



12

Saying Grace Graciously

What does it mean to "ask a blessing" on your food?



15

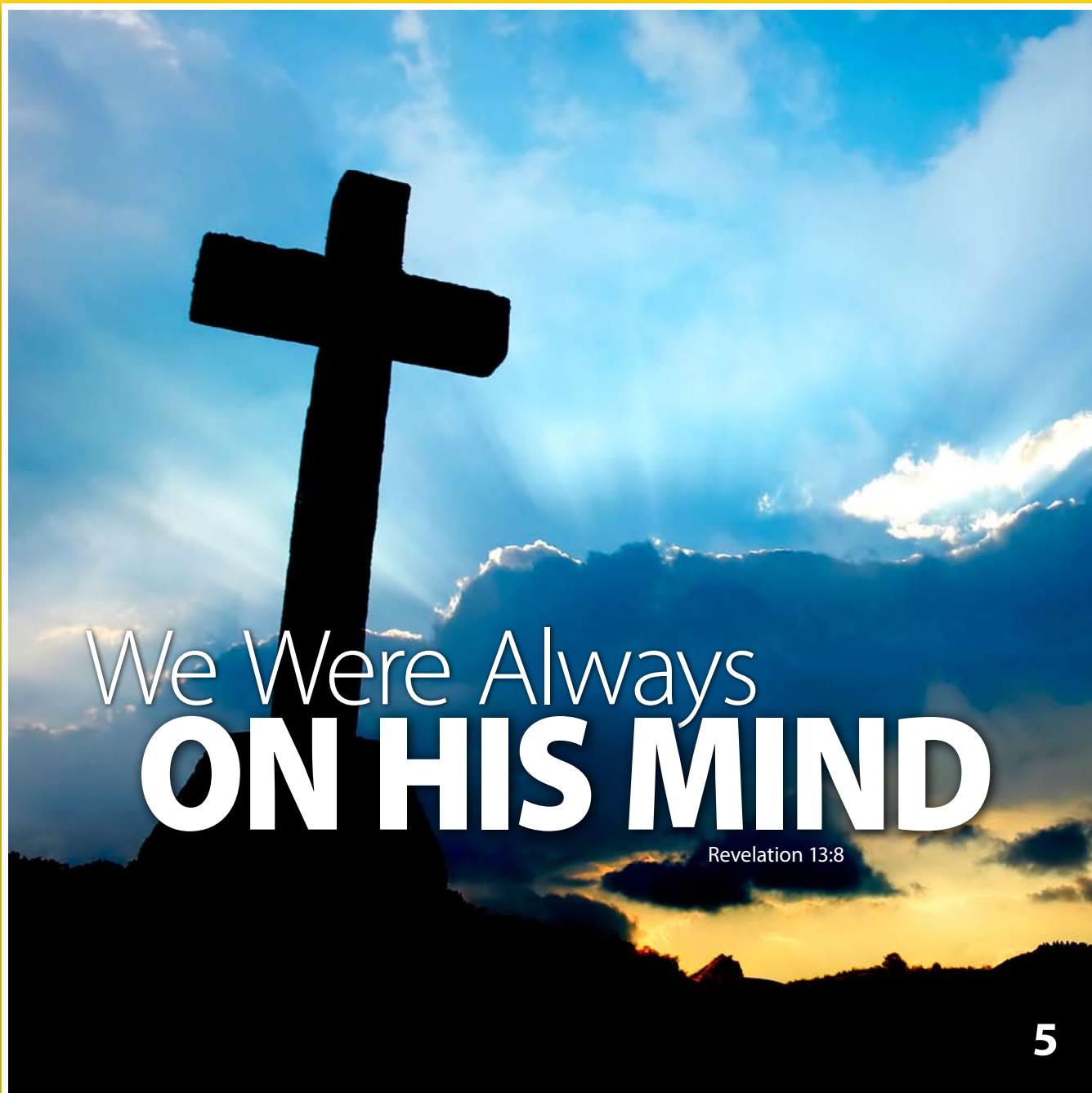
Mid-Life Melancholy

Your life may be half over, but it has only just begun.

