)

Two Baptist colleges with controversial leaders face accreditation trouble

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey
Religion News Service

A small Baptist college now led by outspoken evangelical Ergun Caner has lost its accreditation. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges recently voted to remove Brewton-Parker College in Georgia from membership one year after it placed the school on probation over finances.

Caner stirred a debate within evangelical circles over whether he exaggerated his testimony as a convert from Islam to Christianity.

"We are operationally in the black, our present budget is balanced, we project finishing this fiscal year in the black, and our Board of Trustees approved a balanced budget for 2014-2015," Caner said in a statement, noting that enrollment is also up. "SACS leaders will take all of these changes into account

and reconsider their ruling in our appeal this August."

Confronted with "discrepancies and misstatements" about Caner's background, Liberty University in 2010 decided not to renew Caner's contract as dean of its seminary. Caner has attempted to get YouTube to take down videos of past speeches posted by critics.

Brewton-Parker chose Caner in 2013 because of his past controversies, saying he has endured "relentless and pagan attacks." The college has filed an appeal challenging the accreditation loss in the courts, according to a statement from the college.

The same accrediting agency also placed another small Baptist institution, Louisiana College, on probation for a year. The school has been in and out of trouble with its accreditor amid a series of governance and other issues dating back a decade.

The college moved its controversial leader,

Joe Aguillard, into an emeritus role earlier this year and appointed an interim president. Many say Aguillard was part of the Baptist college's transition to a more fundamentalist direction.

"Although the decision is disappointing, it represents an opportunity for Louisiana College to address the issues in preparation for the arrival of a new president," Argile Smith, the school's president pro tempore, said in a statement. "Fortunately, the issues don't bring into question in any way the excellent classroom work being done by our professors and students. The issues have to do with administrative areas."

While putting the school on probation, the accreditor raised an "integrity issue," and a failure to comply with the accreditor's standards regarding "external influence," according to *Inside Higher Ed*. Internal documents allege that a former college administrator forged signatures on a document submitted to the school's accrediting agency. **BT**

Hobby Lobby victory

Reactions include opposition to, support for Religious Freedom Restoration Act

WASHINGTON — As soon as the Supreme Court decided for Hobby Lobby and against the Obama administration's contraception mandate on June 30, critics called for the repeal of the 1993 law that the justices relied on to make their 5-4 decision.

A *Washington Post* editorial suggested the next day that the statute — the Religious Freedom Restoration Act — could be narrowed in scope. A hashtag popped up on Twitter: #repealRFRA.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation asked its constituents to lobby Congress to scrap the law. Yet at the same time, 10 prominent religious leaders sent a letter to Congress, imploring lawmakers not to touch the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

“Do not amend or appeal RFRA, one of our nation's most vital legal protections for the religious freedom and rights of conscience of every person of every faith,” read the letter, whose signatories included Matthew Harrison, president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention; and Gary E. Stevenson, presiding bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

RFRA sits at the heart of the Hobby Lobby case, perhaps the most debated on the Supreme Court's docket during its just-finished session. The case revolved around the question of whether employers had to cover all types of birth control, including ones that their religious convictions held out as morally objectionable. But it hinged on little-known RFRA.

RFRA says federal laws can't substantially burden a person's free exercise of religion unless the law furthers a compelling government interest (in this case, getting free birth control to women) and uses the least restrictive means possible.

In the Hobby Lobby decision, the court's conservative majority ruled that privately held corporations, not just people, have rights under RFRA. And while it assumed the contraception mandate furthered a compelling interest, it ruled that the mandate was not the least restrictive means of getting a full range



Demonstrators rallied at the Supreme Court on June 30 after the justices sided with the evangelical owners of Hobby Lobby Stores Inc., ruling 5-4 that the arts-and-crafts chain does not have to offer insurance for types of birth control that conflict with company owners' religious beliefs. After the decision, those who were disappointed continued to stand outside the Supreme Court. RNS photo by Heather Adams.

of birth control to women, and that in the process the mandate trampled on the religious rights of the evangelical Green family that owns Hobby Lobby.

Marci A. Hamilton, a Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law professor who has been trying to repeal RFRA since Congress passed it nearly unanimously in 1993, said the Hobby Lobby case shows how RFRA invites religious people to use their beliefs to discriminate against others.

“The genie is out of the bottle,” Hamilton said. “RFRA is an extreme standard, and with Hobby Lobby it becomes crystal clear that RFRA yields results that are in opposition to the vast majority of Americans' views.”

Most Americans, a Kaiser Health Tracking Poll released in April showed, believe that an employer's religious beliefs should not trump employees' rights to all types of birth control promised by law.

Many critics of the Hobby Lobby decision say it not only tramples women's health care rights, but also opens the door to other business owners who want to invoke their religious rights to discriminate by, for example, refusing to hire gay employees.

In the wake of the ruling, Sarah Warbelow, legal director of the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay rights group, said it and allied groups “must remain vigilant in the event business owners attempt to use this decision to justify other forms of discrimination, including against LGBT people.”

Could the movement to repeal RFRA go anywhere? So far, no member of Congress has stood up to advocate repealing or even tinkering with it, though some have said the Supreme Court misinterpreted it.

“I'm not nervous for RFRA,” said the Southern Baptists' Moore. “I think RFRA is secure in law and that it has the support of the Congress.”

Still, the attacks against RFRA, Moore continued, are unsettling, and reflect a movement on the political left to redefine religious liberty protections as licenses to discriminate.

“We do see religious liberty coming under harsh rhetorical attack in ways I don't think could be anticipated years ago,” he said. “We're attempting to be Paul Revere for religious liberty protection and warning people ahead of time that there are crucial rights that must be protected.” **BT**

Five takeaways from the Hobby Lobby case

WASHINGTON — Five things to know about one of the most anticipated Supreme Court decisions of the year:

1. Corporations can't pray, but they do have religious rights.

Hobby Lobby isn't a person. It's a chain of crafts stores owned by a religious family. And though the evangelical Green family objects to parts of the Affordable Care Act's emergency contraception mandate, it's not the Greens but the company that writes the check for employees' health insurance.

The first question the justices had to answer was this: Does Hobby Lobby have religious rights? To many Americans, this sounds a little nutty. Does a craft store believe in God?

A majority of the justices held that a closely held company such as Hobby Lobby does have religious rights. The court didn't apply those rights, however, to publicly held corporations, where owners' religious beliefs would be hard to discern.

But well before the justices had delivered their verdict on this question, many legal scholars said they wouldn't be surprised were they to affirm the company's religious rights. American corporations do have some of the rights and responsibilities we usually associate with people.

And in the 2010 *Citizens United* campaign finance case, the justices overturned bans on corporate political spending as a violation of freedom of speech — *corporations'* free speech.

2. The Affordable Care Act isn't the only way to get contraception to women.

The justices in this case interpreted not only the 225-year-old Constitution but also the 21-year-old Religious Freedom Restoration Act. One of the things RFRA says is that if a federal law is going to substantially burden someone's religious freedom, the feds must make sure that the law uses the "least restrictive means" to achieve its purpose.

In this case, the purpose is providing birth control to female employees at no cost.

Justice Stephen Breyer asked the "least restrictive means" question when this case was argued before the court: Instead of making the company provide insurance that conflicts with its owners' beliefs, how about the government pays for it?

The Supreme Court answered Breyer's question in the affirmative in this opinion: There are ways of getting contraception to women that don't substantially burden the Green family's religious beliefs. Justice Anthony Kennedy, in a concurring opinion, suggested the government could pay.

3. The American people would have ruled differently.

There are nine U.S. Supreme Court justices, and most of them ruled for Hobby Lobby. But what if a softball team composed of a random sample of nine American adults got to decide this case instead? Well, the team would have likely come up with a very different decision.

In a Kaiser Health Tracking Poll, released in April, Americans expressed solid support for the contraception mandate, backing it by a 2-to-1 margin. Kaiser also asked specifically about requiring coverage in the Hobby Lobby scenario: Should a for-profit business owner with religious objections to birth control be subject to the requirement?

Again, a majority (55 percent) said yes, they should, "even if it violates their owners' personal religious beliefs."

REACTION:

J. Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee:

"The Religious Freedom Restoration Act was passed to make sure religious liberty claims are taken seriously by government. It does not dictate results ahead of time; it provides a calculus by which the courts balance religious liberty claims with the interests of the government and other citizens. As the leader of the broad coalition that urged passage of RFRA, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty has a special stake in preserving its continued vitality. The BJC continues to support the legal standard enacted in RFRA. However one views the outcome of the Hobby Lobby case, that standard continues to serve its original purpose."

4. This court is rah-rah religious rights.

Chief Justice John Roberts' court is shaping up to be pretty darn protective of that free exercise clause. Less than two months ago, the court ruled 5-4 that the town of Greece, N.Y., could regularly convene town meetings with sectarian Christian prayers.

And in 2012, the court ruled 9-0 that a Lutheran school could fire a teacher who had some ministerial responsibilities, despite the government's argument that her dismissal violated the Americans With Disabilities Act.

In all these cases, the court sided with religious rights over other rights.

"The Roberts court has been a great champion of religious freedom," said Lori Windham, senior counsel at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which represented Hobby Lobby.

5. Hobby Lobby won, but the next company to cite religious objections might well lose.

Contraception mandate fans painted terrible scenarios of religious rights run amok in the case of a Hobby Lobby win.

What if a Jehovah's Witness invokes her religious rights and says she won't cover blood transfusions in her company's health plan? What if an employer says vaccinations conflict with his beliefs?

The Hobby Lobby decision may certainly embolden religious employers to object to laws they consider burdensome. But that doesn't mean they're always going to win.

The court made clear in this ruling that religion should not always trump the law, and said its decision applies to the contraception mandate, not other insurance mandates. The court also specified that an employer could not use religion to get an exemption from laws that prohibit discrimination — on the basis of race, for example.

The justices were silent, however, on whether employers' religious beliefs could override laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Also unclear, legal experts say, is how this decision is going to affect religious non-profits and religiously affiliated schools and hospitals that want the same sort of exemption the justices awarded to Hobby Lobby. **BT**

Wheaton College gets pass from SCOTUS

WASHINGTON (RNS) — The Supreme Court offered a further sign that it favors letting employers with religious objections avoid the Obama administration's so-called contraception mandate.

Over the vehement objection of its three female justices, the court July 3 blocked the administration from forcing evangelical Wheaton College to sanction insurance coverage for emergency birth control, even though it would not have had to offer the coverage itself.

In doing so, the court made clear that it's not done with the religious liberty issue following the court's June 30 ruling that closely-held, for-profit corporations with objections to certain contraception methods do not have to offer this type of coverage to their employees.

Noting that appeals courts across the country are divided on how religious nonprofits such as charities, hospitals and colleges should be handled under the regulation, the court said "such division is a traditional ground for certiorari" — a decision by the justices to resolve the issue.

In the meantime, the court said women employees of Wheaton College outside Chicago should be able to get emergency contraception services from private insurers — without requiring the college to sign a form it claims would make it complicit in the transaction.

Ironically, it was that arrangement — in which objecting religious nonprofits would sign over their responsibility to offer contraception coverage to insurers or third-party administrators — that the court cited earlier as a potential

solution for profit-making companies such as Hobby Lobby.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, joined by Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Elena Kagan, dissented from the order. She said the accommodation already granted to nonprofits "is the least restrictive means of furthering the government's compelling interests in public health and women's well-being."

"Those who are bound by our decisions usually believe they can take us at our word. Not so today," Sotomayor said. Declaring insufficient the very accommodation it held out earlier as a possible solution for Hobby Lobby "evinces disregard for even the newest of this court's precedents and undermines confidence in this institution," she said.

Under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, the Health and Human Services Department issued a regulation requiring employers to offer women's preventive health insurance coverage, including contraception.

The administration exempted churches and other religious institutions from the requirement. After religious nonprofits objected, it devised its accommodation: They could fill out a form registering their objections, which would trigger provision of the coverage by insurers.

Two types of lawsuits grew out of the contraception mandate. Dozens of nonprofits challenged that arrangement, and dozens of for-profit corporations — mostly closely-held, family-owned companies — sought exemptions as well.

"We continue to believe that a college community that affirms the sanctity of human life from conception to the grave should not be coerced by the government into facilitating the provision of abortion-inducing drugs," said Wheaton president Philip Ryken.

Following the Hobby Lobby ruling, those for-profit companies can expect favorable treatment in the lower courts, a process the Supreme Court already began by denying some government petitions and directing courts to reconsider private challenges.

This more recent order points toward similarly favorable treatment for other nonprofits whose status is the same as Wheaton's. Beyond denying contraceptive coverage without co-payments to hundreds of the college's employees and students, Sotomayor said, the order "will presumably entitle hundreds or thousands of other objectors to the same remedy." **BT**

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'Evangelical Catholics'

How new alliances are shaping the political landscape

How many voters know that former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush is a Roman Catholic? Or that Texas Sen. Ted Cruz is a Southern Baptist, not a Latino Catholic? Or that Florida Sen. Marco Rubio worships at both a Catholic parish and an evangelical church?

More importantly, does it matter?

Actually, it does in today's Republican Party, where a number of factors have forged a new religious identity that supersedes familiar old categories.

These prominent Republicans are emblematic of the new religious amalgam that, in many instances, has helped refashion denominational differences that were once almost insurmountable. Look no further than the stunning Virginia primary victory of Dave Brat, a Catholic with degrees from a Reformed Protestant college in Michigan and Princeton Theological Seminary, who took down House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in mid-term elections.

Running in a conservative district in the Richmond suburbs, Brat is described as both a Catholic and Calvinist, labels that would be considered incompatible in almost any realm. He's a champion of a resurgent movement among Catholic intellectuals that seeks to marry Catholic social teaching with free-market economic libertarianism.

Recent presidential elections have elevated several evangelicals, including former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin and Texas Gov. Rick Perry. But in 2014, several of the Republican Party's emerging leaders are Catholic, including some who maintain evangelical backgrounds or tendencies.

The challenge for Catholic politicians might be finding the balancing act between a Catholic and an evangelical appeal, said Amy E. Black, a political science professor at Wheaton College in Illinois.

"While the Catholic faith used to be a liability, it might even be an asset now," Black said. "Evangelicals are a solid voting bloc in the Republican Party, whereas Catholics are likely to be swing voters. Republican presidential candidates know they need to appeal to evangelical voters, and they want to win over as many Catholic voters as they can."

Evangelicals have been relatively predictable in the past few elections, while Catholics



Look no further than the stunning Virginia primary victory of Dave Brat, a Catholic with degrees from a Reformed Protestant college in Michigan and Princeton Theological Seminary, who took down House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in mid-term elections. Photo: richmondteaparty.com

have been less so. Although Catholic voters have historically tended to be Democratic, recent elections have shown them to be the ultimate swing vote. They backed Al Gore in 2000 (50 percent), George W. Bush in 2004 (52 percent), Barack Obama in 2008 (54 percent) and again in 2012 (50 percent), according to the Pew Research Center.

Evangelicals, on the other hand, have been much more consistently Republican — 79 percent for Mitt Romney in 2012, 73 percent for John McCain in 2008 and 79 percent for Bush in 2004.

The newfound Catholic appeal among the GOP can be seen in the number of high-profile conversions to Rome.

Jeb Bush, who comes from a classic blue-blood Episcopal family dynasty, converted to Roman Catholicism years ago. Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal was raised Hindu but converted to Catholicism.

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback converted to Catholicism, but his wife and family still attend evangelical churches. And former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who was a Southern Baptist for most of his life, converted to his third wife's Roman Catholicism in 2009.

More than 50 years after John F. Kennedy's Catholicism stirred fears that he would be more loyal to the pope than to the people, Catholicism isn't nearly the political liability it once was.

