

Christian Odyssey

VOL. I, NO. 3

Exploring Life and Faith

MARCH 2005

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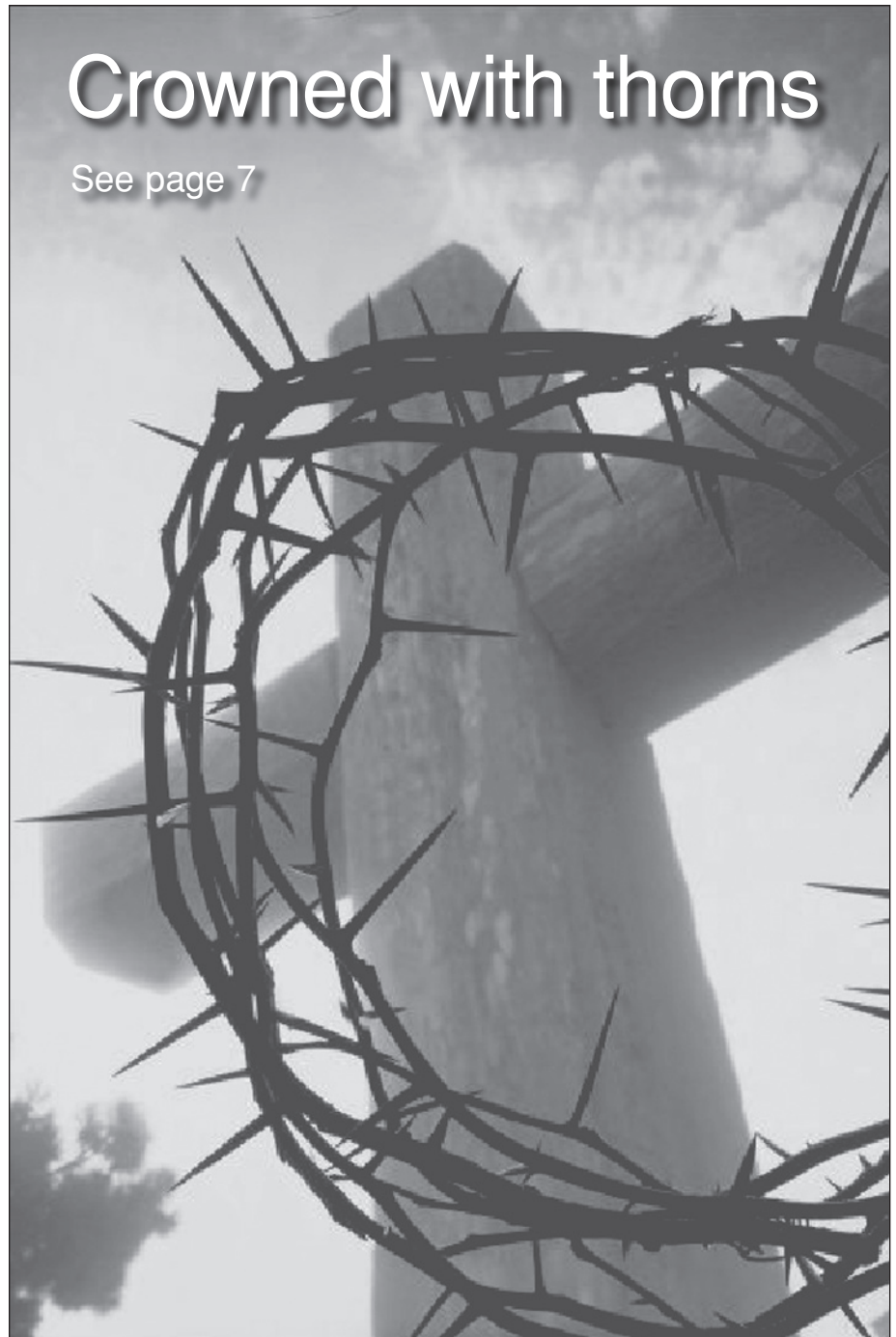
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Christian Odyssey
Box 111
Pasadena, California, 91123

Christian Odyssey

Circulation 16,000

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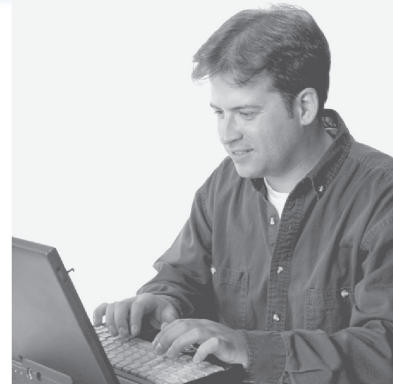
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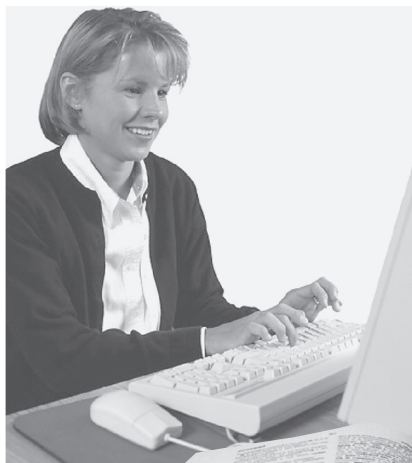
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Resurrection and ascension: What it means to be ‘in Christ’

By Neil Earle

“In Christ.” It’s a phrase we’ve all heard. Albert Schweitzer called “being-in-Christ” the prime enigma of the apostle Paul’s teaching.

Schweitzer was one of the most outstanding Germans of the 20th century, a theologian, musician and great missionary doctor. He won the Nobel Peace prize in 1952. In his 1931 book, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Schweitzer made the point that other religions, prophets, soothsayers and philosophers seek after “God” in some form or another.

But Schweitzer saw that for Paul, the Christian hope and daily living was more specifically and surely focused—it is new life in Christ. Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” at least 12 times in his letters. A good example is 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”

Schweitzer was not an orthodox Christian at the end of the day, but few people evoked the Christlike spirit more powerfully.