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

June/July 2008

Exploring Life and Faith



We Were Always
ON HIS MIND

Revelation 13:8

5

Letters to the Editor

“Sinners in the Arms of a Loving God” article was awesome! I keep recommending it to people. But I couldn’t seem to find who authored it. Was this an oversight? If so, could you let me know who the author was?

LO, California

The author’s by-line was inadvertently left off this article. It was written by Paul Kroll.

I truly enjoy *Odyssey* magazine and appreciate the work you have done towards the spreading of God’s word. I very much enjoyed the article by Mr. William Seymour on the Pentecostal surge in the church today. In regards to speaking in “tongues,” what is the WCG position on this doctrine? It is obviously a significant component in the New Testament Church.

TT, email

We are not a tongues-speaking church

and our worship services do not include tongues-speaking. We neither discourage nor encourage tongues-speaking in private or in small groups where everyone agrees to the practice. For articles about spiritual gifts and tongues-speaking, please go to our website at: www.wcg.org/lit/spiritual_gifts/default.htm

My grateful thanks to the author of the article “Sinners in the Arms of a Loving God.” Not only did it share the truth about the biblical “hell” concept, but also revealed a common hypocrisy held by many people professing Christianity. On the one hand these believers eagerly mouth abundant words of praise, honor and adoration towards a God of love, mercy and forgiveness. Yet deep down inside they also harbor a satanic concept of God as a sadistic

fiend tormenting his detractors forever and ever—a tragic contradiction to which they seem oblivious. Scriptures like 1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9 and Rom. 11:26 give us a heavenly glimpse into God’s plan for the billions who have never embraced Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I believe this understanding of God’s plan for all mankind is a major gift of hope the Worldwide Church of God has been given to share with the world.

JK, email

Letters for this section should be addressed to “Letters to the Editor.” Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-0730, or by e-mail to john.halford@wcg.org.

The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We welcome your comments.

I’ve Been Reading...

Everything Must Change: Global Crisis and Revolution of Hope

by Brian McLaren

Reviewed by Brenda Steffen

My father-in-law often says, “Change is as good as a holiday.” I tend to agree—even something as simple as a change in seasons (especially to the warmer ones) often gives us the same lift as taking a vacation.

But change is also feared. Most of us have a comfort zone we don’t like breached. Even our churches have programs, events and people who make us feel comfortable, and we usually don’t like someone coming in and rocking the boat.

It’s little wonder then, that Brian McLaren’s latest book, *Everything Must Change*, has gotten mixed reviews. It is a bold title, but then, this is a bold book. Like him or not, McLaren has something to say, and chances are, it may crack the barrier to your own comfort zone.

Everything Must Change proposes that our world is operating as a “suicide machine,” spiraling into chaos as a result of our dysfunctional approach to prosperity, equity, security, and spirituality. The author suggests we’ve dug our own grave through warfare, globalization and an economy in which the rich get richer and the poor even poorer.

McLaren asks two main questions: what are the biggest problems in the world, and what does Jesus say about them? These are not questions often asked by any church, and yet shouldn’t they be topics of discussion amongst those of us who follow Jesus—a Jesus who, McLaren suggests, came not just to save us from our sins, but



to teach us how to live with justice, peace, equality and compassion in this world.

I have struggled with many of the issues McLaren faced as he traversed the globe. Through it all, I have ached and still ache for the church to return to “the Way,” as McLaren states—the term used to describe the community of believers in the book of Acts. Those believers had to learn how to share everything with each other and with others, and through their witness of the good

news, they stood in sharp contrast to the negative social issues of their day. Yet it often seems that churches around the world focus more on the style of worship or the size of the building, than on racism, warfare, poverty or the environment.

