

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

September-November 2010

Exploring Life and Faith

What's in a Name?



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Thinking Hard About Tomorrow

By John Halford

Back in 1970, as a young minister working in Melbourne, Australia, I read a book titled *Future Shock*. The author, futurist Alvin Toffler, forecast that the next few decades would bring unprecedented change, and that this would have a disorienting effect on those who would live through them.

As a young man with my career ahead of me, I found this fascinating. If Toffler was right, we could expect the remainder of the 20th century to be turbulent, and the wise approach would be to prepare for change, however unsettling that might be.

In 1994 I had the opportunity to interview Alvin Toffler in Los Angeles. He was easy to talk to, and the interview seemed more like a friendly discussion. Before I left, I asked him to sign a copy of his latest book that I had brought with me. I have it before me now, and I still appreciate what he wrote: “For John Halford, who has also thought hard about tomorrow.”

I still try to think hard about tomorrow—especially what “tomorrow” might mean in my field of magazine journalism. The advances in electronic publishing have revolutionized the way we produce and publish printed literature.

And still the changes keep coming, as the methods of communication become ever more innovative and sophisticated. Some have suggested that the days of printed magazines and books are numbered, as more and more people get their information electronically. That may well be the case; Amazon recently reported that it had sold more books electronically through its Kindle reading device than had been bought as hard copy.

In this tumultuous climate, many magazines have gone out of business, and others have made some drastic changes. Publishers are realizing that a print magazine must be thought of as just one component of an interactive and flexible media package. For example, *US News and World Report*, once printed weekly, is now a monthly magazine with Internet support. Although I suspect that the days of print magazines and newspapers are not yet over, “ezines”—magazines that only exist electronically—are already a fact of life.

So my colleagues and I at Grace Communion International, publisher of the magazine, have been thinking hard about tomorrow.

We have had to face the fact that the costs of ad-

vertising, renewal, printing and mailing have prevented *Christian Odyssey* from becoming a viable general audience outreach publication. Even to continue printing and mailing the magazine to our current readership, especially considering the fact that it is available free of charge on our website, is simply taking up too much of the total budget we have available for media. We have to recognize that other avenues of communication are more cost effective for Christian instruction and inspiration aimed at the general public. So it is

Some have suggested that the days of print magazines are numbered. They may be right.

time to make some changes.

We have decided to more effectively meet the needs of our members and supporters by focusing the editorial content of *Christian Odyssey* not only on a positive and practical Christian perspective on the everyday issues facing ordinary people, as we do now, but also on news of people and events in GCI around the world. So, beginning with the December/January issue, the editorial goals of *Christian Odyssey* will be to:

- Foster hope, joy and a sense of community in its readers.
- Lead readers to deeper understanding of God, their faith and their church.
- Explore the challenges and opportunities facing today’s Christians.
- Inspire readers to embrace the gospel and live a grace-centered life in Jesus Christ.
- Inform readers in a positive and inspiring way about the people and events of Grace Communion International.

The December/January issue will also feature a new design to reflect the new editorial policy. The magazine will continue to be available to everyone free of charge on our websites at ChristianOdyssey.org and at gci.org. The print version will be mailed to all GCI donors, both to those who donate to a local congregation as well as to those who donate directly to the denominational headquarters in Glendora, California.

So now I had better head this ship into port for the refit. We hope to have the redesigned magazine ready to mail to you in late November. ☪



Grace, Communion and International What's in a Name?

By John Halford

When our church decided to change its name from Worldwide Church of God (WCG) to Grace Communion International (GCI), some were puzzled. The new name didn't exactly roll off the tongue. We found ourselves stumbling over it, often getting the words in the wrong order. But more to the point—what did it *mean*? The name WCG may have had baggage, but it at least described what we were. But GCI?

The recent international conference in Orlando, Florida, was the first time the ministry had gathered together under the new name. As over 1,000 ministers and wives from around the world gathered together to learn, fellowship and worship, it was a vivid demonstration that GCI is indeed the right name for our church. It brings together three elements that precisely describe what we are today—an international community, bound together by God's grace.

Grace

The theme of the international conference was "Renewed in Christ." The conference was a vivid reminder that this was no mere slogan. As a church, a ministry and as individuals, we had been and continue to be renewed, and not by our study, scholarship, or righteous behavior, but by the grace of God in spite of ourselves. We have learned that grace is far more than just a religious word; it's the kindness of God actively transforming human hearts and minds.

We had lived through, and helped facilitate, the



remarkable—some say unprecedented—transformation of our church from legalism to the freedom that comes from understanding the gospel of grace. It was not an easy transition (ironically, God's grace seems to be a hard pill to swallow), and many did not make it with us. Most of us have lost friends who decided not to change.

The trauma that accompanied our denominational transformation is in the past now, and our church has settled down. But the experience has led to a special



camaraderie, and we met in Orlando as perhaps soldiers who have shared in a battle might meet, with mutual understanding and respect.