Schweitzer summarized Paul’s thoughts on this subject: “For him [Paul], believers are redeemed by entering already, through the union with Christ, by means of a mystical dying and rising again with him during the continuance of the natural world-era into a supernatural state of existence, this state being that which they are to possess in the kingdom of God.

“Through Christ we are removed out of this world and transferred into the state of existence proper to the kingdom of God, notwithstanding the fact that it has not yet appeared” (*The Mysticism of*



Paul the Apostle, page 380).

Note how Schweitzer shows Paul to have kept the two aspects of Christ’s coming held together in an end-time tension—kingdom living now and full kingdom life yet to come.

But how does all this really work, and how does it fit in with the most important event in human history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

The heavenly realms already?

For starters, the mystical theme is a vital key to understand such powerful passages as Romans 6:1-5: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will also be united with him in his resurrection.... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

This is classic Paul. For him the resurrection was the hinge doctrine of Christianity. Not only were Christians symbolically buried with Christ in baptism, but they were symbolically raised with him as well. Only it goes a bit deeper than mere symbolism. There is a hard bite of ultimate reality to this exalted theologizing.

Note how Paul develops this theme further in Ephesians 2:6: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses—it is by grace you have been saved. And

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

How could this be? Paul is not speaking here literally and physically, he is speaking somewhat metaphorically. He tells us that through God’s saving power demonstrated in Christ’s resurrection we already enjoy participation through the Holy Spirit in the heavenly realms where God and Christ dwell.


This is one of the benefits of life “in Christ” and his resurrection and ascension. Being “in Christ” makes all this possible.

The resurrection factor

Once again we have to stand in awe of the multitudinous dynamics flowing from the resurrection of our Lord and Christ, knowing it was not just the greatest event in history but also a vital guiding principle for everything the believer can hope and expect here below.

“In Christ” is a phrase that penetrates deeper than mere symbol or analogy. It links up with the other phrase, “seated in the heavenly realms.”

Note the rich expositions of Ephesians 2:6 from some expert commentators. Here is Max Turner in *The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Version*: “To say we have been made alive with Christ appears to be shorthand for saying ‘we shall be resurrected with Christ to new-creation life,’ and we may speak of that as though it were an already accomplished event because first, the decisive event of [Christ’s] resurrection lies in the past and secondly, we already begin to participate in as-

See In Christ, page 6 

He's Alive!

Did it really happen? The question is far more than academic. Because if Jesus Christ really died on a Roman cross and was raised again to life, it changes everything.

By Mike Feazell

It's funny how we sometimes believe things that don't make sense or that have no supporting evidence whatever. Conspiracy theories abound today. The tabloids do a multimillion-dollar business tantalizing believing readers with a steady diet of the sensational, if not the ridiculous.

You've seen the headlines: Elvis is still alive. JFK was abducted by aliens. Hitler is living in Argentina. Miners discover an opening to hell. Half alligator, half human baby. World to end in 2005.

And then there are the facts we simply take for granted in our modern scientific world: The world is a sphere, not flat like a pancake. The earth revolves around the sun, not vice versa. A virus causes measles. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address on the back of an envelope.

Most of us believe these things, not because we have personally proven them, but because we trust the authorities who tell us they are true. We use the phone; who invented it doesn't really matter to us. We go to the doctor when we get sick; it doesn't matter to us who discovered a given vaccine.

And we can enjoy a beautiful sunset without giving much thought to planetary dynamics.

We live in a world of facts, but most of the facts we know have little, if anything, to do with who we are and how we choose to live.

The resurrection of Jesus is different. It may be easy to believe Jesus was raised as though it were just another fact for a history exam. But this fact is not like other facts. It changes everything.

If Jesus Christ really was raised from the dead, then he is far more than just another great figure in history. He is who he claimed to be—the Son of God. And if that's so, then he, and everything he said, has to be taken seriously.

The resurrection of Jesus stands at the heart of Christian faith. We believe in Jesus because Jesus did not stay dead. He told his disciples he would be raised on the third day after his crucifixion—and he was!

The fact of his resurrection verified his claims: He was indeed the Son of God. And it verified that God had acted decisively to deal with human sin.

Celebrate!

If there is any one characteristic that is universal among Christians of all denominational stripes, it is celebration of the death and resur-

rection of Jesus. The celebration may occur in a variety of ways, but ever since that first Sunday morning when the tomb was found empty, Christians have remembered. And it's much more than memory. It's participation.

On the night before he was betrayed and arrested for trial and crucifixion, Jesus ate his final meal with his disciples. As he blessed and broke the ritual bread, he told his disciples, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

As he lifted and blessed the cup of ritual wine, he told them: "Drink from it, all of

you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28).

Jesus died for you and me. And on the third day, he destroyed the power of sin and death. In him we possess the greatest hope imaginable.

There is rich meaning in this simple ceremony we call the Lord's Supper (Jesus' final meal), Communion (communion with God through Christ and with fellow believers) or Eucharist (thanksgiving). Paul wrote: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

When we eat and drink the bread and wine (or grape juice) of the Lord's Supper, something wonderful, yet incomprehensible, is going on. A communion with God is

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taking place, and through Christ, a communion with all believers. Through this command of Jesus to eat his flesh and drink his blood, we are not only kept in memory of what God has done for us, we are also brought together, united by faith, into an intimate relationship with God and into his presence in a special way.

raised to life, and through him, we, too, are raised to a bold and fresh and glorious new life—eternal life.

Life of the age to come

We often think of eternal life as something God will give us in the future. But the fact is, Jesus said that those who believe in him, those who eat his flesh and

—is something we entered the moment we became believers.

Eternal life might be easier to understand when we realize that the Greek words John used in quoting Jesus, *aiōnios zoe*, are literally translated, “the life of the age to come.”

When we became believers, we passed from death to life. We entered into the new life, the life of the age to come. That life, which is a life of joy and self-sacrificial love in the power of God, will fill all the universe after Jesus returns. And it has already begun in his believers.

Because he lives

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

Greater words of comfort have never been spoken! It doesn’t matter how far from God we have been. It doesn’t matter how dark and vile our sins have been. When we believe the word of God, the good news that God is redeeming sinners through his Son, God forgives us, accepts us and gives us fresh, new life in his eternal kingdom.