"Growing up, the fact that someone was Catholic would give someone pause," said veteran GOP strategist Ralph Reed, whose "Road

to Majority" conference this summer featured a keynote address from New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a Catholic. "Now, there are a lot of evangelicals who greatly admired Pope John Paul II and some would look to Pope Francis for leadership."

What changed? For one, leading Catholics and evangelicals decided they could do more together than working against each other. Twenty years ago, former Nixon aide Charles Colson and the late Richard John Neuhaus, founder of the ecumenical magazine *First Things*, started the group Evangelicals and Catholics Together, and the cross-pollination it promoted is having practical effects.

"The alliance forged in the trenches between evangelical Protestants and faithful Catholics in the struggle to defend human life and marriage have blossomed into [something] much greater than a mere marriage of convenience," said Princeton University's Robert P. George, the de facto leader of the Catholic intellectual political movement. "What has emerged is a spiritual fellowship that I think was not anticipated at the beginning by anybody."

Catholics have a lot to learn from evangelicals, George said, pointing to a book by George Weigel, another Catholic intellectual heavyweight at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, arguing for a more evangelical Catholicism.

The challenge, he said, is for Catholic Republicans to speak in authentic ways to a largely evangelical base. Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, a Catholic, has figured it out, while others, like 2012 vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan, struggled.

"I'm so goofy with that stuff," Ryan told *Buzzfeed* after a service where he sang with extended hands. "It's just not my thing. I'm Catholic!"

The central challenge for Catholic Republicans, said Wheaton College's Black, is twofold: Not alienating fellow Catholics who say Brat-style economics is anathema to Catholic social teaching, and appealing to the evangelical base in a way that's authentic.

"It doesn't mean a successful candidate has to be an evangelical, but they have to be able to connect with them," said Black. "They need to be able to talk about their faith in a personal way." **BT**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Anne Thomas Neil, beloved missionary, mentor and justice advocate, died June 8 at age 94 in Raleigh, N.C. This is a tribute to her life and ministry.

Guiding star

Anne Thomas Neil was 'matron saint of Baptist women' everywhere

When I started Duke Divinity School in 1994, green as a new leaf, I knew exactly no one. In Abrahamic fashion, I left a network of family, church and campus ministry support that had shaped me until the day I crossed the Georgia line.

Though I knew I had heard God say "Go," I felt like a stranger in a strange land as I navigated the bizarre road system of Durham, N.C., and the Methodist-centered world of the divinity school.

Dozens of times I had to explain what it meant to be a moderate or progressive Baptist, how I could be a Baptist woman in ministry — and especially why I didn't just chuck it all and become a Methodist. After all, they told me, they'd figured out this women minister stuff decades ago.

Blank stares met my fumbling attempts to put words to the power of the free church tradition or to sketch the rich history of missions. Others looked at me with pity, sure I'd drunk the Kool Aid at the (lowly) Baptist communion table.

Even my closest Methodist friends struggled to understand why I wanted to remain in a larger tradition that didn't honor my call.

Then, soon after graduation, someone invited me to serve on the board of Baptist Women in Ministry of North Carolina (BWIM, NC). I immediately recognized the spiritual dialects when I walked into my first meeting.

Here was a room full of Baptists who not only supported women in ministry, but also



Anne with pastor Andrea Dellinger Jones. This photo by Tony W. Cartledge was on the cover of the September 2008 issue of *Baptists Today* with a feature story on Anne Thomas Neil.

instinctively understood the deep roots of Baptist history that nurtured my call. I was home.

Like most homes, this one harbored its share of arguments, laughter and difficult decision-making. A volunteer group with a small budget, we had to be creative and judicious as we made our way in a brave new Baptist world.

Thankfully, we had a guiding star: Anne Thomas Neil.

I first heard her name when the board discussed choosing a recipient of the annual Anne Thomas Neil award. The person next to me whispered a sketch of Anne's life: missionary to Africa, champion of women in ministry and justice issues.



Alicia Davis Porterfield

Later, I would meet Anne at Baptist Women in Ministry state and national gatherings. We would serve together on the Advent Center for Spirituality Board, and I would interview her for BWIM, NC's 25th Anniversary DVD.

Anne was every bit as impressive in real life as on paper.

But even early on, when I just heard bits and pieces of her story, I sensed I'd found a spiritual mother. As I struggled to find a sense of pastoral identity and my voice as a preacher, I longed to hear a prophet calling out in the wilderness.

God gave me Anne.

In later years, as I served again with BWIM, NC, we claimed Anne as our "matron saint." Unknowingly, Anne had blazed a trail for women in Baptist life as she did the profound work of following God.

Though we admired her missionary

‘Thankfully, we had a guiding star: Anne Thomas Neil.’

service, it was her “second career” as advocate and mentor for women that paved the way for us. After returning from Africa in 1981, Anne was called into leading roles in moderate and progressive Baptist life.

Though she never sought leadership, Baptists caught in the mire created by the fundamentalist resurgence sought Anne for guidance. Steeped in mission tradition, we looked to a trusted missionary to help us find a path.

Thankfully, we got much more than we had bargained for.

In Nigeria and Ghana, Anne’s call to justice had flourished from seeds sown in her segregated South Carolina childhood. Serving as a medical missionary opened Anne to the curses of colonialism and global injustice.

She embraced the cultural blessings of nurturing community and valuing elders. Anne’s natural bent toward empowering women became an intrinsic part of her ministry.

So when Anne returned stateside and began teaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) in 1982, her lifelong connection between faith and justice spilled over into everything she said and did. Though she never intended to rock any boats, simply being who God had shaped her to be sent shock waves into Baptist life.

On Missionary Day at SEBTS, Anne delivered a message on “Many Other Women” about the lives of women in global missions, naming gender inequities in the Baptist mission system and urging parity for women missionaries.

“We need to tap the resources of all of us — women as well as men — at every level of Bold Mission if we are to meet the challenge of these awesome days,” she asserted.

This call for parity found its way into *The Biblical Recorder*, the Baptist state newspaper

of North Carolina. Anne realized she had stepped into “uncharted territory.”

“I couldn’t find the map, and neither did I find overwhelming affirmation as had been the case so often in the past” as a missionary, she recalled. But affirmation came from new directions.

The next year, in March, a group gathered in Louisville, Ky., to explore creating a women-in-ministry group within the Southern Baptist Convention. In June the group hosted the first Southern Baptist Women in Ministry meeting in Pittsburgh. At the October gathering, Anne was unanimously elected by secret ballot to chair the steering committee.

Later, Anne recalled her response: “I was not prepared for this. I can’t possibly do this! I was the oldest person there. I’d been out of the country for 27 years. I was running to catch up.” Even her husband Lloyd agreed that this was not the role for her.

Eventually Baptist trust in Spirit-through-majority-rule convinced Anne to accept the appointment. Thirty years later, Baptist Women in Ministry and the state group she helped found, BWIM of North Carolina, are still going strong.

Later, Anne said yes to leadership in what would become the Alliance of Baptists. She found herself called out again to help birth the Baptist Peace Fellowship and the Advent Center for Spirituality. As so often happens, Anne’s sisters and brothers in Christ recognized her gifts for leadership before she did.

But beyond these roles, Anne had a gift for mentoring, affirming and blessing women in ministry. Countless women in Baptist life have an “Anne moment,” a time when Anne reached out to encourage and call out the gifts she saw in them. Others knew Anne

more deeply as a spiritual friend, mentor and counselor.

Once, after I preached at Anne’s church, Millbrook Baptist in Raleigh, she took my hand, looked deeply into my eyes, and offered a blessing as powerful as any a priest might offer a Catholic pilgrim.

The gist was this: “That was a beautiful and prophetic sermon. You clearly have gifts for preaching. Use them well. I look forward to all God will do through you.”

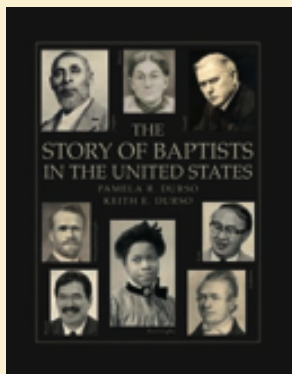
I carry Anne’s blessing with me to this day.

We had many other conversations after that one — including the summer I preached again at Millbrook and wore shoes that made noise as I followed the acolyte out of the sanctuary. I remarked about it to Anne after the service, surprised that the shoes were so noisy.

“I noticed that,” Anne responded with eyebrows raised. I never wore those shoes to preach in again. The best saints know how to challenge *and* cherish.

Thanks be to God for Mother Anne, matron saint of Baptist women in ministry. For following wherever God led, even when it was off the map, and for guidance and advice, for courage and challenge, we give thanks. **BT**

—Alicia Davis Porterfield is recipient of the 2014 Anne Thomas Neil Award from Baptist Women in Ministry of North Carolina. A mother of three boys and part of a clergy couple, she edited the collection *A Divine Duet: Ministry and Motherhood (Smyth & Helwys)* and manages a community blog on *MinistryandMotherhood.com*. Quotations in this article are taken from *Journey Without Map: Words of Hope for Changing Times* by Anne Thomas Neil with Karen L. Caldwell and Karen S. Moore (Trafford Publishing).



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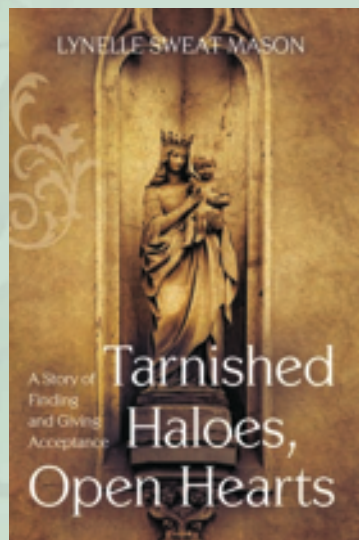
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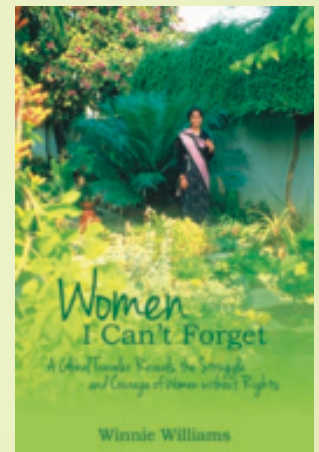
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Bible Study

Matthew 18:15-20

with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 7, 2014

Confrontation and Community

Have you ever gotten your feelings hurt? Of course you have. It happens with uncomfortable familiarity. Let's face facts: Sometimes our feelings are hurt because we're overly sensitive, or because we misunderstood what someone else intended to say or do.

Sometimes, though, someone may say something hurtful on purpose, or may undermine our efforts for their own ends. They may seek attention or opportunity at our expense, putting self-advancement over relationships.

How do we respond when that happens? Is there a better option than retaliation, or licking our wounds? Both are common reactions, and both of them are easy.

Jesus taught his followers a better way to deal with hurt feelings, damaged egos, bruised reputations, or lost opportunities. It's not so easy. In fact, it can be quite hard. But when relationships are at stake, it's worth the effort.

Matthew's gospel

This month we'll be looking at four teachings of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew, so a little background may be helpful. Matthew appears as the first book in the New Testament, although it was certainly not the first one written (Paul's letters have that honor), and probably not the first of the gospels. ↓

We cannot be certain why the early church gave Matthew pride of place as the canon of authoritative scriptures emerged. Perhaps Matthew was the most popular of the gospels that were



Matthew 18:15 –

"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one."

circulating among the churches. Or, perhaps its orientation toward Jewish Christians led to its position, since Jesus had said that he came first to the Jews. ↓

Matthew's gospel appears to have been written within a largely Jewish-Christian context. The author portrays Jesus as a teacher who was both human and divine, a prophet who spoke with the authority of God, as the Messiah who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, as redeemer and risen king over all.

Matthew was also concerned with the church. His is the only gospel, in fact, to use the word *ekkleσία*, a word referring to a defined assembly that came to be used as the New Testament word for "church" (16:18 and 18:17).

We should recall that the church did not yet exist during Jesus' time on earth, so when Matthew portrays Jesus as speaking to the church and its needs, he is adapting earlier materials for the new situation. This is the case in ch. 18,

where several distinct teachings focus on relationships among fellow believers. ↓

When a brother offends you (vv. 15-18)

Perhaps you have heard someone refer to "the Matthew 18 way" of dealing with conflict. Some churches have a conflict resolution process, based on Matt. 18:15-18, written into their constitution.

How, then, did Jesus instruct his disciples, and what sort of offenses are involved?

The text consists of five "if" statements, followed by a conclusion. All together, they appear to constitute a four-step process for attempted reconciliation following an affront.

But first, what kind of issues are we talking about? The text appears to deal with a case in which one member of the church offends another in some manner.

Most translations have something

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like “sins against you” (NRSV, NIV84, HCSB, KJV), but the words for “against you” do not appear in the oldest and best manuscripts. While it is possible that the words were in the original text and were accidentally deleted, it is more likely that the shorter version is more original. In that case, the condition is simply that a fellow believer has sinned in general. Thus, NET has “if your brother sins” (see also NIV11).

While this may seem a minor matter, the implications can be huge. Is the text directed only to persons who have been personally offended and the fellow-Christian who has caused them pain? Or does it invite any believer to rebuke another believer for any offense, with the possibility of getting the entire church involved? 📖

It is unlikely that Jesus’ intent was for his followers to create an inquisition mentality, or to set up a system of exclusion designed to keep members in line with standards of culturally accepted behaviors. The text does allow, however, for individuals to approach fellow believers whose behavior threatened the well-being of the church.

The word translated as “sin” is a strong word for wrongdoing, used only here and at 27:4 in Matthew’s gospel. This suggests that the offense is a serious matter, not something that can be easily brushed aside, but requiring a response for the good of the church. 📖

The instructions are straightforward. If a person has offended a fellow believer, the injured party is to approach the offender privately (“when the two of you are alone”) and “point out the fault” to him or her. If the guilty party “listens to you,” Jesus said – implying repentance and a request for forgiveness – “you have regained that one” (v. 15). The ideal situation is one in which a private conversation leads to personal repentance and restoration within the community.

But sometimes that doesn’t happen. In this case, Matthew quoted Jesus as saying the offended party should approach the sinner again, this time with two or three others to act as witnesses, following Deut. 19:15: “A single

witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offense that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained.”

If the accused still refuses to respond positively – implied by “does not listen” – the offended person, along with the witnesses, should present the matter to the church, offering the person charged with wrongdoing a final chance to acknowledge and repent of the wrongdoing. 📖 If the offending person still refuses to listen (implying a lack of confession, remorse, or repentance), the church is to “treat him as a Gentile or a tax collector” (v. 18). [See the online “Hardest Question” for more]

We note that the responsibility for initiating reconciliation lies primarily with the offended party. This may seem strange to us, for we typically think the person who has offended us should take the initiative to ask for forgiveness. This is easier said than done, however, especially when the sin is grave. The offended party is thus better positioned to initiate reconciliation than the sinner.

It is also apparent that Jesus wanted such matters to be handled as privately as possible, respecting the feelings and reputation of the offending party as well as the one offended. Believers should never hold one another up to public ridicule or shame, even when they have done wrong.

Verse 18 is virtually identical to 16:19, where Jesus gave to Peter the “keys of the kingdom of heaven,” with authority to “bind or loose” on earth, with heavenly consequences. In 18:18, that responsibility is transferred to the entire fellowship of believers: the words are the same, but the verbs are plural.

The language of binding and loosening may suggest the difference between being “bound” to seek reconciliation up to a point, and being “loosed” from that responsibility after the prescribed

attempts had failed. It is more likely, however, that it refers to the authority to hold the offender guilty or to grant forgiveness – with heavenly import: “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” This comports with Matt. 16:19’s reference to granting Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and with John 20:23, which speaks directly to forgiveness. 📖

When Christ is among you (vv. 19-20)

The final two verses of today’s text – about asking for “anything” from God and receiving it – have been the subject of much misunderstanding. Many readers, preachers, and teachers through the years have divorced v. 19 from its context and taken it as a blank check from God that can be written and cashed so long as two or three persons endorse it.