This book was an overwhelming reminder for me of how messed up our world’s society has become. McLaren’s ideas, however, still seem revolutionary to some people. This is not a feel-good book. Some readers may find his tone patronizing, and even in some instances, heretical. I encourage readers of this book not to get bogged down in one or two points of disagreement, but to read the book in its entirety with a global image in mind and see why McLaren insists that our view of Jesus and our role in society *must* change.

Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*, Thomas Nelson, 2007. 256 pages. \$21.99.

Circulation 17,000

Christian Odyssey (ISSN 1937-500X) is published every other month by the **Worldwide Church of God**, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740; PO Box 202, Burleigh Heads, Qld. 4220, Australia. ABN 53 096 517 190. Copyright © 2008 Worldwide Church of God. All rights reserved. *Christian Odyssey* is also available on the Internet at www.christianodyssey.org. For subscriber services in the U.S., phone 1-800-423-4444. In Australia, 7 5553 6000.

Executive Editor

Mike Feazell

Editor

John Halford

Managing Editor

Michael Morrison

Senior Editor

Paul Kroll

Circulation

Celestine Olive, Scott Wertz

Publisher

Worldwide Church of God

President: Joseph Tkach

Notice: *Christian Odyssey* cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photographs. Subscriptions are sent automatically to contributing members of the Worldwide Church of God.

Postmaster: Please send address changes and Form 3579 to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740-0730.

Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Contributions

Christian Odyssey gratefully accepts contributions to help meet publication costs. If you would like to help us bring the good news of the gospel of grace to others, send your contribution to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740. In Australia, send it to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 202, Burleigh Heads Qld 4220.

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

5 We Were Always on His Mind
God is unchangeably committed to saving you.

8 Free to Be
Why it isn't all about you.

10 It Was OK for Timothy
But you also need someone to help you with your ministry.

12 Develop a Spending Plan With a Virtual Cookie Jar.
Tough economic times are coming. It is time to bring back and old idea.

14 Saying Grace Graciously
What does it mean to "ask a blessing" on your food?

16 Mid-Life Melancholy
Your life may be half over, but it has only just begun.

21 Being Human
Why it isn't all about you.

Feature Articles

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 2 Letters to the Editor | 18 Church History Corner |
| 2 I've Been Reading... | 20 Home Base |
| 4 Editorial | 22 Bible Study |
| 9 In Other Words | 23 The Greeks Had a Word for it |
| 11 Bystander | 24 Hmm... |
| 15 Crossword | |



Don't just accept the Trinity

By John Halford

About 15 years ago, when my denomination was correcting certain longstanding doctrinal errors, I was asked to supervise our churches in Britain. Since we had decided to once again publish the denominational magazine, we applied to take a display stand at the Christian Resources Exhibition. The prestigious CRE is open to all legitimate churches, charities and manufacturers and distributors of religious products.

On the first morning of the conference, a tall, thin, rather severe-looking clergyman made a beeline for us.

"I must say," he said pompously, "that I am surprised to see you people here."

"I don't see why you should be." I answered, "This is the Christian Resources Exhibition and our magazine is a Christian resource. Why shouldn't we be here?"

"Because you're not orthodox," he said imperiously.

"Yes we are," I replied, and reached for a copy of our Statement of Beliefs. I had some on hand, suspecting this objection might come up.

"No you are not," he insisted. "You do not accept the Trinity."



If you have believed something all your life, you probably take it for granted. But when you come to a belief later, you have to think it through carefully.

"Yes we do—read this." Reluctantly he read the relevant paragraph. It seemed to take the wind out of his sails. But only temporarily.

He handed the document back to me, and said, "That is all very well. But do your people *understand* the Trinity?"

"Do yours?" I asked.

"My people" he said, with a rather smug smile, "don't need to understand it, because we never rejected it." Then he stalked off. I think my comments upset him, but his comments made me think.