We have it on the highest authority, the very highest, that on the day of judgment we will not be condemned. Jesus says believers have already crossed the great divide separating death from life, and because he lives we are now on the side of life!

The kingdom of heaven has already begun!
See He’s Alive!, page 6

“That church, armed with such an improbable claim and beginning from a handful of uneducated fishermen and tax gatherers, swept across the whole known world in the next three hundred years. It is a perfectly amazing story of peaceful revolution that has no parallel in the history of the world. It came about because Christians were able to say to inquirers: ‘Jesus did not only die for you. He is alive! You can meet Him and discover for yourself the reality we are talking about!’ They did and joined the church. And the church, born from that Easter grave, spread everywhere.”

Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, Nelson, 1992

Out of slavery

We humans know about slavery to sin. We know the invisible, yet humanly invincible, chains that bind us in self-destructive habits and cravings. We know about the pride, the personal walls, the ego defenses, the crippling envy, the resentment, the greed, the burning lust. We know the powerlessness, the failure, the frustration, the depression. We know the loneliness, the isolation, the fear. And we know about the end of it all—the separation we call death.

God, who loves us, knows it too. That’s why he sent his one and only Son, who, without sin, subjected himself to the cruel and unrelenting environment of our sin-darkened world.

God’s love is why Jesus took our broken condition on himself, yet without sin, walked in our shoes and suffered, even to death, at the ignorant and violent hands of us sinners.

But for Jesus, death was not the end of the story. And because of Jesus, it’s not the end of the story for you and me either. Jesus was

drink his blood, have already entered into eternal life. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). Being raised up at the last day is something promised to those who already possess eternal life!

Maybe we tend to limit our concept of eternal life to the future because the words *eternal life* sound like something we don’t yet have. After all, we are still mortal, and we know we are going to die before we receive immortality. But eternal life and immortality are not the same thing. Immortality refers to our physical bodies. At the resurrection, our mortal bodies will be changed to immortal. But eternal life—or the life of the age to come

“Jesus’ resurrection was instantly recognized as the firstfruits of general resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18). Jesus was regarded as the first born from the dead, the one through whom the believing community learned to look for the final coming of the kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the apocalyptic hope.”

Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life*, Harper and Row, 1989

“There is no justification for reducing the meaning of ‘the resurrection of Jesus’ to something like, ‘the continuing significance of Jesus,’ or ‘the disciples’ realization that Jesus’ message could not die.’ By ‘resurrection’ they clearly meant that something had happened to Jesus himself. God had raised him, not merely reassured them. He was alive again, made alive again with the life which is the climax of God’s purpose for human-kind, not merely retrieved from the jaws of death but conqueror over death, ‘exalted to God’s right hand.’ It was this glowing conviction which lay at the heart of the chain reaction which began Christianity.”

James D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, The Westminster Press, 1985

He’s Alive!

Continued from page 4

ready begun to show itself in the world in the lives of those who have entered it. Not perfectly. In fact, sometimes we make a rather rotten show of it. Sometimes we drop our cross, or maybe even throw it down, but Christ in us always moves us to pick it up again and follow on. The fact is, now we are

his, and he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

The crux of our faith


Our Christian faith and hope are based squarely and entirely on the

“Through the cross, God meets us in our lostness and finds us, setting us on the road which leads home—a road on which Christ has gone before us, blazing a trail in which we may follow, knowing that by doing so, we pass from death to eternal life.”

Alister McGrath, *Understanding Jesus*, Zondervan, 1987

fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. On that central truth hangs everything we believe and for which we stand in earnest hope. Because he lives, we live too!

That’s why the Easter season is so important to us. It’s a time of reflection. It’s a time of self-evaluation. It’s a time of recommitment and rededication. And above all, it’s a time of thanksgiving and joy in the unsearchable riches of the grace of God! He died for you and me. And on the third day, he destroyed the power of sin and death. In him, we, together with all the saints, even as we tread the path of the cross, possess the greatest hope imaginable.

Praise God! He’s alive! 

In Christ

Continued from page 3

pects of that new-creation life in our present union with him” (page 1229).

We are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit of course.

Note Francis Foulkes’ comments on Ephesians 2:6 in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*: “In Ephesians 1:3 the apostle has said that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Now he says more specifically that our life has come to be there, enthroned with Christ.... Humanity, by virtue of Christ’s conquest of sin and death and by his exaltation, is lifted ‘from the deepest hell to heaven itself’ (Calvin). Citizenship is now

in heaven (Phil. 3:20); and there, and not under the limits imposed by the world ... true life is found” (page 82).

Notice John Stott’s remarks on Ephesians 2:6 in his book, *The Message of Ephesians*: “What excites our amazement, however, is that now Paul is not writing about Christ but about us. He is affirming not that God quickened, raised and seated Christ, but that he quickened, raised and seated us with Christ.... Fundamental to New Testament Christianity is this concept of the union of God’s people with Christ. [They possess] new solidarity as a people who are ‘in Christ.’ By virtue of their union with Christ they have actually shared in his resurrection, ascension, and session.”

By “session” here Stott refers theologically to the present reign of

Christ over all creation. Nor, says Stott, is all this talk of our reigning with Christ a piece of “meaningless Christian mysticism.” It is instead a meaningful piece of Christian mysticism that goes even beyond that.

Stott adds: “In the ‘heavenly places,’ the unseen world of spiritual reality, in which the principalities and powers operate (3:10; 6:12) and in which Christ reigns supreme (1:20), there God has blessed his people in Christ (1:3), and there he has seated them with Christ.... It bears witness to a living experience, that Christ has given us on the one hand a new life and on the other a new victory. We were dead, but have been made spiritually alive and alert. We were in captivity, but have been enthroned.”

Max Turner is right. There is more than mere symbolism here.

See *In Christ*, page 11 

Crowned with thorns

By Joseph Tkach

When Jesus was on trial for his life, the soldiers twisted thorns into a makeshift crown and jammed it on his head (John 19:2). They hung a purple robe on him and ridiculed him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews,” while they punched and kicked him.