Claims of some TV preachers aside, it doesn’t work that way, as anyone who has tried it should know. The first words of v. 19 – “Again, truly I tell you ...” – bind the following words to the previous context. The “two of you” in v. 19 probably reflects the multiple witnesses from v. 16, and “on earth” reflects v. 18.

The statement “If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask,” may use the word “anything,” but the context has to do with binding or loosening an unrepentant sinner. Thus, v. 19 reiterates v. 18, that what the community of believers bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven.

This statement carries with it great responsibility, and assumes that the stated prayer is offered carefully and in a full attempt to seek that God’s will be done.

While v. 19 is not the free offer that some take it to be, the promise of v. 20 holds true, that Christ’s Spirit is present wherever believers gather in Christ’s name, that is, in a spirit of worship and openness to the Spirit.

Hard things are hard, and confronting broken relationships is among the hardest. With the promise of Christ’s presence to strengthen and guide, however, we can do what needs to be done. **BT**

Bible Study

Matthew 18:21-35

with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 14, 2014

The Power of Forgiveness


Do you find it easier to forgive or to bear a grudge? Forgiveness can be hard, especially when the offense is extreme or the offender is callous. Yet, learning to forgive is essential if we are to know peace in this life.

To begin with, we must forgive if we are to cultivate healthy relationships. Even the best of friends may occasionally offend each other, and we are subject to being used or abused by others who advance their self-interests with no concern for ours. People may hurt us intentionally or unintentionally, but it hurts either way. If we are to be reconciled with those who have hurt us, we must learn to forgive.

This is for our benefit as well as the one who has offended us, for harboring hurts and refusing to forgive are like an emotional cancer that can eat away at our soul and make us miserable people, roiling in a bitter stew of unresolved feelings.

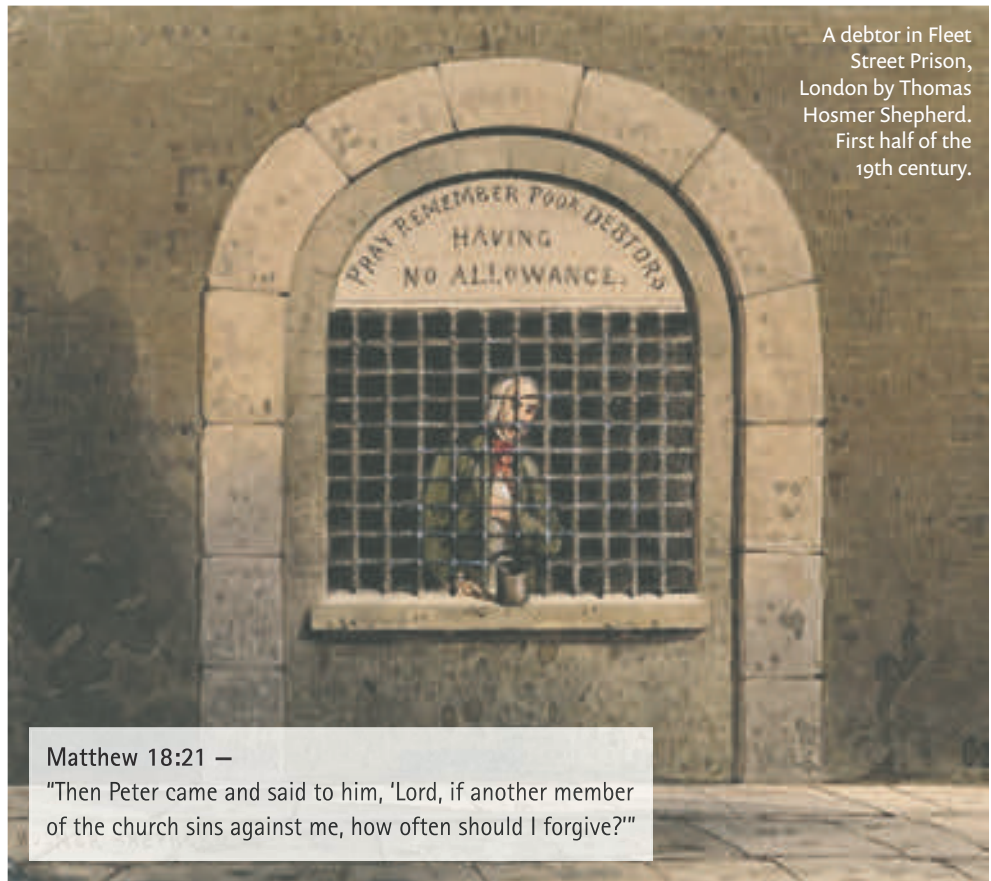
Learning to forgive is one of the great secrets of a joyful, flourishing life.

A curious question (vv. 21-22)

Matthew 18 is presented as a discourse in which Jesus talks to his disciples about relationships within the fellowship. The church did not develop as an entity until after Jesus' resurrection, but the growing community of men and women who followed Jesus would have experienced the same sort of interpersonal issues that would later come up in the early church. 

Jesus taught his followers to relate

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A debtor in Fleet Street Prison, London by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd. First half of the 19th century.


Matthew 18:21 –

"Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?'"

to one another with humility (vv. 1-4), warned against leading others astray (vv. 5-9), and emphasized the importance of seeking and restoring those who were lost (vv. 10-14). In vv. 15-20 we find instructions for dealing with inter-familial conflict, when one member of the community has sinned against another, and today's text expands on the theme of forgiveness.

Peter was often the foil for Jesus' parables, the question-raiser who could appear both obtuse and perceptive. Peter was portrayed in the gospels as a temperamental sort who could bear a grudge, so it is not surprising that he would query Jesus on the limits of forgiveness.

How often should a person forgive? Is once enough? Peter wanted to know, so he asked: "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 

Peter may have intended for his suggestion of seven-fold forgiveness to be overly generous. The rabbis held differing opinions about how often someone should be forgiven for the same type of sin, with some teaching that three times was the limit. 

Peter's question may also reflect a teaching of Jesus in Luke 17:3-4, where Jesus insisted that his followers should forgive anyone who asked for forgiveness, even seven times in one day: "And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive" (Luke 17:4).

The Hebrews considered seven to be a number of completion or perfection, largely because of the tradition that God created the world and rested on the seventh day. Thus, forgiving seven times suggests complete forgiveness.

Whether Peter was recalling an earlier teaching or feeling magnanimous,

his proposal of forgiving seven times came up short, for Jesus said “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

There are two ways to look at this. On the one hand, imagine that we are considering multiple offenses. Suppose someone hurts your feelings, but asks for forgiveness. Tomorrow the culprit does it again, but begs pardon. On the third day, he or she is rude yet again. Would you continue to forgive someone who persists in offending you? Jesus’ words suggest that we should.

But consider another scenario. Suppose someone has caused you such pain that it’s very difficult to get past it. You may want to forgive – and you may speak words of forgiveness – but the hurt is so deep that it remains unresolved, and every time you feel the pain or loss the other has inflicted, you feel resentment welling up again. In this case, you may need to consciously express forgiveness multiple times for the same offense – not to the other person each time, but in your own heart.

After a drunken driver killed my 7-year-old daughter in 1994, I found it hard to forgive him for the selfish, thoughtless actions that led to a horrific crash and the death of a loving, promising child. Showing grace was not something that could be done in one fell swoop. Every time I thought of what he had done and the old resentment returned, I had to forgive again. I came to believe that we are called to live with a forgiving spirit at all times. It’s not really about numbers, whether 3 or 7 or 77 or 490; it’s about learning to have such compassion for others that we can take on Jesus’ forgiving nature.

A pointed parable (vv. 23-35)

To illustrate the importance of forgiveness, Jesus told a story that is found only in Matthew. It is a parable played out in three scenes, an obvious analogy based on a hypothetical kingdom: “the kingdom of heaven may be compared to ...”

The parable has eschatological implications, beginning with a king

who is thereafter referred to as a “lord” over his servants (vv. 27, 32, 34), and who decided to hold a judgment day of sorts in which all debtors will be held accountable. He must have been an incredibly generous king, for one of the servants, Jesus said, owed him 10,000 talents (whether of gold or silver is not stated). This would have been a staggering sum: The talent was the largest unit of currency in use at that time, and 10,000 was the largest number commonly used in arithmetic. The word translated 10,000 is the Greek *myriad*. As in English, it could also refer to an astronomical but indefinite number.

Even if the servant in question was a governor or some other high official, it is inconceivable that he could have owed so much: Josephus recorded that the total take in taxes from Judea, Idumea, and Samaria in 4 BCE was only 600 talents. Jesus deliberately spoke in hyperbole, exaggerating the numbers for shocking effect. None of his hearers could imagine owing that kind of debt, much less paying it – but they could appreciate the relief that should come from being forgiven such a hopeless amount.

When the servant professed his inability to pay the jillions of dollars he owed, the king ordered that he and his family be sold into slavery – a not uncommon practice in the ancient world. The cash return would be miniscule compared to the amount owed, but would prevent the king from facing a total loss and would impose a penalty on the debtor, sending a message that one should not borrow what one cannot repay.

The thought of his family being sold into slavery sent the debtor into a paroxysm of penitence as he shamelessly begged for more time, though everyone involved knew he could never pay it all (v. 26). Surprisingly, the king took pity on the servant and *forgave the entire mind-boggling debt* (v. 27).

In Jesus’ telling of the tale, the

now-freed debtor departed (did he even express thanks?), and soon met a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii. Three months’ wages was not insignificant, but was microscopic in comparison to the amount he had just been forgiven. Incredibly, the ungrateful servant caught his colleague by the neck and harshly demanded immediate payment. When the poor man begged for more time just as the other servant had done, the forgiven man showed no mercy, but had his fellow servant thrown into prison (vv. 28-30).

As one might expect, the churlish servant’s heartless actions were soon reported to his “lord,” who called him in for a tongue-lashing: “You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?” (vv. 31-33).

“In anger” Jesus said, the king reinstated the formerly forgiven debt and threw the heartless servant into prison “to be tortured” until the entire debt was paid – something that could never happen (v. 34).

The parable concludes: “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (v. 35).

Is it time to take a deep breath? That’s quite a warning. The threat of unending torture is probably just as much hyperbole as the inmate’s staggering debt, but intended to stress the seriousness of the matter. Those who follow Christ have been forgiven of a sin-debt that no amount of good works could repay. Could believers be as callous as the man in the parable and refuse forgiveness toward others?

For believers, forgiveness is not an option. Holding grudges is not only bad for our emotional health, but also for our spiritual health, for our attitude in relationships with others directly affects our relationship with God.

Here’s the bottom line: those who wish to receive forgiveness must learn to forgive – both readily and repeatedly.

Do *you* feel forgiven? If not, have you wondered why? **BT**

Youth

September 7 — September 28, 2014

Youth Lessons by **David Cassidy** and online youth teaching resources (at nurturingfaith.net) by **Jeremy Colliver** build off



of the Bible lessons by Tony Cartledge.

Youth lessons are made possible through the generous support of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation.

SEPTEMBER 7

Problems

Matthew 18:15-20

Have you ever been aware of someone talking about you behind your back? Usually this means there is already conflict in the relationship. Talking behind your back doesn't help the situation at all, and in fact, it makes it worse.

The Gospel of Matthew offers five "if" statements to help us deal with conflict.

Matthew 18 refers to someone in the church who offends another person in the church — although "offend" might be too easy of a word. The word "sin" is used only in this passage and one other place in Matthew, meaning that it has to be a serious offense.

So what are you supposed to do when someone offends you?

First, approach the other person in

private and explain how you have been offended. If you work things out, then the relationship is healed. If not, meet with the person again, but this time with two or three others present to act as witnesses. If this doesn't work, present the offense to the entire church body. If there is still no repentance, then the offending party should be treated like an outsider to the church body.

There are two things that may seem strange to us in this passage: (1) The offended person initiates the discussion, and (2) the ordeal should be kept as private as possible. Maybe this does make sense because sometimes we don't know we have offended someone, so the discussion should start with the offended party. By meeting together in private, the reputation of the offending person isn't harmed.

Think About It:

How do you deal with conflict? Do you handle it in a healthy way? If not, how might the guidelines suggested in today's lesson help you resolve your issues in a healthier way?

Make a Choice:

Talking to someone directly is not always the easiest thing to do, but it is the right thing to do. How will you choose to handle conflict the next time it happens? Will you talk to others about the person with whom you have a problem or go to the person directly?

Pray:

Dear God, help us handle conflict in a way that honors everyone so the body of Christ may be whole again.

SEPTEMBER 14

77 times!

Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness is hard. It doesn't seem to be the "natural" thing to do. Doesn't revenge seem like a more normal response? We don't want to forgive because we feel like we have been wronged or we want to get back at the other person. In Matthew 18, Jesus says we are supposed to forgive, but not just once, or even seven times, but 77 times!

The fact that it is Peter in this story who asks Jesus about forgiveness shouldn't be a surprise. It isn't because Peter has sinned against his fellow disciples all the time, but rather he seems edgy. Peter thinks he is going over and above when Jesus says Peter should forgive seven times, because that is twice what the rabbis teach. Maybe Peter is going with the number seven because it

is considered to be perfect and represents completion, so forgiving seven times would be forgiving perfectly and completely. But even "seven" would pale in comparison to what Jesus asks of his followers.

Jesus calls us to forgive 77 times! Imagine someone sinning against you 77 times and you forgiving them all 77 times. For smaller things we probably wouldn't think twice about it. But what if it was a deep hurt? Can you imagine forgiving a person 77 times? You might not even be over the first offense before the next one occurs.

Seventy-seven times would have been a mind-boggling number, so much so that Jesus told a parable to explain it further. In the parable a man fails to learn that to be forgiven, he must also learn to forgive. Each of us has been forgiven by God, and not only 77 times, but an infinite number of times.

Think About It:

Jesus wants us to be forgiving people. What makes it so hard to forgive? How can your faith help you become more forgiving?

Make a Choice:

When someone offends you, it's your choice whether or not to forgive that person. How do you choose to forgive someone?

Pray:

Dear God, thank you for forgiving us again and again and again. May our hearts be shaped so that we also can be generous in showing forgiveness.

SEPTEMBER 21

Life's Not Fair

Matthew 20:1-16

How many times have you said, "Life's not fair!"? If you ask your parents, they might roll their eyes and laugh at you because they hear it so often.

There are many times when life doesn't seem fair, but that is usually because we are looking at the situation from our own perspective. The more distance we have from a situation, the more fair someone else's perspective may seem, because it is no longer happening to us.

Reading the parable in Matthew 20 makes us want to say, "That's not fair!" The parable ends with one of the most quoted scriptures: The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. What are we supposed to do with a passage that doesn't seem fair,

but we like its teaching?

In the parable, each person who has worked receives the same wage at the end of the day, no matter if he has worked all day or part of the day. On top of that, everyone receives the pay they had earlier agreed to earn. It still doesn't seem right. Working more should mean more pay, right?

We want to hear the parable through our sense of fairness. Jesus wants us to read it thinking about grace. The parable is not about the pay someone should receive for a day's work, but instead the reward we will receive in God's kingdom. It doesn't matter when we accept God's grace; it only matters that we accept it. Grace is not something that is pro-rated, but an all-or-nothing kind of gift offered by God.

Think About It:

Although none of us deserve the grace we receive, sometimes we don't want to give grace to others. Why do we not want to give others the grace we ourselves have received?

Make a Choice:

It is human nature to judge others by what we think they deserve rather than giving them grace. How can we learn to better follow God's example in how we treat others?

Pray:

Dear God, thank you for the grace we have received and do not deserve. May we freely pass that same grace on to others.

SEPTEMBER 28

That Jesus?