Someone who had known us in the past might not have recognized this as a ministerial conference. Not just because of the casual dress, or the more informal worship styles or the fact that men and women alike were attending in leadership roles. The abandoning of legalism has led to a much more relaxed atmosphere all around. The artificial barriers erected by an authoritarian structure and rank consciousness had disappeared—somehow they seem irrelevant in the new climate of freedom. We reconnected as friends in a ministry transformed by grace.

Communion

“Communion” is one of those words that tends to get lost in religiosity. Certainly it describes the taking of bread and wine in memory of Jesus’ sacrifice. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. We as a fellowship are beginning to understand more fully that to follow Jesus is not about laws and regulations nor even imitating Jesus as a role model. It is about genuine relationships: real fellowship with the Father through the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, in Christ, real fellowship with one another.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one Being in perfect communion, and Jesus prayed that his disciples would share in that relationship and reflect it to the world (John 14:20; 17:23). The underlying theme of the workshops and plenary sessions of

the conference was the importance of congregations and individuals building genuine community in Christ in the bond of the Holy Spirit—true fellowship rooted in the love by which 1 John 4:8 defines the eternal communion of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Unless a church sees its primary function as building community, it runs the risk of seeing people as tools to “get the job done.” And that, as James Torrance pointed out, can lead to a program of

evangelism that will be both legalist and exclusivist. He wrote, “The triune God is in the business of creating community, in such a way that we are never more truly human, never more truly persons, than when we find our true being in communion” (James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and The Triune God of Grace*, p. 74).

This is a truly exciting and refreshing concept. It is as old as the gospel, and yet it is easy to lose sight of in our modern world that “gets the job done” by organizing business, firms, programs and corpora-

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Leading With Love

One Congregation's Success Story in Reaching Out to Young People

By Willard High

Most churches want a way to reach young people. The congregation I pastor, The Shepherd's Community Church in South Holland, Illinois, has had some good success in doing that. We have also made mistakes and learned a lot. Let me share some of our story to help you decide what might work for you.

About three years ago a church member, we'll call him Jim, came to me with a suggestion. Jim had experience with community sports activities and wanted to use our church gymnasium to sponsor a basketball family night. I liked his idea, and that first evening marked the beginning of our teen and family basketball outreach.

We attracted a few very good players, one of whom just stopped by because he saw the light in the gym; Matthew 5:14 in action! We set rules for rotation so everyone could play. Jim's daughter, plus the

required the girls to sit for 40 minutes and had strict rules of behavior. Big mistake!

The girls rebelled! We were expecting these young people to behave as if they were members of our church. I had failed to understand, respect and appreciate the differences. Even worse, we were trying to get them to change in a group situation before they knew we cared about them as individuals.

We ended that program because it was not working. But I still had to deal with the girls' behavior, which included rude comments, name-calling and threats of violence. This was unacceptable. I asked them not to come back until they could respect the simple rules of conduct established for the activity.

We were all sad that night. I found myself having a pity-party, thinking about how disrespected I felt and how little appreciation the girls had for what we were doing for them. I accepted that we had miscalculated by expecting too much, too soon. But there had to be *some* rules.

Boundaries

Not all rules are "legalistic," of course. If people are to work together, they must respect each other, and if we were going to make a difference in their lives, there had to be some reasonable boundaries. But I also realized that we had to be considerate and patient. After all, we were the ones who know Jesus and have the love of God.

The girls returned after a two-week cooling off period. I never mentioned the incident again and never again tried to manipulate them into change. I got to know all their names and tried to strike up conversations every time I saw them. This seemed to work. It has been well said that people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

Earning credibility

Jim had a sister who he thought could relate to the girls, so we asked her if she would help us. Gas prices had shot up, so we paid her a gas allowance so she

We had prayed as a congregation for God to send us people to help. Here was the answer.

presence of the guys, brought in girls. Jim kept a close eye on who came. Most were friends or acquaintances of those already attending, and we asked them to be responsible for their guests' behavior.

First big mistake

Before long, we decided to separate the girls into a group for games and conversation, which was a big hit with them. We discussed a single scripture or important principle. Next, I accepted a suggestion to give the girls formal lessons on life and etiquette. This

could afford to attend. She also was able to pick up some of the girls en route to the activity, which helped her build a relationship with them.

One night while I was visiting the group, I heard her telling them, “This is my pastor and this *is* a church, you know. You ask me all sorts of Bible questions. Well, the pastor is my teacher, so if you want to learn about the Bible and be with people who care about you, then come to church. If you need a ride, I guess I can pick you up.” That little introduction to church, coming from someone who had credibility because she had proved she cared, made an impact. The group began coming to church. Some of the guys wanted to be where the girls were and to see what our church was like, so they came too.

Caring

In church they got to hear the Word, share in the sacraments and experience some of what Jesus wanted for them through interaction with our members. And our congregation learned some valuable lessons about successfully reaching out with the good news of the gospel. We had prayed as a congregation for God to send us people to help. Here was the answer.