Most Christians do not give the Trinity a second thought. It is one of the "givens" of their faith. If you have believed something all your life, you probably take it for granted. But when you come to a belief later, you have to think it through carefully. I had

spent many years rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity as an explanation of God's being. It was difficult to abandon my suspicion about it, even though I had to accept that my reasons for rejecting it had no basis in Scripture. I had been taught that it was an idea that had been injected into Christianity by pagans who wanted to distort a true understanding of God. It was humbling to see that, far from trying to hide the truth, the doctrine was formulated in technically-precise theological language by devoted Christian scholars who were striving to combat and eliminate some corrosive ideas that could undermine the role of Jesus as Savior.

Okay, so I could see why Trinitarian theology was a litmus test for being accepted as a "legitimate." But it was a fearfully difficult doctrine to use. I am a practical person, and I find analogies helpful. But I could not come up with the perfect analogy that would clarify things sufficiently to put the Trinity to practical use in preaching and teaching.

As the combatant vicar pointed out, most Christians, including many learned and scholarly theologians, haven't needed to do this. They have just accepted the Trinity as part of the historical backdrop of their faith. In doing so, they may have short-changed themselves. Through the ages, however, some prominent theologians have gone beyond just an acceptance of the doctrine, and asked searching questions about what the tri-unity of God *means*. They realized that the doctrine is more than just a useful barrier erected to keep the faith safe from dangerous heresies. They have seen that it highlights foundational biblical concepts that are very exciting and, indeed, quite important for our Christian faith. These are not new ideas, but they have been somewhat neglected, and as such, they are sometimes looked on with suspicion.

They needn't be, for they pose no threat. What they can do is confront you with the real Jesus of the Bible, who is the perfect revelation of his Father, and show you how knowing the Father, the Son and Spirit can blow fresh air through your faith, removing the stale smell of guilt and fear, and transform your everyday life. We have been exploring these ideas in *Christian Odyssey* and we continue to do so in this issue. We hope you will share our enthusiasm—and see how the good news of the gospel is even more exciting than you may have thought. ☪



We Were Always ON HIS MIND

By Joseph Tkach

The doctrine of the Trinity has been with us for more than 1,600 years. Most Christians consider it to be one of the “givens” of their faith, and don’t give it much thought. Theologian J.I. Packer noted that the Trinity is usually considered a little-thought-about piece of “theological lumber” that no one pays much attention to.¹

But whatever your level of understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, one thing you can know for sure: The Triune God is unchangeably committed to including you in the wonderful fellowship of the life of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

Communion

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are not three Gods, only one, and that God, the only true God, the God of the Bible, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This has always been a concept that is difficult to put into words. But let’s try. The Father, Son and Spirit, we might say, mutually indwell one another, that is, the life they share is perfectly interpenetrating. In other words, there is no such thing as the Father apart from the Son and the Spirit. There is no such thing as the Son

apart from the Father and the Spirit. And there is no Holy Spirit apart from the Father and the Son.

That means that when *you* are in Christ, you are included in the fellowship and joy of the life of the Triune God. It means the Father receives you and has fellowship with you as he does with Jesus. It means that the love that God once and for all demonstrated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is no less than the love the Father has always had for you—even before you were a believer—and always will have for you.

It means that God has declared in Christ that you belong to him—that you are included, that you matter. That’s why the Christian life is all about love—God’s love for you and God’s love in you.

The wonderful and beautiful fellowship shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is the very fellowship of love into which our Savior Jesus places us through his life, death, resurrection and ascension as God in the flesh.

God did not make us to be alone. To be created in God's image, as the Bible says humanity is (Genesis 1:27), is to be created for loving relationships, for communion with God and with one another. The late systematic theologian Colin Gunton put it this way: "God is already 'in advance' of creation, a communion of persons existing in loving relations."²

Mutual indwelling

This union/communion of Father, Son and Spirit was referred to as *perichoresis* by the early Greek fathers of the church. They used the word in the sense of *mutual indwelling*.³

Why does this matter? Because it is that very inner life of love in the Triune God that God shares with *us* in Jesus Christ.