Matthew 21:23-32

When you hear the name "Jesus," what images enter your head? For most people it is the image of a gentle Jesus with a lamb or children sitting at his feet — maybe around a table eating and laughing. Another image of Jesus, also very real, is him confronting people.

In today's lesson, Jesus has traveled and taught far and wide but has now returned and is going to teach in the temple. When he arrives at the temple, he doesn't like what he sees.

Likewise, the priests at the temple have heard about him and aren't thrilled with him being there. They question Jesus to try and trap him so they can get rid of

him. Instead, Jesus flips the tables (not literally this time) and asks the priests a question. They are stumped by the question and have to answer with "We don't know." Because the priests don't provide an answer, Jesus doesn't tell them by what authority he does the things he does.

Jesus then tells the priests a parable and asks them to identify which son they are in the story. Those who hear Jesus' story, no doubt, understand that Jesus is calling out the priests for not being receptive to the will of the Father.

There's an old saying: "Do as I say, not as I do." In this encounter, Jesus is pointing out how the priests' actions do not match their words. We have to both walk the walk and talk the talk.

Think About It:

Some people find it easier to talk about what they believe and why they believe it, while others find it easier to live out their faith. If you had to describe yourself, would you be a "walker" or a "talker"?

Make a Choice:

We say all kinds of things every day without even opening our mouths. We speak with our actions. What do your actions say about what you believe and who you follow?

Pray:

God, may our words and deeds point to you and show your care and love to others.

Bible Study

Matthew 20:1-16

with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 21, 2014

A Question of Fairness

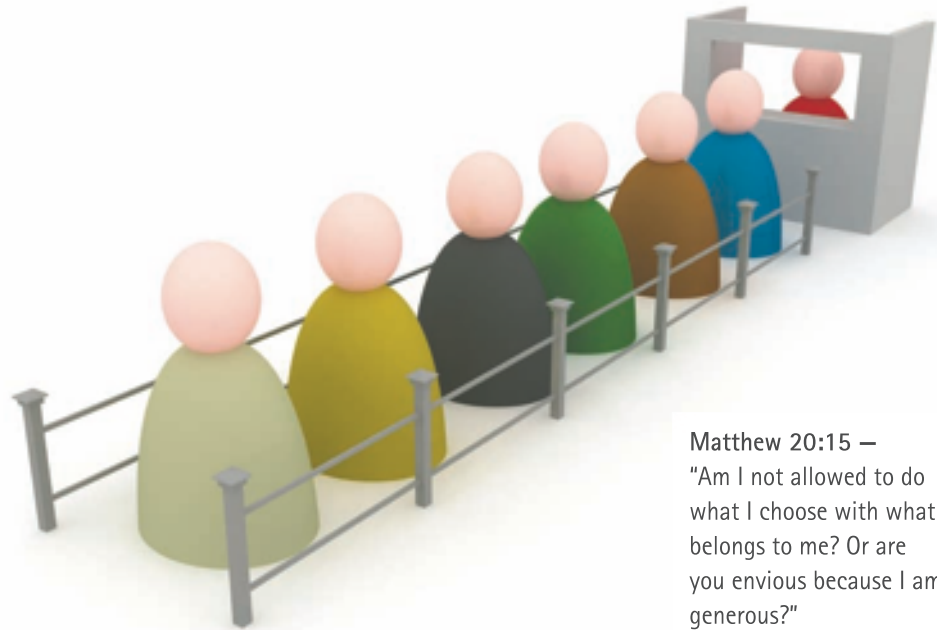
I remember it all too well: When I was a boy, my neighbor Herman decided to go into the egg business, and he hired me to help assemble the wire cages that would be mounted inside the long chicken houses he was constructing. Each cage contained eight or ten compartments designed to hold three hens each, with a sloped wire floor that allowed eggs to roll onto a wire shelf while droppings fell to the ground beneath.

I gave no thought at the time to whether the system was humane to the chickens: I just wanted to make some scratch for my fledgling bank account. Building the cages correctly required patience, an attention to detail, and strength enough to hold things in place while using a special pair of pliers to wrap a metal ferrule around adjoining wires.

Herman offered to pay me something like 60 cents per cage, but after I got the hang of it, I could start early, work steadily, and build enough cages to earn seven or eight dollars in a day.

All was fine until my uncle talked Herman into hiring my cousin to do the same job, but he was less industrious, built fewer cages, and consequently made less money. He complained to my uncle, who persuaded Herman to pay both of us a flat five dollars per day, no matter how many cages we built.

When told of this new arrangement, I felt betrayed by my boss and ill-treated by my uncle, who helped his son earn more without working any harder, while robbing me of extra money I could earn by being productive.



Matthew 20:15 –
“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

So much for motivating your employees!

I remember taking shelter inside a large cardboard box during a thunderstorm toward the end of that day. My dad came to pick me up so I wouldn't have to walk home in the rain, and he found me so frustrated by the unfairness of it all that my tears competed with the raindrops.

We have strong feelings about fairness, don't we? It can frustrate us to recognize that women consistently get paid about 20 percent less than men for doing the same work, for example, or to realize that jet-setting CEOs routinely earn from 200 to more than a thousand times the amount of their average employees.


The offense we take at such inequity grows from the greed of employers, whether it was my late neighbor trying to save a few dollars per day, or a contemporary executive who brings home \$10 million per year while his minimum-wage employees struggle to pay the rent.

Would we take the same offense

if we were to see an apparent inequity based on an employer's generosity instead of greed?

We would not be the first to wonder.

Men at work (vv. 1-7)

Matthew alone recounts Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard, which could just as well be called the parable of the generous landowner. The story concludes a series of conversations about rewards at the end of things. The first was an encounter between Jesus and a young man who was willing to keep any number of laws to gain eternal life, but was unwilling to part with his possessions (19:16-22). Afterward Jesus remarked how difficult it was for wealthy people to adopt the sacrificial lifestyle of kingdom followers (19:23-26), and responded to the disciples' questions about what sort of rewards they might receive after following him faithfully (19:27-30). 

With the question of finances and fairness in the air, Jesus told his

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon



followers a challenging parable that still has the power to make us squirm. The story builds on the preceding verse: “But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.” It then concludes with the same thought, but in reverse order: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (20:16).^U

The parable seems to address a question Peter had raised about what reward he and the other disciples could expect: “Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” (19:27).^U

The story continues to trouble the legalist in all of us who thinks people should get only what they deserve. Legalism has always had a hard time understanding grace.

The rabbis taught that a full work-day lasted from dawn until the first stars became visible, and Ps. 104:22-23 suggests that same thing. The widely accepted wage for a day laborer in Palestine was one Roman denarius per day, roughly equivalent to the Greek drachma described as payment for a day in Tobit 5:15.^U

The parable describes a landowner who went out early in the morning – probably about 6 a.m. – and hired laborers to work in his vineyard, contracting to pay the standard daily wage of one denarius (vv. 1-2). He returned to the marketplace about 9 a.m. and found other day laborers who had gathered to seek work. The owner hired additional hands, promising “I will pay you whatever is right” (vv. 3-4). At noon and 3 p.m. the employer returned seeking additional help, presumably making the same offer (“he did the same,” v. 5).

It must have been harvest time, with grapes begging to be picked before they spoiled on the vine, for the desperate landowner returned as late as 5 p.m. to seek more workers. Finding job hunters still available, he asked “Why are you standing here idle all day?” (v. 6). The men insisted that the problem was not laziness on their part, but a lack of opportunity: “Because no one has hired us” (v. 7).

Why had no one hired them? Had

they slept late or had other business earlier in the day, or had they been waiting there all day without being chosen? (See “The Hardest Question” online for more.) Whatever the case, the vineyard owner quickly took care of the problem: “You also go into the vineyard.”

Wages, and grace (vv. 8-16)

So far, so good. The only unusual thing about the parable is the apparent urgency shown by a man who is so anxious to get his grapes off the vines and into the winepress that he’s still hiring day labor so near the end of the day.

Jesus’ parables often contained a surprise twist, and the surprise arrived as the day wound down and the landowner instructed his paymaster to distribute the men’s wages.^U Surprisingly, he told the men to line up in reverse order of when they were hired, with the last hired to be the first ones paid.

Any person would expect those hired last to be paid a smaller, pro-rated amount of the day’s wage: the landowner had promised to pay those hired later in the day “what is right.” When those workers surprisingly received a full denarius, those who had worked a full day naturally expected such a generous employer to pay them more, but they also received the standard scale of one denarius each (vv. 8-9).

Can you imagine the ruckus that erupted from those who had “borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat”? “They grumbled against the landowner,” Jesus said (vv. 10-12).

You bet they did – and we would have grumbled, too, if we had come to the end of the day weary of bone and stinking with sweat, only to receive the same pay as someone who has sashayed in and worked a single hour. We would think it completely inequitable: note the worker’s complaint that “you have made them equal to us.”

Though the workers cried foul, the

landowner insisted that justice had not been violated. The early-bird workers had agreed to the “denarius a day” scale, and that’s what they had been paid (v. 13). The employer had treated them with perfect fairness – what they could not accept is that the latecomers had received more than justness: he had treated them with gracious generosity.

The parable, no doubt, would have angered legalists who expected eternal rewards in return for a lifetime of following the law. Jesus’ free acceptance and forgiveness of sinners, no matter what their past or how lately they had turned to God, turned the theology of legalism upside down. That, of course, was the point. Those who receive the kingdom and its rewards do so because God is good, not because they have earned it.

A life of faithfulness is not without reward, but Jesus calls disciples to steadfast service that is motivated by generous love, not the expectation of a payday commensurate with either experience or competence.

The issue has to do with generosity and resentment, grace and jealousy. The landowner asked: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (v. 15).^U

We may find it hard to receive grace we did not earn, and even harder to accept God’s generosity to others whom we believe earned it less than us. Jesus’ insistence that “the last will be first and the first will be last” (v. 16) was a way of emphasizing God’s freedom and desire to extend grace to all people – even those who come late or who others might consider unworthy.

We can only imagine how the disciples responded to Jesus’ story, but the important thing is how we respond. Did we, like the all-day workers, react with resentment? It’s hard to rejoice with people who appear to be rewarded beyond what they deserve, but that’s what makes it grace – and without grace, none of us would make it out of the field. **BT**

Bible Study

Matthew 21:23-32

with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 28, 2014

Who decides what is right?

The Jesus we find in today's text is not the gentle teacher and healer we like so much, but a bold revolutionary who wreaks havoc in the temple and challenges the religious authorities supporting the system that had held Judaism together for the past 500 years. ↓

Jesus was no friend of tradition when something better was at hand, and the something better was in himself, in his teaching of a new way, in his demonstration of power that pointed to God's in-breaking kingdom, and in the redemptive acts that he was yet to accomplish.

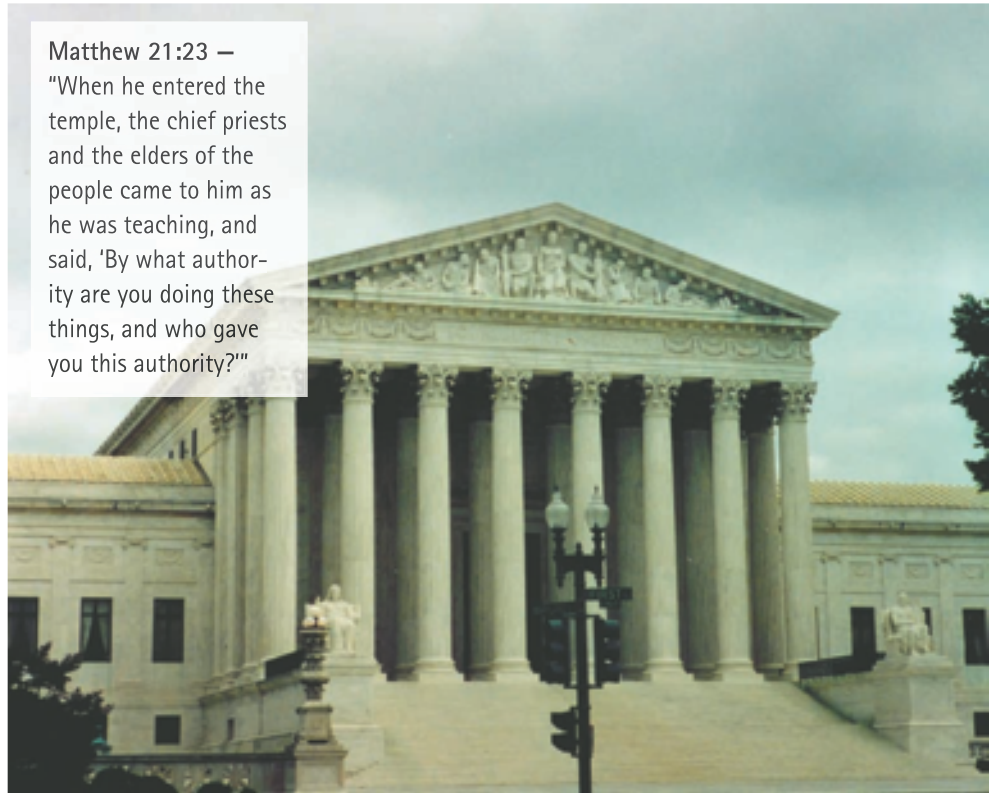
What do we do with a Jesus who is not in comfort mode, but who makes us distinctly *uncomfortable*? As we consider the text, can we see something of ourselves in the authorities who held tightly to their doctrine and could not accept the new thing God was doing?

Jesus, the radical

If the establishment leaders who confronted Jesus used our vocabulary, they would have called Jesus an insurgent, and possibly a terrorist: at least one of his disciples was identified with Galilean group known as the Zealots, and they had been known to use violence.

What are we to make of this story about Jesus getting "in your face" with these scribes and Pharisees, priests and elders, the religious and ethnic leaders of his day? Out of nowhere, Jesus had come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey with hundreds of people shouting praise and crying "Hosanna," as if he were a

Matthew 21:23 –
"When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?'"



conquering king.

That story and its aftermath are told in all four gospels, though not all in the same way. As Matthew tells it, Jesus went straight to the temple, where he took such offense at the carnival atmosphere surrounding the festival week that he resorted to uncharacteristic force. Can you imagine it? The gospels insist that Jesus angrily overturned the tables where men with scales and bags of money were converting Greek or Roman coins into Jewish shekels acceptable for the payment of temple taxes. He then went about releasing doves and other animals being sold for sacrifice (at a nice profit) – and not politely.

Expressing heated disdain that commercial business had taken over the temple court intended as a place of prayer for Gentiles, Jesus cried out "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers!" (21:13). With no other words recorded, he left Jerusalem – but the next day he was back. ↓

Jesus, the debater (vv. 22-27)

As bold as shiny new brass, Jesus walked back into the temple in order to teach, but ran into the path of a religious rip-saw. "The chief priests and elders of the people" were waiting for him, hoping to derail the popular train he was driving, and they did so with a measure of desperation: Jesus' message of the in-breaking kingdom of God was a direct challenge to the religious traditions they had developed. ↓

The officials asked Jesus, in so many words, "Who died and made you chief priest? Who gives you the authority to do these things?" (v. 23). The question was intended to trap Jesus and leave him tied up in the path of their spinning saw blade. If Jesus claimed to be acting on God's authority, they could just hang him for heresy and be done with it. If he could cite no other authorization for his actions – and they were the only sanctioning body – they could evict him from the temple.

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



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But Jesus was quick on his cognitive feet, and not easily trapped. Thinking fast, he turned the question back on his critics and laid a trap of his own: “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” (vv. 24-25).

Jesus knew his inquisitors could not answer that question. If they agreed that John’s authority came from God, they would have to admit that their refusal to believe John meant they had failed to heed God’s messenger. If they denied that John was a legitimate prophet, however, they would have a mob of John’s disciples to deal with, because the Baptizer was very popular with the people (vv. 25-26).