Oh sure, sometimes a few of the members would roll their eyes when the guys talked to the girls during the service or when the baby of one of the teen mothers cried in church. But the guys learned how to respect the service and the members came to love the girl and her baby; the congregation knew this was what they had prayed for.

If we wanted to be like Jesus, this was a small cross to carry. Jesus said he set an example that we should do as he had done, and he served everyone (John 13:12-17). The Spirit changes hearts; we do not. True growth and change takes place at the center of our relationships, where Jesus works with us all. It

takes caring and reaching out so Jesus has the fertile ground to do the spiritual work of change in others and in us.

This might mean enduring some discomfort and sacrifice for the sake of those Jesus is trying to reach; sharing food, tutoring, homework, sports, attending activities or going to the mall. Personal interaction is necessary to get to know one another.



It must be motivated by a genuine desire to serve and help, and not because the pastor said so or because our latest “outreach” program demands it. We can’t force changes in others. Author Bill Hybels puts it this way in his book, *Just Walk Across the Room*:

“I believe the highest value in personal evangelism is to be attuned to the movement and prompting of the Holy Spirit and to play only the role you are intended to play in another person’s life. Second to that value (and it’s a close second) is being radically inclusive of where people are when you find them. Not recklessly condoning the sins they confess, but rather accepting them just as they are” (page 88).

Support

If you want older teens to attend church, you have to encourage and support them. We instituted a good grades incentive, which rewards our younger members for As, Bs or Cs on their report cards. The second Sunday in June is Graduate Recognition Day. Our tradition is to honor all graduates from kindergarten to certificate programs to Ph.Ds. We make a big deal out of it with gifts, a meal after services and monogrammed Bibles for our high school graduates.

As a result of this holistic approach, students who had dropped out are now attending school and graduating. What a testimony to what God can do and the

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IT LOOKS LIKE THIS ...

From union to communion, making disciples with Jesus

Serving With Jesus in the Local Community: Meal and Prayer

By Sarah Faulkner, Bonny McQueary and Hugh Steiginga (AGF pastoral team)

About five years ago, the GCI's Abundant Grace Fellowship in Ft. Myers, FL, met to consider where we were and where we needed to go. We had been meeting in other churches' buildings. But now we sensed God leading us to relocate.

We started by praying for a new location. One day one of our members was driving around and saw a "for rent" sign at a local office complex. His initial thought was, "We can't afford that." But he felt a strong urging to turn around and check it out. He did, and God opened an important door.

A few months later, we began remodeling 1200 square feet of space in that office complex. It is owned by New Mission Systems International, and they were anxious to lease space to a church with a local focus. We held our first worship service there on July 4, 2005.

When we moved, we had ten members in regular attendance. Eight were 60 years or older. But undaunted by our small size and advanced age, we



area. The idea was discussed with the congregation and the pastoral team decided to move forward. We held the kick-off event in November 2008. During the first several months, only a few people from the community came. But we persisted. And after serving many wonderful meals, and otherwise warmly welcoming and unconditionally accepting the few who were coming, word began to spread. The number of community participants slowly grew.

Now every Wednesday and Sunday, we serve lunch to whoever comes. We currently serve about 365 lunches each month. At each meal, we offer prayer request cards and toiletry items. From time to time, we offer clothing and socks. The need for this assistance is growing as the local economy deteriorates, leading to job losses and to overtaxing the resources that local government agencies and ministry organizations have to help the needy and homeless.

It has been inspiring to see friends, relatives and people from other churches and mission agencies join in to help us. Some help serve meals on Wednesdays, and some give donations.

It is most inspiring to see the reaction of the homeless people who come. As they receive our hospitality, experiencing God's unconditional love and acceptance, close bonds of relationship are forged. As this happens, they gain hope and vision, and many of those being served have joined us as servers.

As this transformation occurs, we invite those who seem receptive to join us for our Sunday worship

It's inspiring to see the reaction of the homeless people who come and receive our hospitality, experiencing God's unconditional love and acceptance.

tried several ways to reach out to serve the surrounding community. We held "fun-days" with food and games. We held reverse yard sales. We distributed mailers to people who were moving into the area. None of these approaches bore much fruit.

After much prayer and brainstorming, a member couple suggested that we hold "Meal & Prayer" outreach once each week to serve the homeless in the



Be Ye Perfect

By Barbara Dahlgren

Reading “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” in Matthew 5:48 (KJV) reminds me of all my imperfections—which are many, to be sure. The imperfection I hate most in my life is that I’m not perfect.

Those who struggle with perfection know too well the feeling of never really being good enough. We are like those children learning to write the alphabet for the first time, who tear their papers up the second they see they have malformed a letter. It makes no difference that they made it to the “R” without a problem. If the “S” looks sloppy, then in the trash it goes. Practically perfect people are hard on themselves.

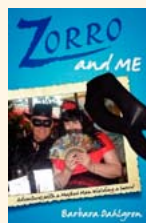
In psychological terms, perfectionism is the belief that perfection can and should be attained. When that belief transforms into thinking that anything less than perfect is unacceptable, problems set in. Through a perfectionist’s eyes, a person’s self-worth is determined by flawlessness. Of course, ideas of perfection vary from person to person. Perfectionists set rigid standards of performance for themselves and sometimes for others. They never feel they “measure up.”