The soldiers did it to amuse themselves, but the Gospels include this as a significant part of Jesus’ trial. I suspect that they include it because it has an ironic truth—Jesus is the king, and yet his rule would be preceded by rejection, ridicule and suffering. He has a crown of thorns because he is the ruler



of a world filled with pain, and as the king of this corrupt world, he established his right to rule by experiencing pain himself. He was crowned (given authority) with thorns (only through great pain).

Meaning for us, too

The crown of thorns has meaning for our lives, too—it is not just part of a movie scene in which we are overwhelmed with the suffering that Jesus went through to be our Savior. Jesus said that if we want to follow him, we must take up our cross each day—and he could just as easily have said that we must experience a crown of thorns. We are joined to Jesus in the crucible of suffering.

The crown of thorns has meaning for Jesus, and it has meaning for every individual who follows Jesus. As Genesis describes it, Adam and Eve rejected God and chose to experience for themselves evil as well as good.

There is nothing wrong with knowing the difference between good and evil—but there is much wrong with experiencing evil, because that is a path of thorns, a path of suffering. When Jesus came proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom God, it is no surprise that humanity, still alienated from God, rejected him and expressed it with thorns and death.

Jesus embraced that re-



jection—accepted the crown of thorns—as part of his bitter cup of enduring what humans endure, so that he could open the door for us to escape with him from this world of tears. In this world, governments jam thorns on the citizens. And in this world, Jesus suffered whatever they wanted to do with him so that he could redeem us all from this world of ungodliness and thorns.

The world to come will be ruled by the human who has overcome the way of thorns—and those who give their allegiance to him will take their place in the government of his new creation.

We all experience our crowns of thorns. We all have our crosses to bear. We all live in this fallen world and take part in its pain and sorrow. But the crown of thorns and the cross of death have met their match in Jesus, who bids: “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). 🦋



Jesus embraced rejection—accepted the crown of thorns—as part of his bitter cup of enduring what humans endure, so that he could open the door for us to escape with him from this world of tears.

Building believing children

By Ted Johnston

The Holy Spirit helps believers grow as disciples of Jesus who are becoming more and more like their Master. This includes believing children. As youth ministry workers, leaders and parents, our role is to serve with the Spirit in this vital process.

Love and instruction

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, Paul compares his discipling work to that of parents with a child. Love is expressed toward the child (gentle care from the mother and encouragement and comfort from the father). In the context of that love is clear instruction (referred to as both sharing the gospel and urging godly living).

In this passage we see the environment and the content of the discipling process. The environment, characterized by care, encouragement and comfort, is the positive relationship between the discipler and the disciple. The content of the process is instruction—the imparting of life-giving knowledge through teaching and training.

Following this biblical model, our goal in ministry to children is to provide Christ-centered, gospel-oriented instruction in the context of a positive, loving relationship. Without the positive relationship, the instruction will not have a lasting impact. And without the instruction, even the best relationships can be devoid of meaning.



Tailor instruction

It's essential that we tailor our instruction of children to their level of emotional, social, mental and spiritual development.

In that regard, the work of child psychologists can be helpful. For example, Jean Piaget observed that children tend to develop morally according to the following predictable stages.

Stage One: Pre-moral. At this stage, the child obeys in response to the command of a respected adult. Though the duty to obey is felt deeply, it does not emanate from within the child.



Stage Two: Heteronomy (4 to 8 years old). Literal obedience to the law is all-important at this stage. Heteronomy is a form of moral realism in that acts are evaluated in terms of disobedience to the law without regard for intent or motive.


Stage Three: Autonomy (8 to

12 years old). Reciprocity or mutual respect is the key in this stage. Justice is dominant, with intent or motive rather than law the determining factors. The influence of interpersonal relationships in moral development is vividly demonstrated in this stage.

The chart on page 9 distills the work of Piaget and other child psychologists and education specialists to provide information we can use in choosing instructional curricula and in guiding us in their use. (Note: the chart is adapted with permission from Group Publishing, Inc.; Hands-On Bible Curriculum, Teachers Guide, fall 1994.

Group Publishing, Inc., Box 481, Loveland, Colorado, 80539).

Wise (and effective) teachers and parents are careful to use methods of instruction that are in sync with these developmental issues. Don't be discouraged—you don't have to be a child psychologist to be an effective instructor of children—but you do need to care about children and be sensitive to their abilities and needs.

Our goal in all this is to help children in age-appropriate ways to experience Christ and to learn about him and his way. Because children develop the way they do, young children in particular learn more through experience than through verbal instruction. But words of instruction are important, too, because such words give children an internal language with which they can talk to themselves and thus comprehend these experiences. 