Knowing they were caught, but seeking to avoid a greater defeat, the officials gave the only other possible answer: “*We don’t know.*”

Their inability to answer provided Jesus with a way out. If they could not identify the authority behind John’s baptism, how could they claim to judge Jesus? Claiming his verbal victory, Jesus said “Neither will I tell you by whose authority I am doing these things” (v. 27).^U

The question of authority is a serious consideration. When churches ordain ministers, for example, they grant authority to teach, preach, and preside over the ordinances with the endorsement of the church. When pastors preach, they often claim that their message comes on the authority of scripture, which owes its authority to God.

Knowing what to believe, however, is not so easy, for today’s religious authorities – like those Jesus confronted – are also subject to misinterpreting the scriptures and failing to perceive new things God is doing in the world.

The question about Jesus’ authority is a reminder that Jesus *did* teach with the authority of God, and remains our highest authority. As we seek to understand various issues of the day, we must seek not only to understand scriptural evidence, but also weigh it against the

teachings of Jesus we find in scripture, and make a conscious effort to seek Christ’s leadership through prayer. We live in a changing world with questions and possibilities not evident in the biblical world, but the promise of Christ’s continued presence means that new words can still be heard.

Jesus, the challenger (vv. 28-32)

Having put his accusers on the defense, Jesus shifted to his own line of attack by asking the officials a pointed question in the form of a story. The story concerns a farmer who instructed his two sons to go and work in the family vineyard. One of the sons said he would not go, but later changed his tune and went to work. The second son responded with a polite “Yes, sir” – but never showed up (vv. 28-30).^U

“What do you think?” Jesus asked – pushing his accusers deeper into a corner. “Which of the two did the will of his father?” (v. 31a).

There was only one answer, but in pointing to the one who initially declined but later went to work, the religious authorities condemned themselves. They were like the son who claimed to be obedient but would not accept God’s new covenant in Jesus, while the other son represented sinners who had violated the law but later repented and followed Jesus. Lest there be any misunderstanding, Jesus announced that prostitutes and crooked tax collectors would enter the kingdom of God before those who treasured their religious authority but refused to accept what God was doing in Jesus.

Tying the parable to the earlier question, Jesus reminded the officials that they had also rejected John the Baptizer while sinners of all stripes had flocked to him, repenting and being baptized. The

religious elite had seen the revival John’s preaching had sparked, but refused to believe John’s message – presumably the part about a greater one who would come after him, the one he identified as Jesus (Matt. 3:11-17).

So, as Jesus asked his critics, what do *you* think? Could this story possibly have anything to say to our time, to our church, to our ideas about organized religion? If there’s anything inauthentic about them, it would. Jesus took it to the most religious folk of his day because they appeared to be all show and no go. They talked the talk, but they didn’t walk the walk.

In contrast, a lot of folk who weren’t welcome at the temple had begun following Jesus in baptism and walking on a different road. For much of their lives, they had said “No” to God’s way, but now they were changing their hearts and their lives. Zacchaeus was paying back the extra tax money he had extorted, and Matthew (also a former tax collector) was following Jesus all around the country. Former prostitutes were among the women who also followed Jesus, using their resources to help the poor and telling others about how to be forgiven, giving their hearts to walking in the way of God as revealed in Jesus.

So, where does that leave us? Do we honestly want people to judge us by what we *do*, or do we live in the vain hope that others will believe everything we *say*? What can we point to that sets us apart and identifies us as true followers of Jesus?

We might indicate financial contributions, perhaps, or volunteer work, or the time invested in church activities. Even so, most of us could probably confess that we are sometimes so concerned with sounding good, looking good, feeling good, and making good that we don’t get around to *being* good, especially if it means challenging traditions and being open to what feels like radical new ways of showing Jesus’ love in the world.

Are you living the faith, loving the people, walking the walk? If Jesus told a story about you, what might it be? **BT**

Classifieds

Senior Pastor: First Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, N.C., is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor whom God has chosen to lead and shepherd our congregation of 200-plus. Preferred qualifications include a theological degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school and a minimum of 5 years of pastoral experience. Send a letter of interest and résumé to Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 125 Tappan St., Spruce Pine, NC 28777 or to bearley8744@att.net.

Minister/Director of Music: First Baptist Church of Morganton, N.C., is seeking a full-time minister/director of music to continue the tradition of excellence in selecting meaningful, appropriate music to enhance the worship of God and by developing the musical talents of children, youth and adults utilizing a variety of musical styles. For more information about our church and a complete job description, please visit fbcmorganton.org. Submit résumés and references to fbcmusicsearch@gmail.com or to Minister/Director of Music Search Committee, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 459, Morganton, NC 28680.

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And the winner is...

Tommy Deal of the First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga., took home a Samsung Galaxy Tab4 from Nurturing Faith, the book and church resources publishing arm of *Baptists Today*. The drawing took place at the June assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Atlanta.

Nurturing Faith Books are available in print or as digital downloads for all devices at NurturingFaith.info.

Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge are inside *Baptists Today* with free and abundant teaching resources (including Tony's video lessons) online at NurturingFaith.net.

Pastor

Church Profile:

- A flagship CBF of South Carolina congregation
- Affirming of women in all ministry roles

Qualifications:

- Ordained Baptist minister
- Degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school
- Ministry experience

Responsibilities:

- Provide spiritual leadership for the congregation
- Lead the congregation and staff in pursuing the mission of the church
- Assist in forming the vision of the church for ministry in the 21st century

Submit résumés by October 1 to:
Pastor Search Committee
Fernwood Baptist Church
200 Fernwood Dr.
Spartanburg, SC 29307
office@fernwoodchurch.org

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In the Know

Ilie Coada, a Baptist pastor in Moldova who worked tirelessly against human trafficking and the sex trade in his country, received the Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award at the July 6-12 meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in Izmir, Turkey.

Howard Cobble died July 4. He was pastor twice of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Carrollton, Ga., where he was named pastor emeritus. Other pastorates included Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, Ky., and First Baptist Church of Avondale Estates in Atlanta.

Andy Hale oversees the Church Starts Initiative for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He serves as pastor of Mosaic of Clayton in Clayton, N.C. Previously he was associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Clayton.

Benjamin Franklin Lowe Jr. died April 26. He was academic dean of Chowan University in Murfreesboro, N.C., from 1968-2001, where he also taught religion classes.

Ben McDade, who has served in development and marketing with *Baptists Today* since 2012, has accepted an advancement position with Brenau University in Gainesville, Ga.

Steve Nethery is executive director of His Nets, an organization supported by many Baptists to distribute insecticide-treated bed nets to those most vulnerable to malaria. He is experienced in net distribution in Ghana, West Africa.

Samuel Tolbert is president of the National Baptist Convention of America. He is pastor of Greater St. Mary Missionary Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La.

John M. Yarborough Jr. died June 20 at age 79. A dermatologist and musician, he was longtime organist at St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans. **BT**

The conundrum of moderate Baptist missions

Moderate Baptists don't support missions — at least traditional missions — the way we used to. There's no denying that, and leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) made no attempt to pretend otherwise during this year's General Assembly in Atlanta. Missions was a constant theme and mission offerings were frequent, but the response left something to be desired.

CBF was formed, in part, because many moderates believed in missions but could not support the Southern Baptist Convention's shift to an evangelism-only strategy that sacrificed hospitals, schools and social programs while tightening restrictions on who could be missionaries and what they had to believe. We didn't want to be a denomination so much as an alternate missions-sending agency.

The early years saw a flurry of activity and excitement, with money flowing to the movement's growing missions program, some SBC missionaries coming to do missions through CBF, and several fully-funded missionaries being appointed every year. Keith Parks, former head of the SBC International Mission Board, came over to lead CBF's new global missions effort and preached stem-winding sermons that had us walking the aisles to volunteer for missions and opening our wallets to give sacrificially.

Global missions makes up just over half of the budget and designated spending for CBF, but financial support for the program has faltered. Fully-funded appointments have disappeared: New missionaries have to raise a considerable portion of their own funding from family and church friends or other partnering organizations.

I've been wondering why, and I suspect the following factors all play a part:

Progressive Christians are more aware that the mission enterprise is so identified with colonialism in many parts of the world that it's no longer well received. Well-intentioned missionaries through the years have sometimes done more harm than good, whether by bringing new diseases along with the gospel or introducing new customs that destabilized cultures and set neighbor against neighbor. I suspect this is one of the reasons CBF no longer uses the term "missionaries," but appoints "field personnel."

Many places in the world are now more Christianized than America. The center of global Christianity has moved south of the equator — and it's often more conservative and more charismatic than the faith most of us practice. Nagaland, in northeast India, may be the most Baptist place on earth. In parts of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, polarized conflict between Christians and other religious groups spills into murderous violence and reprisals on a large scale. We may feel hesitant to pour more fuel on the fire.



The paradigm that once compelled us to sacrificial giving was based largely on a call to "win the lost at all costs," with images of millions of souls who were destined for perdition if we didn't persuade them to follow Christ. The more progressive we are, the less likely we are to believe (a) in hell as an eternal torture chamber, and (b) that God would damn people to eternal punishment for failing to accept a gospel they'd never heard.

While CBF's 2012 Task Force report calls for mission engagement "with the least evangelized and most neglected persons of the world," the most apparent focus is on social ministries that make life better for people, seeking to touch those who are the most impoverished or oppressed. That mission is both laudable and appropriate, but doesn't seem to spark the same excitement as the call to save lost souls.

An obvious factor noted by both CBF missions coordinator Steven Porter and executive coordinator Suzii Paynter is that many churches have shifted missions

engagement toward short-term trips for members. That has led to a wider awareness of human needs and broader participation in missions, which is terrific — but it also uses dollars that could support long-term missionaries.

The passion generated by such trips hasn't translated into stronger support for traditional missions. Most churches can raise \$30,000 to send a mission team to Zimbabwe or Ukraine or India far more easily than they can raise the same amount to support someone who could stay long enough to learn the language. It's also easier to raise partnership support for a missionary known and loved by the church than it is to collect a large offering for global missions in general.

The church in general is suffering decline, whether mainline or evangelical. With societal trends leading to a more secular and less religious population, churches are struggling to support their staff and maintain their buildings. When compounded by broader economic struggles, churches can become more concerned with keeping the lights on at home than with spreading the Light of the World. When church receipts decline, we can become depressed and defensive, more focused on our own needs and less concerned about others.

The result is that CBF mission personnel have to work on a shoestring budget and spend significant portions of time raising support rather than doing the work. Our networking and partnering with other groups is desirable and essential, but may also diminish a sense of ownership in the mission — and if we don't feel ownership, we're less likely to ante up.

We can spin it as "the way God is working" in the world today, but we can't ignore the reality that moderate Baptists have not supported mission efforts the way we could and the way we should.

I hope that if we truly believe in the Great Commandment as well as the Great Commission, we'll find a way to become as energized by improving people's lives as by saving their souls. If we can see the global missions line in CBF's budget start trending upward again, the future of CBF itself will start looking a lot brighter, too. **BT**

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

This month is marked by a string of United States victories over the reeling Confederacy. Most notable is the Union's rousing naval victory in Alabama's Mobile Bay early in the month, a victory that provides a badly-needed boost to U.S. President Abraham Lincoln's re-election campaign.

As if on cue, the fall of Mobile Bay seems to open the door to further Union successes, including in the Atlanta Campaign. By the end of the month, Union forces arrayed against Atlanta have driven as far south as Jonesborough, severely disrupting Rebel supply lines and overwhelming Confederate defenders. The fall of the key southern city seems only days away.

Nonetheless, a brief and brilliant ray of hope shines across the south land this month. On the afternoon of August 21 in what becomes known as the Second Battle of Memphis, Confederate raider Maj. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest and 2,000 cavalry temporarily occupy and cause havoc in Memphis, Tenn. Forrest withdraws after a glorious two hours, taking prisoners and supplies with him.

Forrest's Memphis raid aside, some Southern Baptists in the trenches reflect this month upon a cruel war seemingly without end. Hosea Garrett of Co. G, 10th Texas Infantry, engaged in the defense of Atlanta, writes to his uncle, Hosea Garrett Sr., in Chappell Hill, Texas. Garrett Sr., a prominent Texas Baptist and president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, is one of the richest plantation owners in Washington County, Texas.

We are all quite tired of this war ... I can't believe that God will let such a people [Northern soldiers] go unpunished. I believe that the day for their overthrow is not far distant. I have heard that they cut the throat of a very wounded man that they came across in Miss. ... And I heard that some of our men found some of their wives tied to stakes and dead from the cruel treatment that they received from their foul hands. If such as this will not make men desperate, what will? We are not what we should be in a religious point of view, but I am certain that we have no soldier



Battle of Mobile Bay, 5 August 1864 (1890), by Xanthus Russell Smith. The monitor ships are CSS Tennessee (left), shown surrendering, and USS Chickasaw (foreground). Admiral Farragut's USS Hartford is right, and USS Winnebago, left.

150 YEARS AGO

August 1864

that would commit such outrageous acts on helpless women and children as theirs has been guilty of. I would to God that our entire Army were true Christians ... Pray the Lord to spare me though this cruel war, and that I may do some good in the name of my master's cause. I have tried to make a Christian soldier as well as a soldier for my country's rights. In this I pray to be sustained.

Garrett is among many white Southern Baptists, whether soldiers or ministers or lay leaders, who remain firmly committed to the Confederacy's "rights" of white supremacy and black slavery. Not a few are quite public in their sentiments, their diatribes not infrequently criticizing Baptists of the United States for pandering to Lincoln's abolitionist despotism.

Among the Southern Baptist churches in the Confederacy unshuttered from the ravages of war, national anxieties hover ever close. In revival meetings, religious conversions offer some relief from hardships. Funds for army missions are a staple of associational gatherings. A Virginia Baptist layman charges that apart from the pulpit, his state's clergy talk only of the war and the Confederacy. In other pulpits, the war mingles with the gospels.

North Carolina Baptists lament the loss of many ministers who have been killed in the great conflict, while most Baptist pastors in Middle Georgia reject calls to minister to soldiers, choosing instead to remain in their pulpits.

Enslaved Baptists, sitting in the galleries of white-led congregations, remain silent but attentive in the presence of white Baptists, a quietness belying their faith in an abolitionist God of whom Lincoln is the new Moses destined to lead God's people to freedom.

For their part, Northern (American) Baptists believe defenders of black slavery to be cruel and unbiblical. In sermons and writings they decry slavery and rejoice that the evil practice will cease when the Confederacy is defeated. One such sermon this month, preached at the white Lima Baptist Church in New York, celebrates "the freedom and divinity of man" and "the glorious claims of human brotherhood." New black Baptist congregations in the North and Union-controlled areas of the South celebrate both freedom and brotherhood.

The decades-old competing Baptist claims for the moral high ground on the issue of black slavery have changed not a bit. But the course of the war over slavery has shifted, and reality is pointing toward a victory for those yet living in bondage. **BT**

—Bruce Gourley is executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society. For a daily log of "This Day in Civil War History," see civilwarbaptists.com.

Your complete guide to the Trinity

Most of the things we talk about in church on Sunday still sound fine on Monday — sharing, listening, being kind — but others only sound right in church.

“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.”

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”

We sing, confess our faith and baptize new Christians with Trinitarian formulas, but you seldom hear someone in line at Starbucks say, “How ’bout that God in three persons?”

The Trinity is confusing. We usually say Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but sometimes we hear Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer; or Almighty God, Incarnate Word and Holy Comforter. I heard this one recently: Womb of Life, Word in Flesh, Brooding Spirit. This may become your new favorite: Primordial Nature, Consequent Nature and Superjective Nature. We sing “God in three persons,” but one theologian suggests it would be more accurate to sing “God in three hypostatic modes of being.” That is not going to catch on.

The Bible does not contain the word Trinity. Jesus does not talk about it. Not until the fourth century did church leaders formalize the idea at the Council of Nicea.