One of my favorite movie lines comes from *Mary Poppins* when she humorously replies, “We practically perfect people never make mistakes.” Poppins, like most everyone else, links perfection to lack of mistakes. Sometimes Christians make the same error in reading the Bible. The word “perfect” in the above King James Version verse is translated from the Greek word *telios*, which means finished, full-grown, mature, lacking nothing, or brought to completeness. It is not about making mistakes or not being good enough.

God wants us to “be complete” by being spiritually one with his Son, Jesus Christ. This “perfection” is not a matter of looking good or performing flawlessly, but of Christ living in us.

The good news is that we are already perfect in God’s sight. It is a gift given freely to us. With Christ in us, we are brought to completion and we lack nothing.

Will we still make mistakes? Sure. But the perfection spoken of in this verse is not about what we do; it’s about what Christ does. ☪



Readers who enjoy Barbara’s column will also enjoy her hilarious accounts of more than forty years of life as a pastor’s wife. *Zorro and Me – Adventures with a Masked Man and a Sword*, Pleasant Word, ISBN 1414114850



services and lunch. Many have accepted our invitation. Nine of them were baptized between November 2009 and March 2010. Our average weekly worship service attendance has tripled.

All this has been inspiring and humbling. We have seen how God can use an “over-the-hill gang” that is willing to follow where he leads. But most importantly, we have experienced his compassionate care for a group of homeless and needy folks that our culture tends to push aside. How marvelous to share in what God is doing to show them that he accepts and includes them in his love and life

So that’s what, by God’s grace, it looks like here at Abundant Grace Fellowship in Ft. Myers, FL. A small, and “mature” (a nice way to say “old”) group who has joyfully joined Jesus in his ongoing ministry to people in our area. We have learned that God is not limited by age, size or anything that we may see as an obstacle. Thank you, Lord.

For more pictures and videos of GCI churches in the U.S. making disciples with Jesus, see “It Looks Like This...” at gci-usa.blogspot.com

A God of Chaos?

By Sheila Graham

Do you ever feel you're in a chaotic mess? I'm spending much of my time either trying to avoid chaos or get out of it. Earlier this year—you know, New Year's resolutions—I had the bright idea to reorganize my home office. I know what, I'll (meaning my husband) build some shelves in the office closet to hold the printers and other equipment taking up my space.

Well, one thing led to another. Electrical and computer cables had to be redirected. Files had to be moved out of the closet to make space for the shelves. Everything was piling up in my office, so we could hardly get in and out.

Moving that equipment into the closet allowed us to get rid of some furniture, which meant moving around the other furniture. It was chaotic for days and

Genesis 1:1-3 (New Revised Standard Version): “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” We know the rest of the story.

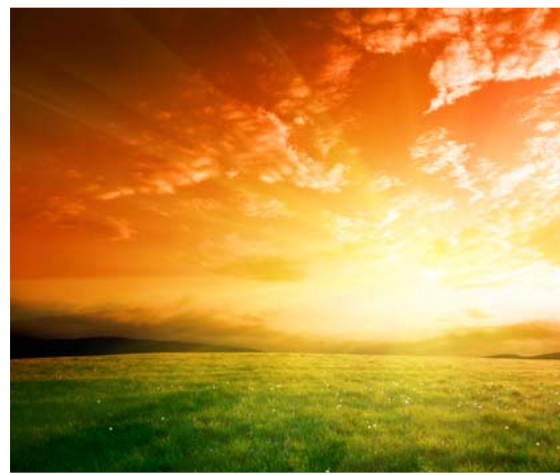
With the subject of this article firmly in mind, I looked at several translations. The earth was “without form and void”; “formless and empty”; “void and vacant”; “unformed and void”; and finally in the Living Bible, “a shapeless, chaotic mass.”

Yes, I finally found the words I was looking for: *chaotic mass*.

God makes order out of chaos. But then, as he made everything, didn't God also make the chaos? He had to make that shapeless, chaotic mass to begin with. Who is this God we worship? What's he really like?

I know God is creative—wonderfully creative. No

When I watch in wonder the ever-changing colors in a sunset, I'm looking at a moving canvas of art never to be repeated in quite the same way.



two snowflakes alike, no two fingerprints the same. When I watch in wonder at cloud formations swirling around changing patterns or at the ever-changing colors in a sunset, I'm looking at a moving canvas of art never to be repeated in quite the same way.

Before you scoff at abstract paintings, look at

it wasn't long before I was apologizing to Ed and sorrowfully regretting my bright idea.

But then, all was put back in order. I had more space. The office looked much better, and Ed didn't hurt his back. I promised him it would be years before I would change that office around again.

God likes order. It says in Genesis 1 that God created raw material out of nothing. And he took that chaotic mass of raw material and made a universe out of it. One planet he focused on in particular was our earth.

the most beautiful abstracts ever by viewing Hubble telescope's photos of the stars, nebulas and the constellations. Or look at organic structures under a microscope. No one can create abstracts as beautiful as God creates.