Stages of development in children

Grade (age)	Emotional development	Social development	Mental (cognitive development)	Spiritual development
preschool/ (3-4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● generally happy ● influenced by the reactions of other youths ● sensitive to the moods and reactions of adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● generally play with same sex ● prefer short group experiences ● use language in dramatic play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● can recall some facts and events ● can memorize stories, songs or finger plays ● ask lots of questions ● have an attention span of no longer than 10 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● hear and enjoy Bible stories ● recognize own church: develop sense of belonging at church ● understand that prayer is talking to God; pray simple, spontaneous prayers
preschool/ kindergarten (4-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● proud of their accomplishments ● have their feelings hurt easily ● beginning to gain self-confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● learning to share and cooperate ● can understand and follow rules ● enjoy extensive dramatic play ● eager to please teachers and parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● can listen to and create stories ● can distinguish between real and pretend ● need simple directions—understand one step at a time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● understand that God made them ● trust that God loves them ● beginning to develop a sense of conscience
first and second graders (6-8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● express feelings with physical action ● crave individual attention and affirmation ● are self-centered; each wants to be first ● feeling capable is directly related to self-esteem ● want everything to be fair; black-and-white sense of justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● usually prefer to stick to same-sex friendships ● thrive on organized games and group activities ● want to please teachers but are beginning to recognize their role in relation to their peers ● want to win and always be first; have a strong sense of competition with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● interested in concrete learning experiences such as dramatizations and rhythms ● have a limited concept of time and space; interested in the present but not past and future ● yearn for competence in developing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● understand God's love and God's world through personal experience ● don't comprehend the spiritual nature of God; think of God as a giant/magician/invisible man ● don't comprehend the Bible's chronology except that the Old Testament comes before the New ● have a literal and concrete understanding of Bible stories and biblical truths; don't comprehend abstract ideas
third and fourth graders (8-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● feelings may be hurt easily ● sensitive to praise and criticism from adults ● developing ability to empathize with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● want to be a part of a group ● enjoy extended group projects ● able to accept limited constructive criticism ● naturally avoid interaction with the opposite sex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● most can read well ● like to be challenged but don't like to fail ● need to feel independent; don't always want help from teachers ● understand cause and effect; like to arrange and organize information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● able to accept that there are some things about God we don't understand ● ready to relate individual Bible events to the scope of Bible history ● recognize the difference between right and wrong; able to make deliberate choices about actions
fifth and sixth graders (10-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● get mixed messages about being mature and accepting responsibility for choices/actions ● possible strong fears about losing parents, abandonment, rejection by friends, being a victim of violence or becoming ill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● spend a lot of time with one best friend ● usually prefer to stick to same-sex friendships ● thrive on organized games and group activities ● strongly influenced by heroes and role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● well-developed critical-thinking and problem-solving skills ● beginning to question authority figures; prefer to reason things through for themselves ● interested in how past and present world events affect their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● want everything to be fair ● want to test what they have been taught about God against their own experiences ● able to make choices about finding God's will and following it



Exclusive interview with

Robert Farrar Capon, author of *Genesis: the Movie*

Part Three Grace

Tim Brassell: Can a pastor take grace too far?

Robert Capon: No. A pastor can't take grace too far. That is, not unless he claims that sin doesn't matter. If he claims that, he's abusing grace, because sin does matter. It matters to *me*, the sinner. It matters whether I leave myself stuck in it.

Suppose a mother has a kid who comes in all muddy. She just washes off the mud. She loves her child and doesn't wait to see whether the kid decides if he wants to live with mud all over him. She just washes it off. And if she is a faithful, true mother, she will continually take that mud into herself and say, "Well, this is my son, and I will stick with him."

TB: Mothers are like that.

RC: Yes. The point is that sin is mud. It's a cover-up or cover-over of your true being as a person. And Jesus has washed it away. He's erased the sins. He's washed them away.

Not all churches practice infant baptism, but infant baptism is a wonderful testament to absolute grace. It says, "It's done." It doesn't say, after this if you do something, *then* you'll be OK. It says, "You're OK *now*," not because you did something or thought something or

figured something out, but you're OK now because Jesus says so.

It isn't religion that makes you OK with God, it's God who does it. The sacraments are not religion. They do not cause something to happen. You don't change the wine in the Eucharist into the blood of Christ, the presence of Christ. You just put up a sign in which you say, he is present in this sign as he is present in all things, including me.

For example, a priest in my jurisdiction holds up the bread and wine before communion and says, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." That means that the whole world is changed, changed by Christ.

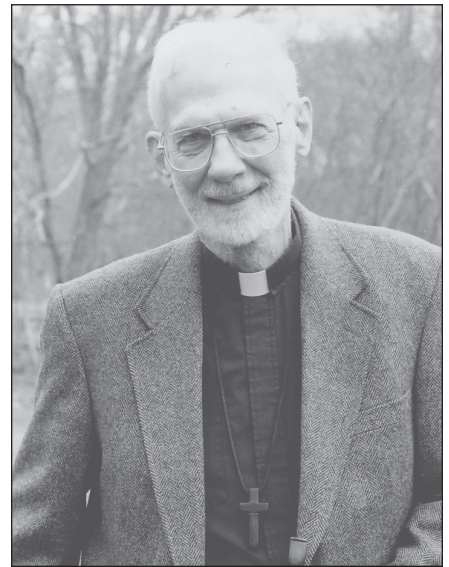


Tim Brassell

TB: Some people say that if you preach grace a lot, people will get the idea that they can go ahead and sin all they want and still be saved. What would you say about that?

RC: First of all, I would say they're perfectly free to sin all they want whether you give them permission or not. But the thing that they are not free to achieve on their own is their own forgiveness, and that is what is already done. They simply have to accept that in Jesus, God has forgiven their sins.

Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. The incarnation has been in the works from the beginning. The incarnation is from the foundation of the world—no, before the foundation of the world. The incarnation



Robert F. Capon

is not an afterthought. God didn't say, "Uh-oh, I've got to do something now," after Adam and Eve ate from the tree. The incarnation is built into the fabric of the creation from before time began. So after sin came into the picture, history simply becomes the restoration of the human race to God in Christ.

It's all that and also the results of paying no attention to that restoration. You can't experience what you don't pay attention to. What's the first argument that happens after the fall?

TB: Cain and Abel. They argued over religion.

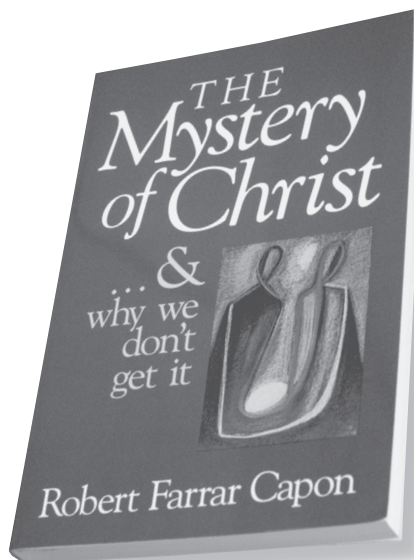
RC: Exactly. My god likes my sacrifice better than your god likes your sacrifice (laughter). Adam and Eve exit the garden, and the angel guards the way to the tree of life with a flam-

ing sword, so this brilliant idea that *we* will be like god blows up in their faces. And of course, the only thing that could mean is that even though they couldn't make themselves god, they *could* turn God into a copy of themselves.

TB: God in their own image?