Different theologians express it in different ways.

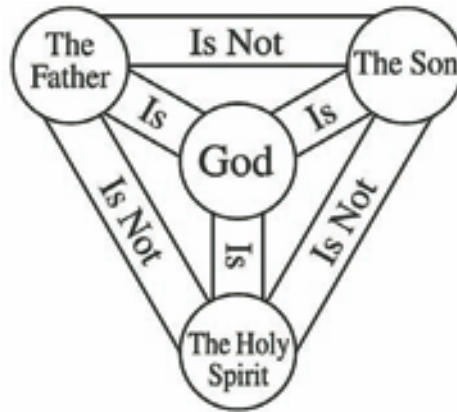
John Calvin: “To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.”

Too bad that will not fit on a bumper sticker.

This is Karl Barth: “God is the speaker, without whom there is no word and no meaning, the word who is the speaker’s word and the bearer of the meaning, the meaning which is as much the meaning of the speaker as of the word.”

Glad he cleared that up.

For most of us, the hairsplitting intellectual gymnastics of arguments concerning essence



versus substance seem obscure. The analogies I was taught in Sunday school are inadequate, but are still helpful in catching a glimpse of how one God can work in three different ways at the same time. Father, Son and Spirit are like water in the form of liquid, ice and steam. They are like the sun, the rays of the sun and the heat generated by the sun. They are like the memory, understanding and love that exist in the same heart.

I am not recommending the idea that Jesus is the pitcher, the Spirit is the catcher and God the Father is the umpire. My junior high Sunday school teacher liked that one.

Ultimately, the Trinity is impossible to explain. The discussion seems so esoteric that we are tempted to think it does not really matter, but it does.

T.S. Eliot suggested that humans, as a species, cannot bear too much reality. So we spend most of our lives dealing with little questions that are easy to answer: What’s for lunch? Who won the game? Who is rich? Such questions pass the time. But now and then we realize that staying on the superficial surface keeps us from the good gifts that are down deeper.

The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that there is always more to God than we conceive, more of God than we can explain, more than we can sing or preach or prove. God is as near as our breath, but not so familiar as to be completely understood. God is beyond time and space, but not so mysterious as to be inaccessible. The Trinity is difficult, but it is also delightful.

The Trinity is the understanding that God is at work in an abundance of ways. God is in the world, in the story of Christ and in the hope

deep within us. God draws us to abundant life through the wonder of creation, the love of Jesus and the hope that holds us. God is over us as Creator, with us as Christ and in us as the Spirit.

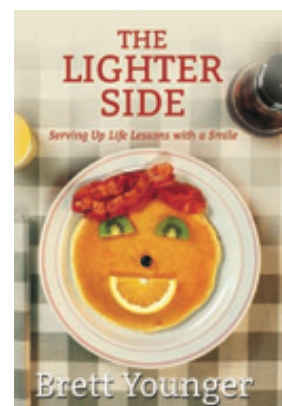
The Trinity reveals the creative, ethical and mystical nature of God. The essence of God is that God creates. Jesus shows us how to live. That is ethics. The mystical is the Spirit, the presence of God.

If we think through it, we see that the doctrine of the Trinity offers direction on how we should live. This picture of God is a gorgeous interaction between the creative, ethical and mystical. Since we are created in the image of God, we are to live with the same fullness. We are most like God when the creative, ethical and mystical are at work in us. When our imagination, commitment and openness are awake, then we live in the hope of God.

If we believe that God created all of the world, then our attitude will be concern and celebration. If we believe that God was in Christ, then we will follow Jesus’ example of caring. If we believe that the Spirit is present, then we will stop judging everyone and everything and begin to look for the ways God is at work. **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology.

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Baptist theology

PART TWO

This is the second in a series of six articles about academic theology written since 1950 by Baptists. We will begin with textbooks of systematic theology.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIES

When we hear the phrase “systematic theology,” we tend to think of those massive volumes that have been both loved and hated by students who were required to study them in seminaries and divinity schools. During our period, Baptists have written many such books.

R.T. Kendall

I begin with a three-volume, 1,400-page book by R.T. Kendall titled *Understanding Theology*. It is extraordinary in that it consists almost exclusively of outlines. There are very few prose paragraphs.

Fortunately most of the points and sub-points, and sub-sub-points are full sentences, so it isn't difficult to follow Kendall's thinking. His career is as extraordinary as his book.

Kendall is a Southern Baptist who served for 25 years as pastor of Westminster Chapel in London. Like his predecessors G. Campbell Morgan and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Kendall is a master of biblical exposition, but in this systematic theology he intentionally addresses current issues as well. He is charismatic, and he longs for a reuniting of the Word and the Spirit.

Wayne Grudem

Grudem's 1,300-page *Systematic Theology* has been abridged into a 530-page book titled *Bible Doctrine*, which in turn has been abridged into a 160-page book titled *Christian Beliefs*.

Grudem, like Kendall, defends both Calvinism and charismatic experience. He is a Third Wave charismatic: At one time he participated in a Vineyard Fellowship, though he is a Baptist.

In his book he argues for a complementarian understanding of men and women. Women and men are equal in value before God, but God has assigned them different, complementary roles. Grudem is a master communicator, and his book is now being used as a text at many seminaries.

Millard Erickson

In a 1991 survey of how systematic theology is being taught in America, Gabriel Fackre discovered that Baptist Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology* was being used as a text in more schools than any other single-author book.

There is now an abridged version of this 1,300-page volume; Erickson delights in telling people that it is popularly known as “Millard light.”

Erickson is a mediating theologian. For example, he makes a conscientious effort to do justice to both sides of a debate in which Baptists have engaged continually for almost four centuries: the debate about predestination.

He affirms divine sovereignty and human freedom, and he says that God's work of predestination is compatible with humans making free choices. I appreciate mediating theology, but I don't think there is a coherent middle ground here.

Predestination is an either/or issue. If you believe that prior to creation God made a sovereign decision, without reference to the future conduct of individual humans, to save certain individuals and not others, you are a Calvinist. If you don't believe that, you aren't.

Samuel J. Micolaski

Micolaski's *Theological Sentences: A Study in Christian Critical Realism* is unusual in several ways. One is that the book was brought into print just last year, when the author was 90 years old!

Another is that he employs a numerical format similar to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The author interacts thoughtfully with an exceptionally wide range of conversation partners, especially with scientists, philosophers and church fathers.

His title is borrowed from the medieval theologian Peter Lombard. This book is a splendid example of how to present the good news to contemporary intellectuals.

Dale Moody

Of the Baptist systematic theologies published during our period, perhaps the most intensely biblical is *The Word of Truth* by Dale Moody. I estimate there are 3,000 references to Scripture in this 600-page book.

The book is enriched by the author's utilization of the results of the work of the biblical theology movement. Moody was passionately ecumenical, and his ecumenism was wider than most theologians can manage.

For example, in his chapter on eschatology he spends one page arguing with Albert Schweitzer and the next page arguing with C.I. Scofield.

Moody displays an enthusiasm for the Bible and for theology that is infectious in the way James Leo Garrett's enthusiasm for historical theology is.

Stanley Grenz

Grenz wrote a 900-page systematic theology titled *Theology for the Community of God*. He did not follow the traditional procedure of beginning with an affirmation of the authority of Scripture and then moving on to systematize what he finds in Scripture.

His section on Scripture does not come until the middle of his book. It is in a chapter on the Holy Spirit in which Grenz says that the Spirit uses the Bible to carry out the Spirit's work in the church.

In not placing the Bible at the beginning of his book, Grenz was following the example of the First London Confession rather than of the Second. It was a great loss to Baptists and to the wider church when Grenz died in 2005 at the age of 55.

James Wm. McClendon

The period under consideration saw the publication of what I believe to be the most original systematic theology ever written by a Baptist. It is the three-volume *Systematic Theology* by James Wm. McClendon.

It is conventional for theologians to begin with method, then present doctrines, and then trace out moral implications. McClendon reverses that sequence. His first volume is titled *Ethics*, his second is *Doctrine*, and his third is *Witness*.

What lies behind this sequence is a conviction that people are drawn into Christian communities by the way of life the communities practice. They then absorb the community's beliefs the way children absorb

the language of their families of origin. Only later, as they begin to think more intentionally about the community's doctrine and ethics, do they feel the need for warrants for those beliefs.

McClendon worked with life narratives as much as with abstract concepts. In doing this he is, of course, following the example of the Bible.

To the best of my knowledge, McClendon's *Systematic Theology* has been discussed by a wider range of persons than any other Baptist systematic theology in the past 60 years. I believe it deserves this attention and respect.

MONOGRAPHS

We turn now to some theological monographs, books on a single theological topic, that show the range and creativity of Baptist theology.

Frank Tupper

The first theological monograph to be considered is *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God* by Frank Tupper, first published in 1991. The footnotes show that the author has read widely, but he is wrestling with life as much as with literature.

In 1981 he and his wife Betty learned that she had cancer, and she died in 1983. Early in his book Tupper briefly describes her ordeal, and then at the end of the book he recounts conversations the two of them had in the weeks leading up to her death. For him, providence is a life-and-death issue.

Tupper writes extended theological meditations on stories about Jesus from his birth to his death and resurrection. He also reflects on the stories of contemporary persons, some famous and others not. This is narrative theology at its best, not using stories to illustrate concepts or to inspire readers, but mining them for their theological and religious meanings.

Tupper defines God's providence as "the loving care of God in relationship to creation, history, and each of our lives." His principal thesis is that God always does the best God can do, given the limitations of any situation.

This doesn't mean that the universe limits God, though Tupper considers that idea. It means that God has voluntarily accepted limitations as part of creating the kind of world we live in. Tupper doesn't attempt to describe the limitations, presumably because Christians know from their own experience the kind of things the loving God might have done if the limitations did not exist.

Clark Pinnock

The most beautiful theology book I have ever read is *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* by Clark Pinnock, published in 1996. He wrote that "Theology ought to be beautiful, because its subject is so beautiful."

The triune God "is not at all like Aristotle's god, thinking only about thinking. God is pure ecstasy — each Person exists in loving relationship with the other Persons, and the joyous fellowship spills over into giving life to the creature."

"The Trinity is an open, inviting fellowship, and the Spirit wants the church to be the same."

"When we look at salvation from the standpoint of the Spirit, we view it in relational, affective terms."

"Being saved is ... like falling in love with God."

Pinnock describes salvation as union with God, beatific vision, communion, and *theosis*, not just as acquittal in a courtroom.

Of the possibility that people who are not Christians may be saved Pinnock wrote: "There is no way around it — we must hope that God's gift of salvation is being applied to people everywhere.... Let us not forget to hope.... We are good news people. Negativity does not become us."

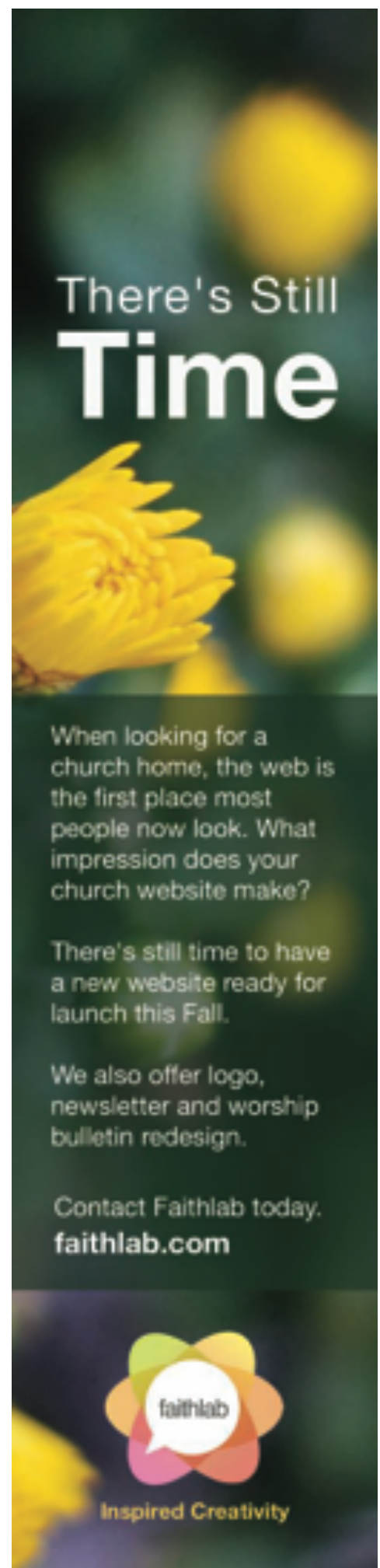
Pinnock takes seriously the challenge that in this hope he may be motivated by wishful thinking, but then he turns the tables and asks those who disagree with him to consider their own motives.

Are they like Noah who resented God's mercy to Ninevah? Or like the elder son who resented the welcome that his father gave the prodigal son when he returned home? Pinnock concludes, "Let us never give up hope for those who have not yet believed."

Pinnock believes that the Spirit plays a cosmic role. He advocates for a Spirit Christology, but he is thinking of the Spirit, not as the divine in Jesus, but as the Third Person of the Trinity.

He emphasizes the presence of the Spirit in the sacraments. He explains why the charismatic renewal has meant so much to him and to millions of others. He says that God's mission includes not only saving souls, but also bringing peace and justice and the renewing of the whole world. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity, emeritus, of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. This series is a revision of part of a longer article titled "Baptist Theology Since 1950," published in *Baptist History and Heritage* (Fall 2013) and used by permission.




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Ask the Theologian: Part 3

STONE MOUNTAIN, Ga. — At the April meeting of the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today*, editor John Pierce posed questions to theologian Fisher Humphreys during a session titled “Ask the theologian.” Questions were submitted by those who serve on the board with Humphreys. His responses appear here in print (as the third entry in a series) as well as in full on video at baptiststoday.org.

QUESTION from Roger Paynter, pastor of First Baptist Church of Austin, Texas:

How are we to understand the issue of whether God intervenes in our world or not? If God is not involved in our world, why bother with intercessory prayer? If God IS involved, why is there so little sign of that involvement?

FH: Jews and Christians believe that God acts in history. God’s acts in history are an indispensable part of traditional Christian faith. This belief sets them apart from most if not all other religions. Alfred North Whitehead put it succinctly: “The Buddha gave his doctrine... Christ gave his life. It is for Christians to discern the doctrine.”

There are two kinds of divine acts in history. We see both kinds in the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. God was acting in the suffering and death of Jesus, and God was acting in the resurrection of Jesus.

The first act was a natural event; it is natural for crucified people to suffer and bleed and die. The second act was a supernatural event, a miracle, an intervention; it is not natural for a dead man to be raised from the dead.

Divine interventions are especially problematic for modern people. We moderns think that the world operates in accordance with certain natural laws such as the laws of gravity and electromagnetics. This makes it difficult to understand how God acts in the world and how we human beings act in the world.

If everything that happens in the universe is determined by unbreakable natural laws, then there would seem to be no room for human freedom, for making decisions, and for being intentional about how we live. A deterministic universe seems to exclude fully personal human beings as well as a personal God.

On the other hand, we all experience ourselves as actors in the world. I think that entitles us to affirm that we act in the world, and that opens space for the idea that God acts in the world.

I think this would be true even if we could not explain how there can be freedom in a world governed by deterministic laws. In fact, however, in addition to our own experience of being actors in the world, we know of at least two things that suggest determinism isn’t the whole story.

One is that modern physics allows for contingency in the behavior of particles at the sub-atomic level. This was a point about which Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr radically disagreed, and apparently Bohr’s view is now part of the standard model of the universe.

The other is that we know that as we move from simpler to more complex beings, new factors emerge, and these factors are real. For example, as we move from physics and chemistry to biology, we find an emergent new factor: life. As we move from botany to zoology, we find another emergent new factor: consciousness. And as we move to the human sciences such as psychology and sociology and history, we find another emergent new factor: freedom. Freedom is an emergent property of human evolution.