And what about us humans? We start out tiny as the head of a pin, then through ingesting animal and vegetable products we grow into adults. How can wheat, rice, milk, beef, green beans, or here where I live in Texas, chicken-fried steak and biscuits and gravy grow a human being? Yet here we are, made out



Afraid of God?

By Tammy Tkach

Are you a little afraid of God? Do you worry that he has something against you?

When I feel that way, it helps me to remember three stories in which God teaches us how he really feels about us.

The first is the strange story of the prophet Hosea. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute, so he did. Their marriage produced children, and Hosea loved his unnamed wife. She eventually went back to her immoral ways, but despite her unfaithfulness, Hosea didn't stop loving her. Hosea's experience was God's way of illustrating how he never stopped loving his chosen people, even though they repeatedly turned back to idolatry.

The second story is that of the Good Samaritan, who stopped to help a Jew in distress. Samaritans were despised; but in Jesus' parable, the Good Samaritan ignored the history of prejudice and mistreatment to help a man who would likely just as soon have spit in his face. That's just how Jesus feels about me. No matter what I've done, he still loves me, forgives me and takes care of me.

The third story is Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. The father of the prodigal son didn't wait for his son to drop to his knees, begging and pleading to be taken back, even as a servant. He ran to his son crying, elated to have him back, before his son had even spoken a word.

Sometimes we might think God is much like stern parents or teachers, peering over his reading glasses, looking down his nose at us, waiting for us to sheepishly or desperately admit our sins and ask for all to be forgiven before giving us the "Well, okay, but don't do it again" condescending nod. And then we may or may not get the ruler on the knuckles before he sends us on our way.

Growing in grace and knowledge means we can put aside our childish notions of a God who thinks and acts as we humans do. He is not like us; his thoughts and ways are not like ours. He is not a petty, malicious, self-centered being who gets offended when we sin and then peevishly waits for us to crawl to him on bloody knees. Just as in the examples of Hosea, the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, our God loves and forgives us even while we are sinning! Christ died for the ungodly. His love is not conditional, and his forgiveness is ours before we even think to repent.

God does desire our repentance. He wants us to be with him and to know we have his forgiveness. Repentance is going to God's throne of grace and being reassured that he never stops loving us. It does not mean drumming up artificial sorrow and begging for a forgiveness we fear we might not get.

God is not holding a grudge and he has not turned away from us. He lovingly awaits those who fall back into old habits, who still feed at the pig troughs, and who in their sins are helpless in a ditch, no matter how long it takes. His love is unailing and his grace is neverending. ☪

of a mess of seeds, grasses, fish and animals.

A meteorologist studying weather patterns in the 1960s came to the conclusion that because of the endless variations in the weather, we could never accurately predict the weather. It was too chaotic. The study was famous for saying even the flutter of a butterfly's wings could change the weather—the butterfly effect. This eventually led to what is called Chaos Theory.

I won't attempt to explain that theory, but in later studies what scientists considered chaotic: how weather changes, how tree branches grow, how blood veins branch out, all individually different and unpredictable, some brainiac came up with a formula that worked across these so-called chaotic patterns. To scientists' astonishment, they found order even in chaos. There's so much we have yet to learn about the mind of God.

Our God is the greatest artist, greatest architect, scientist, biologist, zoologist, physicist—greatest everything because he created everything. I wonder how much Christ knew in his physical form about what he created. The Bible writers are more concerned with what Christ did and taught, so few are the clues to what Christ understood about the world he lived in.

He changed water into wine. Did he understand the molecular structures he was working with? Did he need to? He healed people. Again, did he know exactly how the healing took place? Not sure if it mattered to him. His purpose was not to reveal the secrets of the universe but to redeem, reconcile and save us.

We live in a chaotic world full of people living chaotic lives. Before surrendering my will to God, I could describe my life as "without form and void." Many are out there living in desperation, yearning for some kind of escape from the mess they've made of their lives. That's where Christ comes in like the conquering hero he is.

Who is this God who calls himself the Creator? Jesus came to show us. He came to reveal the sovereign God. Some say we can learn about God through looking at his creation. That may be true to a point. As 17-century English poet John Milton wrote:

"The planets in their stations list'ning stood,
While the bright pomp ascended jubilant.
Open, ye everlasting gates, they sung,
Open, ye heavens, your living doors; let in
The great Creator from his work return'd
Magnificent, his six days' work, a world"
(*Paradise Lost*).

Yes, a magnificent work indeed. But God cannot be examined through microscopes or telescopes. He is spiritual. Jesus came to let us know who God really is. Even scientific minds marvel at his creation, but only Jesus could let us know how much God loves us. ☪



Treasure in the Trash

By Kerry Gubb

The American children's television series *Sesame Street*, well known for its "Muppets" characters, premiered on November 10, 1969, and it became one of the longest-running children's programs on television.