RC: Yes. First comes the idea that we will be like God, and then the next disaster is to make God like ourselves.

The basis of classic orthodoxy, with all its faults, is that it does say it's all done. It does give you the doctrine of the Trinity. Pure monotheism is dangerous. The doctrine of the Trinity embraces the paradox of mutuality in God himself without violating the unity



of God—because it can only be presented as a *paradox* and a *mystery*.

Paradox can take you on trips that religion can't even buy a tick-

et for. God is who God is, who he reveals himself to be, not something we can reason out or come up with by some kind of logic. And from before the foundation of the world, God is both Creator and Redeemer. The incarnation of the Word stands under and upholds everything, which means we can pay attention to the restoration that is already a reality for us. 🦋

Robert Capon Books

Autographed copies of Robert Farrar Capon's books are available from the author by clicking on the Amazon.com "used and new" button and going to seller "quietchina" for your purchase.

In Christ

Continued from page 6

What Paul is explaining is the implication of our new life in Christ.

The practical implications

First of all, Christians are "as good as there," in reference to their salvation. Christians who are "in Christ" have been "covered" by Christ. They take on his death, burial, resurrection and ascension and can be said to be already in some sense living with him in the heavenly places.

This teaching was not meant to be an idealistic teaser. It was originally written to Christians living in dire straits in the corrupt cities they inhabited, cities without the civil and political rights we often take for granted. Death from the Roman sword was a grave possibility to Paul's readers, even more so when we consider that most people at the time lived to be only about 40 or 45 years old.

Thus Paul lifts his reader's spirits with a further thinking out of

the core doctrine and distinctive of the new faith—the resurrection of Christ. Being "in Christ" means that when God looks at us he does not see our sins. He sees Christ. There is no more encouraging teaching than that. This is reemphasized in Colossians 3:3: "For you died and life is now hidden with God in Christ."

Secondly, being "in Christ" means Christians live in two different realms—the physical world of everyday reality and what Stott calls the "unseen world" of spiritual reality. This has implications for the way we view this world. We are to live balanced lives. We bear primary allegiance to the kingdom of God and its values on the one hand but, on the other, are not to be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. It's a tightrope and every Christian needs help from God to walk it securely.

Thirdly, being "in Christ" means we are trophies of God's grace. If God has done all this for us, has in some senses already inducted us into the heavenly realms, then that means we are to live as ambassadors for Christ.

Francis Foulkes puts it this way: "The purpose of God for his church, as Paul came to understand it, reaches beyond itself, beyond the salvation, the enlightenment and the re-creation of individuals, beyond its unity and fellowship, beyond even its witness to the world. The church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom and love and grace of God in Christ" (page 82).

How true. Being "in Christ," being given new life in Christ, having our sins hidden to God through Christ—all this means we are to exhibit the Christlike life to the people we meet. We Christians may march to a different drummer, but we have a Christlike concern for the people who share physical life with us.

God has displayed his resurrection power to us to be a daily demonstration of God's goodness, to show by our good works that he exists and that he cares mightily for every person on this globe. Christ's resurrection and ascension powerfully affects our worldview. The challenge before us is to live up to this high calling 24 hours a day. 🦋

The gospel according to Sam

By John Halford

Some people help you understand what the gospel is all about. They cut through all our theological bickering, personality conflicts and denominational rivalries and inhibitions. They do things that show us what Jesus really meant by what he said.

They are people like the widow in the Temple who donated “all her substance” to the offering. Or the thief on the cross who just wanted to be forgiven. Or the worried father who asked if Jesus could heal his child in spite of his own unbelief. And like Sam Howard.

Sam is a middle-aged African American man who has spent nearly two decades on death row in Ely State Prison in Nevada. My wife, Pat, and I have known Sam for about half of that time.

Grim surroundings

Sam is incarcerated in Ely Maximum Security Prison, a grim fortress of concrete and razor wire in the moonscape of central Nevada. As we wait for him in the windowless, no nonsense visiting room, it occurs to me that in more than 10 years of knowing Sam, we have not once been able to sit in the open air. The rules are strict—this prison holds some dangerous people. But Sam is no longer one of them.

Several years ago, Sam became a Christian. For him, this was not just the acceptance of a religious argument, or a knee jerk emotional reaction. It meant the repudiation of a whole way of life that had earned him the reputation for being one of the most dangerous inmates in Nevada’s prison system—his nickname was “Nitro.” Today he is a quiet teddy bear of a man, living a life of service and humility in circumstances that



most of us could not tolerate for 24 hours.

Talking with Sam is refreshing. We who are the richest and best educated disciples in history tend to complicate Jesus’ teachings. We have vast resources, but we seem to spend so much time talking, arguing, planning for action, revving our engines on the starting grid, getting our ducks in a row and endlessly analyzing, quantifying, organizing and reorganizing ourselves in our efforts to be lights and preach the word. Sam just gets on with it.

His mission field is literally and spiritually stony ground. Ely Prison is a harsh and unforgiving place, but Sam has found a way to bring compassion, empathy and kindness to an environment where the usual emotions are anger and fear.

‘You good’

The hours we spend together are not spent going round in circles over controversial doctrinal points and theological conundrums. Sam tells us about the people he has helped. Like the deaf, mute young inmate who was the victim of bullying and racial abuse. Sam befriended him, and encouraged him, until eventually the traumatized man stumbled out the words “You good, man.”

“But I’m not good,” says Sam. “I know who to give the credit to.” The gospel for Sam is a 24/7 challenge of living in contrast to what he calls his “situation.” Every day sends opportunities to serve, to share the little that he has, to turn the other cheek and to do good to those who would abuse him.

His “room” on death row has become a place of hope. Mail—vast amounts of it—arrives from all over the world. Even staff members, used to hostility and abuse, know they will get respect and encouragement

from Sam Howard. “I’ve been able to accomplish so much in here,” he tells us, without a trace of vanity.

Until his conversion, everything and everyone Sam trusted in life let him down—his family, his friends and his country. He is an ex-Marine who was sprayed with Agent Orange while on active service in Vietnam. But he bears no grudges. “I made mistakes—it is my fault I am in here,” he says. “And in Jesus I now have a friend who will never betray me.”