Returning to the Bible, we notice that almost all of God’s interventions occur in just three periods in Israel’s 1,500-plus year history: at the Exodus, in the work of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and in the work of Jesus and his apostles.

This means there are entire centuries of Jewish history in which there were no divine interventions. This did not prevent God’s people from living faithfully. They were able to do this by remembering God’s mighty acts in their past. We still do that today. Jews remember the Exodus, and Christians remember Jesus’ death and resurrection.

One more thing: With the exception of the resurrection of Jesus, interventions tend to be downplayed in the New Testament. Jesus said that it is an evil generation that seeks for signs. Paul wrote that the Jews seek signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, and that he intended



to disappoint them both and to preach the message of the crucified Jesus. I expect it’s alright for us to adopt a similar attitude.

In summary, God works principally through the regularities of the world rather than through interventions. Historically, God has intervened occasionally, as in the resurrection of Jesus. God is free to intervene today, and we are free to pray for God to do that. Divine intervention will always be rare; it is God’s work through the regularities of the world that is frequent and normative.

QUESTION from William Neal, president of Developmental Disabilities Ministries of Georgia:

What are the implications of a 24/7 mobile society on the traditional view of worship being concentrated around a special day of the week? Is the church fighting a losing battle when it comes to imposing an old model of life in cycles of activity, i.e. the traditional “day of rest” in contrast to the work week?

FH: I suspect that in most places in the United States we have moved far enough away from our biblical heritage that blue laws to shut down commercial activities on Sundays are counter-productive. Nevertheless, I think the church should encourage its own members — and anyone else who will listen — to take the idea of Sabbath seriously.

Sabbath serves two purposes. It provides a time for rest, and it provides a time for worshipping God. The Sabbath commandment was a radical, life-affirming commandment. In the ancient world where those with power compelled other people to work every day, it was humane to command everyone to cease working and to rest.

All of the modern labor laws of which we

are so justly proud — the 40-hour work week, overtime pay, safety for workers, minimum wages, against child labor, and the like — all of these taken together have not contributed as much to the well-being of working-class people as the Sabbath commandment given to Israel in the Sinai desert (Pierre Joseph Prudhon made a similar point about 1850). We need Sabbath for rest.

We need it for worship, too. In the last century there was a Christian philosopher at Oxford named Eric Mascall. When young people said to him, “I can’t hear God,” he replied, “Of course you can’t. Turn off your radio.” We need a Sabbath so we can turn off the distractions that keep us from hearing God.

For many people, Sunday can’t be a Sabbath. Many years ago I led a retreat for some golfers in the Women’s Pro Golf Association. These women can’t worship on Sundays; that’s when they play tournaments. They had their weekly worship services on Thursday evenings before the tournaments began.

And it isn’t just pro golfers. Many pastors and other ministers on church staffs can’t take their Sabbath on Sundays. They may or may not be able to worship God on Sundays, but they can’t rest. For many of them, Sunday is the day of the week when they work the hardest. They need to find another day for a Sabbath.

And, of course, there are other forms of Sabbaths such as retreats and conferences. The point is pretty simple, really. Work is important, but you are more than a worker. You need the Sabbath to connect you with your non-work life and to nurture it. That includes connecting with God through worship.

QUESTION from David Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala.:

You have written about Calvinism. Why is this theological position gaining such popularity today especially among younger people in Baptist life? What impact will this have on moderate Baptist churches in the years to come?

FH: I have two suspicions about the growing popularity of Calvinism. The first is that it owes something to the fact that we live in a time of rapid and radical change. Rapid change is disorienting and causes anxiety. It is natural for us to want an authoritative voice that tells us the way things are. Calvinism provides this.

It is a closely reasoned set of ideas and practices. It can claim some justification from the Bible. It has a long and honorable history in the church. It has contributed hugely to

the lives of people and to the mission of the church. Once we accept it, we move into a large world just waiting to be explored, a community of churches and people and theologians and philosophers and social thinkers and activists and missionaries. I think one appeal of Calvinism to the young, the restless, and the Reformed is its comprehensive, thoughtful, biblical worldview.

My second suspicion is that some of the success of Calvinism should be attributed to the efforts of its proponents. Calvinists believe deeply, they strategize shrewdly, they organize wisely, and they labor energetically. They work at the emotional and rational levels, and at the popular and academic levels.

My sense is that the increasing popularity of Calvinism probably won’t make much difference in moderate Baptist life, but the Southern Baptist Convention is being rocked by Calvinism. For many of us, Calvinism is simply one of several alternatives to our vision of Christianity. For the SBC it is the greatest threat to its unity.

QUESTION from John Pierce:

Sometimes we assume that what some claim as “essential Christian beliefs” are timeless, but in reality they often emerge over time. What do Baptists and/or Evangelicals tend to emphasize now that once weren’t considered so important?

FH: Doctrines are not timeless. Like ourselves, they change and evolve. Academic theologians call this “the development of doctrine.”

They point out, for example, that the New Testament does not contain an intentional doctrinal formulation of the Trinity, but the Nicene Creed does. The development of doctrine is expressed in some familiar metaphors. For example, it is said that doctrine is “based on” the New Testament or that the New Testament contains the seeds of the doctrine.

As doctrine develops, everything that was present at the beginning is not lost at the end. Christians today talk about the same things the first Christians did: about God and Jesus and the Spirit, about the church and Christian hope, about sin and salvation, about grace and faith, and about discipleship and worship.

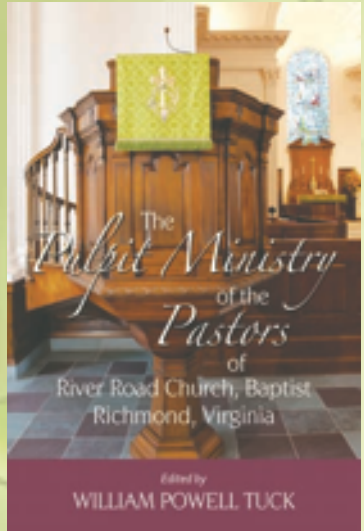
There is continuity as doctrine develops. The Bible is the principal source of continuity, and all the churches share it. Many churches also have creeds and formal liturgies that provide continuity. Because creeds and formal liturgies can be used by both the state and the church in ways that stifle sincere religion, most

Baptists avoid them, but we can still recognize their stabilizing effect on the churches that have them.

Here are some ways that Baptists and evangelicals have changed: The original Baptists were anti-Calvinists, but many later Baptists have been Calvinists. Many Baptists and evangelicals believe in the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible, but so far as I can tell no one appealed to the original manuscripts before the early 19th century. Many evangelicals and Baptists have become charismatics, part of a movement in the church that is barely a century old. Many Baptists and evangelicals have embraced the need for social ministry and for social action, something most of their spiritual ancestors rejected when it went under the name of “the social gospel.” **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys of Birmingham, Ala., has written several books on theology including *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, *The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What It Means To Us All*, *Fundamentalism (with Philip Wise)* and *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism (with Paul Robertson)*.

FROM
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Saint Roberto?

Effort seeks to make late baseball star Clemente a saint

Richard Rossi is on a crusade of sorts, traveling to cities across the country to collect stories about the fabled healing powers of baseball great Roberto Clemente.

His goal? Nothing short of making Clemente an officially recognized Catholic saint.

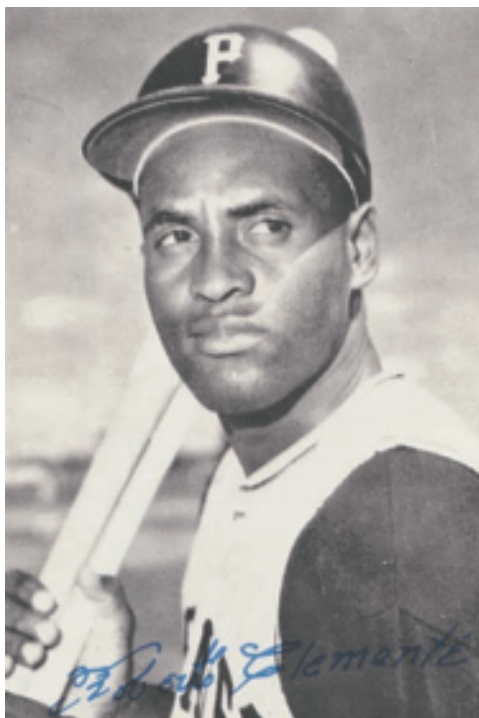
“He had a calling to be a great baseball player,” Rossi said, “but he had a calling beyond baseball.”

Clemente played right field for the Pittsburgh Pirates from 1955-1972. He reached 3,000 hits and won the National League MVP trophy in 1966.

On Dec. 31, 1972, Clemente boarded a flight in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to ferry relief supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. Soon after takeoff, the plane crashed, killing Clemente and four others.

Rossi was only 9 years old when Clemente died but remembers going to Pirates games for \$1 with his father. Since then, Rossi said he’s read almost everything written on Clemente and talked with many more people who knew him.

After talking to several people, including a nun, Rossi said, he learned the religious side to Clemente had been left out of most biographies. So, Rossi, a 51-year-old Catholic and



independent filmmaker in Hollywood, made it one of the bigger parts in his movie, *Baseball’s Last Hero: 21 Clemente Stories*.

Now, Rossi and a group of volunteers are listening to people’s stories about Clemente, and they’re using the scientific tools of X-rays and medical records to verify tales of Clemente’s miraculous healing touch.

Under normal circumstances, miracles are considered much later in the process, after the church has officially opened a sainthood cause. Catholic teaching says miracles attributed to a saint — two are needed for canonization, after his or her death — are evidence that the person has God’s ear in heaven.

“One reason the Catholic Church has lasted a couple of thousand years, it has this kind of process, they’re very slow and so we want to make sure we present something that, you know, has a lot of credible evidence,” Rossi said.

Rossi already has several supporters on his side, including Duane Rieder, executive director of the Clemente Museum in Pittsburgh.

Rieder said he has spent time talking to family, friends and nuns who knew Clemente; they say he predicted his own death through dreams of him dying in the ocean and his body not being found.

But Rieder said he feels that the most important part is not the way Clemente died, but the way he lived his life for others.

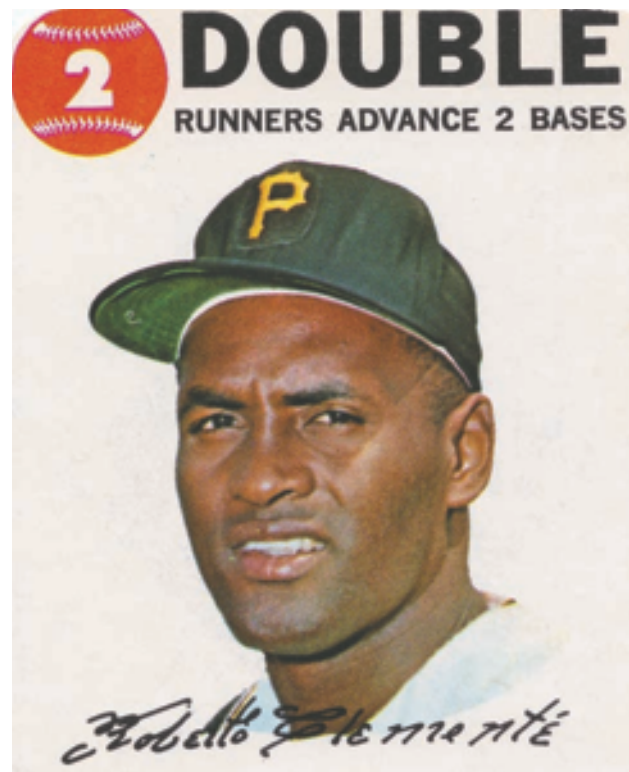
“He’s the only true baseball hero. He’s the only person, player that ever gave up his life helping other people. Everybody else, you know, Babe Ruth wasn’t a hero. He was a hell of a baseball player,” Rieder said. “Roberto Clemente was the only true baseball hero.”

Rossi is also looking for support from bishops, including Archbishop Roberto Gonzalez Nieves of San Juan — and even Pope Francis.

“The purpose of my writing is to humbly ask your blessing on my efforts to defend the beginning of the canonization of Puerto Rican athlete humanitarian Roberto Clemente,” the letter says.

As the archbishop of San Juan, Nieves would have to sign off on Clemente’s sainthood cause and move the process along to the Vatican.

Rossi also hopes to meet with Pope Francis



and show him his movie. “I think he is the perfect pope for this — No. 1, being Latin American. But No. 2, he thinks outside the box.”

Carmen Nanko-Fernandez, a Latina theologian at Chicago Theological Union, is writing a book about Clemente, *El Santo! Baseball and the Canonization of Roberto Clemente*.

She said anything is possible with Pope Francis, but due to a canonization process that can stretch on for centuries, she isn’t so sure Clemente will make the cut.

“All evidence seems to point to that Clemente was a good guy who tried to live his life well. So in that sense, you know, does he have a chance at being considered a saintly person? Sure,” she said. “Will that make him into the canonization process that makes him an officially recognized saint in the Catholic Church? I’m not so sure.”

But Nanko-Fernandez said Hispanic Catholics can continue to venerate and honor him, making him an unofficial saint.

“It’s not necessary for one to become an official saint to be considered a saint,” Nanko-Fernandez said.

For Rossi, Clemente is needed as a saint for “ordinary” people to look up to. Clemente lived his life for others and died in service to the poor, Rossi said, and what could be more saintly than that?

“When we look at the process of canonization, unfortunately, it’s very weighted towards celibate people that choose the vocations of being a priest or nun,” Rossi said. “I mean, there’s a very small percentage that walk it out in the real world as a family-first man, as a husband, as a father, in a secular culture, as a baseball star.” **BT**

A lesson from a duel between the sun and the wind

By Travis Collins

When I was a little boy, my mom told me the fable of a contest between the sun and the wind. They were arguing about which of the two was the stronger, when along walked a man wearing a coat.

The wind challenged the sun by saying, "I'll bet I can get his coat off him quicker than you can," and the sun accepted the challenge.

So, the wind blew and blew and blew until the man could hardly keep his feet on the ground. But the harder the wind blew, the more tightly the man pulled his coat around him.

The wind finally gave up.

The sun then began to shine gently on the man. The sun caressed the man with warmth until the man eventually removed his coat.

The moral of the story is that warmth and gentleness are stronger than might and rage.

That certainly is true of spiritual leadership.

Ephesians 4:3 offers helpful words for the spiritual leader: "Speak the truth in love... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

Kindness, of course, is not synonymous with indulgence or lenience. Remember that in the Bible there are two values that must be kept in balance: compassion and accountability.

In *Loving Monday*, John Beckett,

a Christian and a business leader, wrote, "Compassion without accountability produces sentimentalism. Accountability without compassion is harsh and heartless."

Certainly, courageous and visionary decisions must be made. Opposition must be endured, and inappropriate opposition has to be met head-on. But even when the Christian leader must engage in legitimate confrontation, it should be done in love, with an attitude of humility and respect.

Callousness is not an admirable attitude for a spiritual leader.

Nastiness, unfortunately, seems to be on the rise in some ministerial circles. I have heard pastors brag about the uproar they raised while bringing about changes.

In conversations with fellow pastors, I have heard some disparage the old spoilsports who opposed the pastors. Some of the pastors have even appeared proud of the number of people who have left the church.

The arrogant ministers have collected those stories of church clashes like the notches on a gunslinger's pearl-handled revolver. That attitude disturbs me more than a little bit.

There seems to be a popular idea

circulating in some circles that one cannot be compassionate and lead a church through necessary transitions. I fear that the propagation of that assumption is fostering a harshness among some ministers that is both unbecoming and unnecessary.

I can't decide if this is a martyr complex, a Messianic complex or megalomania. One thing's for sure: it is over the top.