Like many parents, we wove *Sesame Street* into the fabric of early learning for our kids. Forty-two years later, I'm still partial to a grouchy but lovable Muppet called Oscar, who lives in a garbage can. Oscar has a life-long attraction to and passion for trash. One song has the refrain, "Trash, I love it."

This strange affinity for trash also appears in older, more sophisticated, more highly educated persons known as archaeologists. They investigate past cultures by studying the things those cultures left behind. Some of our most exciting knowledge and insights into ancient civilizations have come to us from household ruins, city dumps and even communal cesspits. In other words, trash.

Everyday documents sifted from the trash of

It makes perfect sense that a loving God should reveal himself to us in the language of ordinary people.

ancient towns and cities are rich sources of cultural information. In contrast to Oscar, who loves trash for its own sake, the archaeologist loves what he or she can learn from it. In fact, some archaeologists can, if the quality of the trash is high enough, become even more expressive than Muppets!

One exciting find in the village dump in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, actually changed our perception of the New Testament.

At the time of Jesus and the apostles, the pre-

vailing language of the Eastern Roman Empire was Greek. But there were two levels of Greek language: the classical Greek of literature and the *koine* Greek of common conversation and writing. Things written in classical Greek tended to be copied and preserved in libraries and royal collections. But things written in the common, or *koine*, style—anything from personal letters and journals to shopping lists, would in time find their way into the trash can and finally to the garbage dump. And of course, since many of the common words and expressions in *koine* were not used in classical Greek, these words and expressions were not preserved for posterity.

And as it turns out, the New Testament was written in the *koine*, the common form of Greek. It has a vocabulary of only about 5,000 words, and of those, about 500 were considered unique to the New Testament, not found in other Greek literature up to that point. Scholars agonized over the disparity between New Testament and classical Greek.

Schools of thought emerged to deal with this. "Hebraists" thought that New Testament Greek must have been a translation from an original Hebrew text. "Purists" surmised that New Testament Greek was a special language, created by the Holy Spirit and "purified of its pagan origins" to suit the purposes of God's revelation.

Eventually, some scholars started thinking outside the box. Bishop Lightfoot, one of England's most insightful New Testament scholars, said, "if we could only recover letters that ordinary people wrote to each other without any thought of being literary, we should have the greatest possible help for understanding of the language of the New Testament generally."

In April 1897, the bishop got his wish when Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt began discovering sample after sample of written *koine* Greek in that garbage dump at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt—including nearly all of the words formerly thought unique to the New Testament.

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Small Change Leads to Big Mission

By Rick Shallenberger

Last week I watched with pride as my daughter shared with the congregation experiences from her seven-week mission trip to Malawi. Kayla and two other Grace Communion International ladies had traveled to Malawi to teach in our church-run school in Blantyre. It was a life-changing experience for them. All three are anxious to go back, and two of them want to serve for an entire year. The Blantyre mission is just one of many ministries our congregation takes part in.

We got involved in international mission and ministry five years ago as an answer to prayer, and we've never looked back. Our goal is to journey with Jesus sharing God's love and life with others. We were already heavily involved in community outreach locally in Cincinnati, but we believed God was calling us to do more. We contacted Rod Matthews, GCI mission director for Southeast Asia and the Southern Pacific, and asked if there was a mission opportunity there for our congregation. We now work with the GCI Nepalese pastor, Deben Sam, to support a free medical clinic for the poorest of the poor in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Since that time we've begun to do work in Africa, Jamaica, Haiti, Belarus, and South America. Contrary to the popular opinion that a church cannot afford mission, outreach giving has *increased* as the members have made a commitment to be a blessing to our brothers and sisters around the world. The mission trip to Malawi, for example, started with a conversation with African mission director Kalengule Kaoma two years ago.

Let me share how simple getting started can be.

We have a "Small Change for a Small Change" mission that supports the *Les Ambassadors* school in Haiti. Twice a month the small children in our congregation—all two to six of them—walk through the congregation with tin cups labeled "Haiti." The members drop in their loose change, and the children dump the loose change into a "treasure chest." While they do this, we talk about and pray for our brothers and sisters in Haiti. Over the past four years, we've raised \$9,000 for Haiti—in small change. It's an easy and effective way to start mission, and it won't affect your church budget.

Grace Communion International is growing slowly in the United States, but rapidly in other countries. There is a hunger for the gospel, and the Grace Communion International mission directors can use your help. They would love to hear from you and are more

Over the past four years, we've raised \$9,000 for Haiti—in small change. It's an easy and effective way to start mission, and it won't affect your church budget.



than willing to help you get involved in international mission and ministry. You can start small and then watch the enthusiasm grow. A small change can lead to big mission.

Rick Shallenberger is the pastor of Christ Fellowship Church in Cincinnati, Ohio.