We’re his friends too, and we’d like to help. Can we do anything for him? No—he’s fine thank you. Does he need anything? No—he has all he needs, but he promises he will let us know if there is anything. But there hardly ever is.

Sam receives a small disability pension from a veterans association. He tells us how grateful he is for small blessings—a chance to encourage a lonely inmate, a letter or card from one of his many friends, or just a new air mattress to make life a little more comfortable. He never has a bad word for anyone. He is not bitter, resentful or consumed with greed. He has that deep down spiritual peace of mind which, as Paul wrote “transcends all understanding.”

He also reminds me of what the imprisoned Paul said to King Agrippa: “I pray that you and all who are listening may become what I am, except for these chains” (Acts 26:29).

What next?

Sam’s case is under appeal and inching its way oh-so-slowly through the legal system. Most people who know the facts believe there is a strong argument for a retrial. I don’t have the legal expertise to comment on this, and anyway, Sam wouldn’t want me to.

“John,” he says, simply and with See According to Sam, page 13

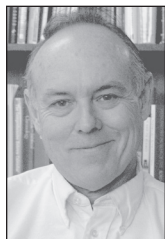
Dogmatics in Outline— Karl Barth

By Terry Akers

Karl Barth (1886-1968) was the most influential theologian of the 20th century.

In 1946, standing in the rubble of Bonn University, Barth (pronounced “Bart”) gave a series of lectures without notes to young German theology students. These lectures, framed by the Apostles’ Creed, were later combined to compose the small book, *Dogmatics in Outline*.

Barth’s monumental *Church Dogmatics*, written over the span of three and a half decades, covers in depth the great doctrines of the Word of God, God, Creation and Reconcili-



ation. He died before writing Volume 5 on Redemption. *Dogmatics in Outline* serves as an excellent introduction to theology and a concise guide to Barth’s mature thought.

These Bonn lectures were intended to help theologians

better articulate the Christian faith and reestablish their spiritual bearings after the catastrophic events of World War II. Before the war, German Protestant theology had fallen into a dangerous liberalism as a result of its compromise with Enlightenment humanism. This condition had become so entrenched that most German theologians endorsed Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. By 1933 the German Evangelical Church had become largely a tool of the Nazi party.

The appalled Karl Barth stood virtually alone in those dark days. He and a few friends wrote the “Barmen Declaration” in 1934 as a Christian statement against Nazism. This cost him his professorship at Bonn. He was later expelled to his native Switzerland for the duration of the war.

The theology contained in these lectures is basic and essential. Christians are to be ready to give an answer for their hope, and this book helps immensely in articulating an accurate and effective response.

American theologian Stanley Hauerwas said, “*Dogmatics in Outline* is Barth’s short, but intense, course in how to speak of God in

a world that has lost the habits of faithful Christian speech.”

By using the essentials of the Apostles’ Creed and filling in with brief sketches of sound orthodox doctrine, Barth cuts a safe middle swath through the dangers of heretical ideas that find acceptance when the church veers too far left or right.

Barth contends that recovering Christian speech is vital—“If we get God wrong, we get everything wrong.” When “Jesus is Lord” is confessed, the world hears the message that it is God, not humans, who

rules the world. We cannot try to fit God into our history, but must realize that God has made us part of his history.

By focusing on the gospel message, Barth’s brief book (155 pages) establishes a sound underpinning to which one can lay a theological anchor. If the gospel is to be effective, the church and each of its members must present it in a clear

and meaningful way that makes it relevant to the hearer.

In this book, as in all good theology, Jesus is consistently the central focus. Error enters when either the divinity or the humanity of Christ is overemphasized. This obscures God’s true nature, and the power of the gospel proclamation is compromised. The message of *Dogmatics in Outline* protects against this by its adherence to the creedal confession that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully human. 🦋



According to Sam

Continued from page 12

conviction, “it does not worry me. God knows what happened. I’d like to be free, but for me it is not the big question. The big questions of my life were answered when I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus as my Savior. Sin is a terrible prison to be in—I am free of that. Whether I live or die is not the critical thing. God has a plan for me and no one can take that away.”

All too soon it’s 2:45—time to go. A phalanx of officers appears to escort the inmates back to their cells. “See you next time,” says Sam cheerfully as we say our good-byes. “Thanks for coming.”

Thank you, Sam. Once again you have reminded us what this way of life we call Christianity is really all about. 🦋

Christian Life

a study of Ephesians 5:1-20

By Michael Morrison

In Ephesians, Paul makes it clear that we are saved by grace, not by our works (Ephesians 2:8). But he makes it equally clear that God has made us and called us so that we do good works (v. 10). In the last half of his letter, he gives some specific exhortations for the kind of behavior that reflects our Christian faith.

At the end of chapter 4, Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians to forgive one another, just as God in Christ had forgiven them (v. 32). We are to pattern our behavior after God himself. Paul states this general principle as he begins chapter 5: **“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”** (vv. 1-2, TNIV throughout).

We should be like our heavenly Father, and the imitation of God is a basic principle of Christian ethics. We do not imitate him in authority, but in humility, because God is revealed to us most clearly in the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the clear example of forgiveness and love that we should follow. When we love others, we are a sacrifice that pleases God (Hebrews 13:16).

A call for purity

Love does not mean promiscuous sex, however: **“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people”**

(Eph. 5:3). Paul does not say what sort of “impurity” he is thinking of. Greed is wrong because, among other things, it is an opposite of love.



Not only should Christians avoid even the hint of immorality, Paul advises, **“Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving”** (v. 4). Obscenities are common in American culture now, but Paul exhorts us to conform to Christ rather than to culture (Romans 12:2). When sin becomes a joke, more people sin. Sex is a gift of God, and it should not be tarnished by referring to it as a joke or as an insult. Our speech should set a good example, and Paul suggests that if you have to say something, say something good. “Thanksgiving is an antidote for sin” (Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, p. 276).

Paul then emphasizes how important this matter is: **“Of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”** (Eph. 5:5). That behavior, and that sort of speech, is contrary to the character of Christ. How can we be scrubbed of such impurities? Through Christ—and having freed us from corruption, Christ wants us not to go back to wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:22).