Could it be true that some vocational ministers assume the domineering role when we are least confident in who we are and what we are doing?

Reggie McNeal thinks so. In *A Work of Heart*, he wrote, "Some leaders ... claim to operate from 'spiritual authority' when in fact they are operating out of a deep sense of insecurity."

Insecure ministers are tempted to throw their weight around, thinking that if they do, they will alienate many people and have a difficult time.

Good leaders aren't tyrants, and tyrants aren't good leaders.

Of course, mousiness will get you and your church nowhere. But kindness, genuine kindness, goes a long way. **BT**

—Travis Collins is a consultant with the Center for Healthy Churches, and the author of *Tough Calls* (New Hope, 2008).



NEW RELEASE

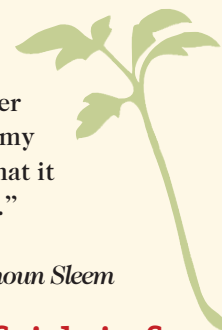
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to the change from that childhood to becoming director of the Domari Center gave me an incentive to tell my story and show the world what it is like to be a Gypsy woman."

—From the memoirs of *Amoun Sleem*

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Laugh & Learn

Humor, helping hands and institutional history mark Clarissa Strickland's CBF tenure

DECATUR, Ga. — Before the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) had much of anything else, it had Clarissa Strickland on the job. Through the years she has shifted from one position to another as the Fellowship has grown.

Her good-humored, hardworking presence now comes to an end with retirement. When recognized at the recent CBF annual assembly, Clarissa recalled the time she accidentally flushed her keys down a toilet.

“Except for that day,” she said, “I count it all joy.”

Unlike many other employees of what CBF Executive Coordinator Suzii Paynter calls a “denominetwork,” Clarissa said she “had the high privilege of being around for the whole ride.”

Executive Editor John Pierce asked Clarissa about her experiences and the lessons that have arisen from her long tenure on the CBF staff.

BT: When did you start to work for the Fellowship, and what were your tasks? Can you describe the setting for the organization at that time?

CS: I began work in June of 1991. CBF had just been “named” at the first General Assembly a month earlier. It had not yet

merged with the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., which was the initial expression of this new movement which originated with the consultation meeting called by Daniel Vestal that took place in Atlanta the previous August.

It was basically a funding arm (or the “bucket” as it was famously named by David Sapp) for people to use who felt that in good conscience they could no longer contribute to much of what the Southern Baptist Convention was doing at the time.

So, yes, we began as a reactionary movement. I was hired on a temporary basis for a day or two a week — which turned into a 23-year employment. Intended brevity of my hiring turned into longevity.

Office space at that time was one room in a small office building in downtown Decatur, Ga. As I recall, our first office furnishings were hand-me-downs from *Baptists Today* — then called *SBC Today*.

BT: You have taken on various responsibilities over the years. What were they, and how did they end up in your lap?

CS: At first, I was pretty much a generalist — answering the phone, cleaning up the database of duplicates, doing whatever needed to be done. Our one-room office included one phone line with call waiting and one computer. There was no fax machine in those early days, much less email.

Since I was also on CBF's first coordinating council, I had asked Daniel Vestal, the chair of the interim steering committee, if my employment would be a conflict of interest. Since it was so part-time and so temporary, he said no.

As we took on more structure and with the advent of Cecil Sherman as the first executive coordinator, it was decided that I should choose between employment and being on the council. I chose the option that paid a bit of money.

With the hiring of David Wilkinson in 1993 as the communications coordinator, my duties changed and expanded. I began to do a



Clarissa Strickland wears the nametags bearing the various job titles she held with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

great deal of proofreading for publications that came out of the Resource Center.

In 1994, I was asked to take on the duties of logistical support for the General Assembly. (Coincidentally, I worked closely with Suzii Paynter who was hired to help with that on a contract basis. As I watched her in that context, I began to see her as one of the most competent people I had ever known.)

I have been fortunate in that the people who supervised me over the years recognized any gifts they thought I might have and put me in areas where I could use them — including, you know, those ubiquitous “other duties as assigned.”

For the last 12 years or so, I have coordinated CBF’s efforts in reference and referral as we work to connect churches with effective ministerial leadership. It has been real ministry for me.

I have tried to remember that behind each of the many résumés that have come before me is a real person who is trying to discern God’s call in her or his life. It has been sacred work for me.

Former coordinator Cecil Sherman passed my desk one day in the earlier years and said, “You know, this is just the perfect job for you!” And that is how I have felt for 23 years — regardless of my specific job description at any given time.

BT: As with any organization, CBF has evolved. What do you see as some of those shifts, emphases and transitional landmarks?

CS: For me, the seismic shift has been from being a reactionary organization (reaction to the takeover by the SBC, which was our first stance) to one with its own mission, goals and priorities. This was surely not an overnight occurrence, but one that has taken place over the years.

Then there has been the shift to a “partnership model” which has cut across the whole movement. Our intentional focus on young Baptists has yielded positive change in our leadership within the staff as well as those in elected places among us.

This is so easily seen in the many young faces at our General Assemblies. Then the whole missional church movement has also been an important swing.

BT: Are there a couple of “moments in time” that stick out in your mind as significant ones for you?

CS: If you mean significant in terms of the Fellowship, there have been so many. Early on, when the Southern Baptist Convention voted to no longer accept funds passed to them through CBF, calling such monies “tainted,” that freed us to re-tool budget-wise and turn all funding toward our own initiatives. It was a first step toward freeing us from the rancor that led to the formation of the Fellowship.

Another one of those moments was the carefully constructed decision to *not* become a denomination, but to be what Suzii Paynter has recently termed a “denomnetwork.” The vote of the Baptist World Alliance to accept CBF into membership — at great economic cost to them — is another. More recently, the 2012 Task Force report has given us a clear blueprint for moving forward.

Of course, each time we have called a new executive coordinator has signaled another shift for our movement. These three leaders — Cecil Sherman, Daniel Vestal and now Suzii Paynter — have each put their own fingerprints on who we are — all hugely gifted, but very differently so. And each has seemed to be the right person at the right time.

Personally, each time my job description changed and I was moved to the direction of a new coach or manager was a watershed moment. Each was a caring taskmaster and mentor who helped me grow as a person and, I hope, as an effective employee. They have also been my friends. These included David Wilkinson, Terry Hamrick, Bo Prosser and Harry Rowland.

BT: At both planned and unplanned times you have brought needed humor to the Fellowship. Do you have some philosophy of humor’s role in faith? Or do you just see things from that viewpoint? Or both?

CS: In her book *Plan B*, Anne Lamott calls laughter “carbonated holiness.” I love that whole idea.

I think humor and laughter are God’s gifts to us. In my own life, even in some pretty tough times, I have often been able to see at least a bit of dark humor or irony that has helped me find a way through.

And I must admit that there is great gratification in making people laugh. It just plain feels good.

I think it is important that I not take myself so seriously and that we as an organization not take ourselves so seriously that we cannot poke a bit of fun at ourselves. I would imagine that Brett Younger’s “Lighter Side”

column in *Baptists Today* is one of your most widely read articles each month. People like to laugh. People need to laugh!

BT: What will you take away from your time with Fellowship Baptists that you’ll treasure most?

CS: Without a doubt, it is the relationships. I feel as though I have been on an amazing 23-year journey that has been made so by the traveling companions.

These relationships reflect the diversity of the Fellowship which we have strived so to maintain. I have loved my visits to our partner divinity schools and seminaries. My friendships with these young leaders have been just as deep and meaningful as friendships with those closer to my own age.

This is also true in my relationships with my colleagues in the CBF Resource Center. I treasure all of them.

BT: Please tell us something (or some things) we should do and/or not do that will make us better?

CS: I feel rather presumptuous in offering my opinions. There are far wiser thinkers among us.

There have been times when we have tried to do too much for the size organization we are. I think sometimes we have spread ourselves too thin to be really effective in some cases. The 2012 Task Force report has brought a more laser-like focus to our efforts.

One of my passions has been women in ministry. While we have made great strides, there is a long way to go. I would love to see our churches be more open to the whole idea of women as pastors.

It is going to take the continued help of male pastors who will see that their congregations have opportunities to see women in the pulpit. May it be so.

It is very important that we strive to maintain and widen our diversity, giving all a place at the table — across the demographic boundaries we often speak about. Our diversity has been an area of achievement for us — but an ongoing challenge for the future.

As I have tried to prepare for my personal life transition, I read Richard Rohr’s *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. Rohr says, “...to go forward there is always something that has to be let go of, moved beyond, or ‘forgiven’ to enter the larger picture of the gods.”

Certainly a good word for Clarissa ... maybe a good word for the Fellowship as well. **BT**

Who's at risk?

By John Pierce

Picking up my daughter from a week of volunteerism at a camp for at-risk children meant that the leisurely Saturday drive home would be filled with enthusiastic reports of newfound friends and continuous efforts at taming a cabin full of squealing girls.

The pretty teen I taught to catch snakes, frogs and other creatures said she was called the “man of the house” for her willingness to deal with the various bugs that came indoors with the kids. There is just something about camp that every young person should experience — as often as possible.



I heard stories about kids who live the rest of the year in very challenging situations. Camp was a not only a unique environment for many of them, but also a rare opportunity to have focused attention on their potential for good.

Two of the young girls in her cabin, my daughter noted, didn't really come from

“at-risk” situations. She meant that they seemed to have a more financially secure home life than the others.

However, I noted that there are risks other than the scarcity of resources. In fact, an overly-enhanced sense of self-reliance and self-importance arising from abundance without appreciation may be the riskiest way for a child to be reared.

The resulting, swarming culture of self-focused adults puts everyone at risk.

There is much to teach children about life: faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control — and that the world doesn't revolve around any one of us.

... Oh, and how to get a granddaddy long-legs spider out of the cabin without screaming your head off. **BT**

Bible Odyssey: A digital adventure awaits

By Tony W. Cartledge

Bible literacy may be at an all-time low. Surveys consistently show that many people can't identify important Bible characters or themes, or think that people like Joan of Arc or sayings such as “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise” are in the Bible.

The Internet is populated with a number of Bible study sites, but many of them come with an agenda, such as promoting a fundamentalist or pre-dispensational millennialist interpretation of scripture.

One I've found useful is bible.org, publisher of the NETBible. It takes a more neutral approach and provides lots of content, but it's uneven and often leans toward more conservative interpretations than I would choose.

What to do if you want a well-written website designed to convey a good academic understanding of the Bible?

What you do is visit bibleodyssey.com, the fruit of an ongoing project by the Society of Biblical Literature. SBL recently reached a milestone in the 5-year-old project with a public launch of the very helpful site.

Bible Odyssey contains well-executed photographs, artworks, videos, essays, maps,



timelines, interactive games, multiple texts of the Bible and a condensed version of the HarperCollins Bible Dictionary.

It has hundreds of quality contributors and is written in an accessible style, but from an academic approach.

Those threatened by new ideas or challenges to long-held notions might want to stay away. However, for those seriously interested in a deeper and broader understanding of the Bible, Bible Odyssey is the site for you. **BT**

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For the mutual good

COMMUNITY MARKET BRINGS CONGREGATION, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

PELHAM, Ala. — Crosscreek Baptist Church is nestled inside a quiet, suburban neighborhood outside of Birmingham, Ala. If you don't know about Crosscreek, you might have a hard time finding it behind the ranch-style houses and big oak trees.

However, news about the church is traveling fast this summer, thanks to the success of the Crosscreek Community Market.

Heather Jeffcoat, editor of the national magazine, *Entertain Decorate Celebrate*, and a member of Crosscreek Baptist Church, had the idea moving about in her mind for more than a year.

"My husband, Brad, and I had been talking about this for a year or so," she said. "We kept thinking that it would be great to bring a farmers market to Pelham and encourage other residents in our community to taste fresh produce and see how many talented local farmers and artisans we have near us."

She continued: "When our new pastor, Brandon Hudson, came on board and began talking about how we could invite our community in, we thought that our church parking lot would be a wonderful location since it is inside a community."

Hudson, who became the pastor of Crosscreek last year, embraced the idea.

"Heather approached me one day at church and shared her thoughts about the use of our space for the good of the community," said Hudson. "It was something she had been pondering for a while, and she had the connections and skills to make it a reality."

"Heather was really helping to find a practical way to embody one of our key ideas



Heather Jeffcoat (right) assists a customer at the Crosscreek Community Market

at Crosscreek ... that we want to be a force for good in our geographical community," he added. "We are a church that values the local and the hand-made. A community market was a perfect fit."

It seemed like a good idea to others in the congregation, too. So Brandon and Heather went to see the mayor of Pelham to share their thoughts and to make sure that he would be on board if they decided to move forward.

"Heather had been working to find out what it would take for us to get the market going, and I was concerned we would have some bureaucratic hurdles, but the mayor wanted to help us help the community," said Hudson. "It was a great example of the local government, the church and local growers working together for the mutual good."

Heather also wanted to introduce the idea of food trucks to Pelham — which are very popular in the city of Birmingham, but rarely seen in smaller towns or communities.

"Food trucks were not ... a part of Pelham, but I love them and wanted to bring them to our city," said Jeffcoat. "They are a great way for people here to try new cuisine without having to drive downtown. The mayor loved our idea and even said he thought we would outgrow our parking lot one day."

Such markets are popular in Alabama, but most happen on Saturdays. However, Heather was committed to a weeknight market in the summer.



"We wanted to have it on a weeknight because that would give the vendors and farmers an additional time during the week to sell their items," said Jeffcoat. "I am friends with a farmer in Selma, and something he said made me think that a weeknight would be more beneficial since there are quite a few Saturday markets."

The planners settled on Tuesday evenings from 5:30 to 8 p.m. as the designated time.

"People can come for dinner at the food trucks and then do their shopping," said Jeffcoat.

The Crosscreek Community Market has brought people to the church parking lot each week to buy fresh vegetables and fruit, enjoy dinner, and get to know their neighbors.

"We have had 'regulars' who are non-church members who have come with their family every week to shop and eat and hang out," said Hudson. "We've also had new faces every week and church members who come to help and shop; that has created an atmosphere of familiarity and energy that has been wonderful."

In creating the market, congregational leaders had two primary focuses: an embrace of the community and promoting holistic health.

"Crosscreek was founded in this community roughly 40 years ago," said Hudson. "It has members who live in the community and those who have moved but continue to come here to church."

"We have a concept of a theology of place,

an idea that we are in this particular location for a reason," he continued. "...We understand one aspect of our reason for being as to be a blessing and resource for the community, because all of our neighbors are our brothers and sisters. This has been a great way to get to know our neighbors."

"We also want to promote a holistic understanding of health," said Hudson.

Jeffcoat agreed. "I think our goal was to bring our community together and share with the residents what it means to eat local and shop local, a continued effort to encourage wellness and health of the total body. Fresh produce picked that morning tastes so different than the produce you get in a grocery store. Plus, you get to talk to the farmers and understand their love of farming. Our artisans have a true gift to share, and it is so great to see others being inspired by their passions."

As people visit the market, they occasionally find their way inside the doors of the church on a Sunday morning or Wednesday evening as well.

"We are approaching this as a longterm relationship-building exercise," said Hudson. "...When I meet people at the market, I try to communicate to them that we value them as neighbors more than we value them as potential church members. Of course they are welcome and we have information, but I believe that people who are not regular church attenders are too accustomed to feeling like a 'prospect.' I want them to feel like a valued



Anna Ford enjoys a cold treat on a warm day.

human being who is hopefully learning to trust a new resource and partner in their community."

Jeffcoat said working together on this project has brought current church members together more closely.

"We have always been a very close-knit church, and this has just strengthened us even more," she said. "There are outreach opportunities we engage in that some members can't do, like going to Haiti or Arkansas, but this gives our church members an opportunity to be involved and help connect with those in our area. And that is a great thing!" **BT**

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