According to biblical scholar Eugene Peterson, "The words came from wills, official reports, letters from husbands away on business to their wives at home, a letter that a son who had become a soldier wrote to his parents, a letter in which a father admonished his children who were away from home, petitions, accounts, shopping lists, bills and receipts—the kinds of writings that never get bound into books and catalogued in a library. This was the kind of writing that, when it has done its work, is thrown away."¹

The impact of all this on Bible translation and Bible reading is huge. It makes perfect sense that a loving, considerate God should reveal himself to us in a manner we

can understand, in the language of ordinary people. He's given his precious word to all of us, not just to the highly educated.

Sesame Street's Oscar the Grouch says "Trash is everything to me." While it's unlikely we could agree entirely with that sentiment, it's worth remarking that some very important knowledge about the word of God came from sifting through an ancient town's trash.

Thanks to archaeology and scholarship, Oxyrhynchus has proved to be a case of Treasure in the Trash. **co**

1. Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (2006), p. 145.

Leading with Love

From page 7

small but important part he calls us to play. Through the Mary Bellamy Scholarship Fund we give monetary gifts to help high school graduates attend college or trade school. Another member just started a college student outreach ministry to encourage the grads and keep the connection between them and the church going while they are away at college.

Genuine relationships

Kinnaman and Lyons in their book, *Unchristian*, encourage us to rewrite the script for the reputation of Christianity by developing accepting and genuine relationships with “nonbelievers” rather than relationships intent upon criticism and manipulation (page 88). God brings about his desired changes as we interact through loving relationships. This is the example Jesus lived, loving not only Christians, but the whole world. And of course, he gave himself for us before we ever made any changes at all (John 3:16-17; 1 John 2:1-2).

Our experience at The Shepherd’s Community Church has shown us that we must change our behavior if we are to become people who attract others. When visitors come, we should welcome them, include them in our lives and connect them to members with similar interests. In time they will want to begin serving too. This same approach works for any outreach effort to any age group.

The bottom line is that we learned that we need to be less concerned about changing people and more concerned about loving and helping them. Veteran church growth professor and consultant Eddie Gibbs once summed it up like this, “Treat people as if they were Christians until they discover that they are not.”

Whew! What a load that takes off our shoulders. We still have a job to do but now the burden is not so heavy. It’s focused upon Jesus and his ministry, and as he said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). This is as true of ministry as it is of salvation.

Jesus values every person. He is the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one that was lost (Luke 15:1-10). No one is lost to God, of course, but they are lost to themselves. They are sheep who have no idea there is a Good Shepherd out there. They have no idea where they can find safety, water and food, but by the grace of God and with his love flowing through us, our churches can be safe havens for them. ☪

What’s in a Name

From page 5

tions. In such structures, people can be seen as a consumable and perhaps even disposable commodity.

Getting together in Florida, we were reminded that the church—any church—is most effective when it is first and foremost a loving community. In our case, we have a most unusual opportunity, for our community, our communion with Christ in the love of the Father by the Holy Spirit, reaches across racial, cultural and national boundaries; indeed, around the world.

International

We came from all over—from nearly every state in the Union, from Canada, from Mexico, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and the islands of the Pacific. It was a vivid reminder that we are very much an international church—in fact, not just in name.

At each meal, one of our international mission directors reported on the spiritual growth and gospel outreach in his region. And in President Joseph Tkach’s address to the conference, he featured even more of the work God is doing through our denomination in the many outposts of the gospel God has given us around the world.

We were reminded that God has drawn us together into a church that is truly international in scope. Caribbean Director Charles Fleming summed it up after a visit to our small congregation in Haiti following the devastating earthquake earlier this year. “In many ways,” he wrote, “the most striking aspect of this visit for me was the realization that our Haitian brothers and sisters draw strength from the solidarity they sense coming towards them from our worldwide church family. It is as if members around the world are a ‘distant presence’ in their daily lives. They repeatedly asked us to pass on their thanks and stated that they take comfort from knowing that people are praying for them. I found myself wondering whether I was experiencing some aspect of the ‘oneness in Christ’ Jesus described in John 14:19-20 and John 17: 20-26.”

It is a blessing that our church is large enough to have opportunities to work together and small enough that those opportunities can be personal. Friendships are continually being built across the national and cultural boundaries that more often than not create division in our world.

As we met together in Florida, we experienced again the abiding love of God as an international communion that has been transformed by his undying grace.

Grace Communion International is a good name for that. ☪

The Most Excellent Way

A study of 1 Corinthians 13

By Michael Morrison

The church in first-century Corinth was plagued with social divisions and rivalries. Paul explained to them that God gives different people different abilities—not so that some people can exalt themselves over others, but so that everyone will work together for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7). No one is self-sufficient, and no one is unnecessary.

Near the end of chapter 12, he again explains that God appoints different roles in the church. He asks, Is everyone in the church an apostle? Of course not, he implies. It's silly to expect everyone to have the same role (vv. 28-30).

Nevertheless, some gifts are better than others, and Paul encourages the Corinthians to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (v. 31). But even if they get better gifts, how are they to use them? He explains: “And now I will show you the most excellent way.”

This superior pathway, he says in chapter 13, is the way of love. Love is not a gift that some people have and others don't—it is the way in which *all* gifts should be used. This is what the Corinthians needed most. Indeed, without love, all the other gifts were pointless.