“Let no one deceive you with empty words,” he warns—let no one tell you that God doesn’t care about such things, **“for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them”** (Eph. 5:7-8). Paul is saying here that God is angry with people who give themselves over to corrupt behavior. Sin hurts people, and since God loves people, he hates sin, and he opposes those who persist in it.

Greed and immorality hurt people, and even though they are common in society today, we should not join in with people who do them. Indeed, we should avoid even the hint of impropriety, such as the dirty jokes. This



We imitate God in humility, because God is revealed to us most clearly in the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

requires a difference in behavior, not physical separation. “We cannot share the gospel if we separate from unbelievers. The light is to shine in the darkness” (Snodgrass, 278).

Children of light

In verses 8-10, Paul uses a figure of speech common in Greek literature: light as the good, as the intelligent choice: **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.”**

You once lived the way the world does, he says, but now you have a different standard—Christ—and in him we are people of light. When we follow him, our lives will be characterized by goodness, righteousness and truth. We need to find out what God wants, and we need to do it.

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret”

(vv. 11-12). Paul again mentions the need for us to keep our speech pure. How do we “expose” wrong behavior? With light—with goodness, righteousness and truth—setting a good example, having good words.

“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light” (v. 13). I suspect a translation problem here, because no matter how much we illuminate a sin, it never becomes a light. However, people can become transformed into lights, and that fits the context: Everyone who is exposed by the light becomes visible, and everyone who is illuminated (that is, transformed by Christ) becomes one of the children of light, who live in Christ.

Paul talks about a personal transformation in the next verse: **“This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’**” (v. 14, source of quote unknown, but perhaps adapted from Isaiah 26:19; 60:1). Here Paul uses resurrection

as a figure of speech for coming to faith in Christ (see Eph. 2:1 for a related figure of speech). In Christ, we rise to a new life—no longer a slave to the deeds of darkness.

Transformed by the Spirit

Since God cares about what we do, Paul advises: **“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as un-**

wise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (vv. 15-16). Immorality and coarse jokes were common in Paul’s world, too, but he calls us to buck the trend and be different. Because sin is so common, we need wisdom in discerning how we should live—we can’t just go along with what everyone else is doing.

“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery” (v. 17). When people are drunk, they are more apt to sin in other ways too. Paul contrasts that with life in the Spirit: **“Instead, be filled with the Spirit”** (v. 18).

Instead of to the misery of debauchery, the Spirit leads us to joy and thanksgiving: **“speaking to one another**

with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 19-20). This is the kind of party we need! 🦋



Giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the kind of party we need!

Questions for discussion

- How realistic is it for us to try to imitate God? (v. 1)
- Would Paul encourage us to use obscene words when we are with people who don’t consider them obscene? (v. 4)
- How should we expose sin? (v. 11)
- How can we understand what the will of the Lord is? (v. 17)
- How do we speak to one another when we sing hymns? (v. 19)

Lectionary Readings for March 2005

Easter falls in March this year, which means that the events of Holy Week also occur in March. It is a sobering time, culminating in a joyous celebration of the resurrection of our Lord.

Lectionary Readings for March 2005

March 6

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

March 13

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45

March 20

Palm Sunday
Isaiah 50:4-9
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 21:1-11

March 24

Maundy Thursday
Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm 116
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31-35

March 25

Good Friday
Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
John 18-19

March 27

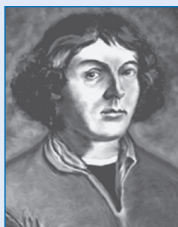
Easter
Jeremiah 31:1-6
Psalm 118
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20 or Matthew 28

Church History Corner

When astronomy became a theological football

Imagine a book on astronomy by a noted scientist being condemned as heretical by a Christian church. This is precisely what happened to *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium (On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres)*, published in March 1543. The publication was written by Polish astronomer-mathematician, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543).

Copernicus merely proposed a heliocentric model of the universe, in which the earth revolves around the sun. He believed that the sun, not the earth, was at the center of the solar system. However, the cosmological theory accepted in Copernicus' day by many European Christians placed the earth at the center of the universe. His contrary proposition, if true, meant that the earth was just one planet among others. This concept opposed the official view of Rome itself. Yet, it took the church 73 years to place the book on the forbidden Index. Why so long?



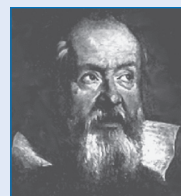
Nicolaus Copernicus

A Lutheran pastor at Nuremberg, Andreas Osiander (1498-1552), wrote a letter to the reader that was inserted in the book as an anonymous preface. Copernicus had no knowledge of it. The preface claimed that Copernicus thought the heliocentric theory described in his book was but an unproven hypothesis.

Ironically, Osiander's unauthorized preface probably saved the book from instant condemnation by the church. *De Revolutionibus* was not placed on the Index of forbidden books until 1616, some 73 years after its publication. The papal decision to censor Copernicus' work was based on a conclusion that a heliocentric claim was contrary to the literal meaning of Scripture. But because *De Revolutionibus* had actually contributed to calendrical reform, it was not proscribed entirely, but would require revision.

Enter Galileo. Galileo Galilei was born in 1564 at Pisa, 21 years after *De Revolutionibus* was published. By 1598, Galileo believed in the truth of the Copernican heliocentric theory, and was teaching it in a public way.

In 1615 Galileo went to Rome to argue the merits of the Copernican theory. But the next year *De Revolutionibus* Galileo Galilei was placed on the Index, and Galileo was warned not to promote its theory as reality. In 1633, Galileo was interrogated under threat of torture and made to recant Copernicus' heliocentric proposition. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, which he spent in house arrest at his home in Arcetri. Galileo died in 1642.



It is a good lesson for us today. We have no need to condemn the work of science by looking for biblical passages to back up our preconceived theological views about how the creation functions.

The Bible is God's self-revelation as Creator and Redeemer of all things, not a science text on how he designed the physical universe. For that sort of knowledge God gives us the joy of research and discovery.