Without love, we are nothing (verses 1-3)

Paul begins with the spiritual gift that the Corinthians valued the most: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” No matter how special the words are, if they aren't helping anyone, they are just noise.

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” Eloquent preaching, deep wisdom and strong faith are

all wasted if they are not being used to help others.

“If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Even great sacrifices, if done for selfish purposes, fail to do anything for us. Selfish actions, no matter how good they appear on the outside, do not improve our standing in the eyes of God.

A description of love (verses 4-8)

Real love is not proven through spectacular performances. Rather, it is demonstrated in much smaller things we do in everyday life: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”

This is a description of God himself, and this is the life that the Father, Son, and Spirit enjoy with one another. This is the life God wants us to enjoy forever—and the life he wants us to have now, as well.

Love “is not rude,” Paul says. “It is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” God encourages us to participate in this life now: freed of selfishness, fits of anger and grudges.

The reason that God wants us to live this way is because this is the way God already is. He does not keep a record of wrongs—he has already forgiven us for everything we've done. He does not tell us to do something he has not already done himself.

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” Unfortunately, *we* often fail. Paul is describing a way that we, of ourselves, cannot achieve. But Christ in us has already achieved it, and God wants us to participate with Christ in his perfect life by trusting him and letting him live in us. **co**



The Greeks Had a Word for It

ἀγάπη

Ancient Greek had several words for love: *erōs* for erotic love, *phīlos* for love between equals, *storgē* for the love of parents and children, and *agapē*. Although the verb form of *agapē* was common, often as a synonym for other types of love, the noun was rare.

This changed when Jews in Alexandria translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. They preferred the word *agapē*, and by using it to describe God's love for his people, they gave it a more distinctive meaning. It was associated with the goodwill and generosity of a person in power toward one without power. It was a love that was freely given, without expecting things in return

except for gratitude and loyalty.

When the New Testament was written, *agapē* was again chosen to describe the kind of love that God has for his people, and the kind of love that he wants his people to have toward one another: a love that is freely given, whether or not the other person is able to give any favors in return. Because it never keeps track of failures, it is a love that never ceases to be given.

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Hmm...

Since total conformity to the moral law is something that has *never* shown any sign of arriving soon, God has decided not to count on it as a means for finally cleaning up the mess we have made. *While we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us. He has taken the cleanup entirely into his own hands. He has just gone and done it without waiting for us; and he invites us to simply trust that he has it all accomplished for us in Jesus—and to proclaim that trust by acting as if we really believed it.

Robert Capon

That same Christ event signals unequivocally that Christians need not fear the wrath of God at the end of the age—indeed, far from it. A God who is prepared to offer up his son to suffer and die in order to effect atonement for sinful humanity—*free* atonement no less!—is clearly utterly benevolent. This is a God of love, not a God of punishment. If anything, then, this God will defend the hapless Christian against accusations issuing from any other actor, whether human or superhuman! (And if God is on your side, who can really stand against you?)

Douglas Campbell
The Deliverance of God, 608

Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.

Dalai Lama

This is the “wonderful exchange” by which Christ takes what is ours (our broken lives and unworthy prayers), sanctifies them, offers them without spot or wrinkle to the Father, and gives them back to us, that we might “feed” upon him in thanksgiving. He takes our prayers and makes them his prayers, and he makes his prayers our prayers, and we know our prayers are heard “for Jesus’ sake.” This is life in the Spirit, worship understood in terms of *solo gratia* [grace alone]. This is

the Trinitarian nature of all true worship and communion.

James B. Torrance
Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace, 15

Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man; earth is the creation conceivable to him.

Karl Barth
Dogmatics in Outline, 61

Where law rules, one is preoccupied with his own behavior, while grace causes us to be preoccupied with Jesus.

Steve McVey
Grace Rules

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Life is neither good nor evil; but only a place for good or evil.

Marcus Aurelius

Don’t count the days; make the days count.

Mohammad Ali

Our hope for salvation does not lie in the fact that we hold on to God’s hand, as if our decision and act were the principal part of the economy of hope. Rather, our hope for salvation lies primarily in the fact that God’s hand in the humanity of Jesus Christ has already reached out for, found and held fast to our hand.

Andrew Purves
The Resurrection of Ministry, 133

The only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little farther down our particular path than we have yet got ourselves.

E. M. Forster

Intimacy between friends involves a non-dominant love, as well as vulnerability. With a true friend we can share the deepest places

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of our hearts, the dark as well as the light. I have friends whose secrets will go to the grave with me, as mine with them. We listen, we share, we laugh, we accept. We seldom give advice, and when we do, it is for love, not power. We play together, and this is a special delight for me in my mid-seventies, to have friends with whom I can play with the enthusiasm and wholeheartedness of a child.

A friend said to me, “Madeleine, you should see your face when you play Ping-Pong.”

I looked at her questioninglly.

“You look just like a child.”

Madeleine L’Engle
Penguins and Golden Calves, 24