Theologian Michael Jenkins describes it this way: "Through the self-giving of Jesus Christ, through God's self-emptying assumption of our humanity, God shares God's own inner life and being in communion with us, uniting us to himself by the Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the God who is Love brings us into a real participation in the eternal life of God."⁴

Salvation flows from God's absolute love, not from a desperate attempt to repair the damages of sin.



Too "theological" sounding? Let's make it simpler. Just as Paul told the pagans at Athens, in God we all "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The God in whom we live and move and have our being is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, each existing in the other in perfect communion and love. The Son became human so that we humans can join him in that perfect communion of love that he shares with the Father and the Spirit. All this we learn from God's own perfect revelation of himself in Jesus Christ attested in the Scriptures.

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well" (John 14:6-7).

"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?...Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:10-11).

"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:20).

"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20-21).

"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

Salvation flows from God's absolute love for and faithfulness to humanity, not from a desperate attempt to repair the damages of sin. God's gracious purpose for humanity existed *before* sin ever entered the picture (Ephesians 1:4). God has assured our future—he has, as Jesus said, "been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Jesus has taken us with him where he is (Ephesians 2:6). God has purposed to never be without us. *All* of us, for "God was pleased to have

all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20). We often forget that. But God never does.

In his embrace

In Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father, we mortal, sinning human beings, in spite of ourselves, are graciously and lovingly held in

the divine embrace of the triune God. That is exactly what the Father intended for us from the beginning. "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:5-6).

Redemption starts with God's nature, his absolute and unquenchable love for humanity, not with human sin. Through the Incarnation of the Son, his becoming one of us and making us one with him, God includes us humans in the all-embracing love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. God made us for this very reason—so that in Christ we can be his beloved children.

This has been God's will for us from before creation. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.... And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ...to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ" (Ephesians 1:4-6, 9-10).

Through the atoning Incarnation of the Son, Jesus Christ, humans are already forgiven, reconciled and saved in him. Divine amnesty has been proclaimed for all humanity in Christ. The sin that entered the human experience through Adam cannot hold a candle to the overwhelming flood of God's grace through Jesus Christ. "Consequently," the apostle Paul wrote, "just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18).

Universal salvation?

So will everyone automatically—perhaps even against their will, enter into the joy of knowing and loving God? Such a thing is actually an oxymoron. That is, it is impossible for you to love someone against your will. God draws all humanity to himself (John 12:32), but he does not force anyone to come. God wants everyone to come to faith (1 Timothy 2:4), but he does not force anyone. God loves every person (John 3:16), but he doesn't force anyone to love him—love has to be voluntary, freely given, or it is not love.

Contrary to the idea of universal salvation, only those who trust Jesus are able to love him and experience the joy of his salvation. Those who don't trust him, who refuse his forgiveness or the salvation he has already won for them, whether because they don't want it or simply because they don't care, can't love him and enjoy fellowship with him. For those who consider God their enemy, God's constant love for them is a grossly aggravating intrusion. The more they are confronted with his love, the more they hate him. For those who hate God, life in God's world is hell.

As C. S. Lewis put it, "The damned are, in one

sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside."⁵ Or as Robert Capon explained: "There is no sin you can commit that God in Jesus hasn't forgiven already. The only way you can get yourself into permanent Dutch [trouble] is to refuse forgiveness. *That's* hell."⁶

Always on his mind

The doctrine of the Trinity is far more than just a creed to be recited or words printed on a statement of faith. The central biblical truth that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually shapes our faith and our lives as Christians. The wonderful and beautiful fellowship shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is the very fellowship of love into which our Savior Jesus places us through his life, death, resurrection and ascension as God in the flesh (John 16:27; 1 John 1:2-3).

From before all time the Triune God determined to bring humanity into the indescribable life and fellowship and joy that Father, Son and Holy Spirit share together as the one true God (Ephesians 1:4-10). In Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, we have been made right with the Father, and in Jesus we are included in the fellowship and joy of the shared life of the Trinity (Ephesians 2:4-6). The church is made up of those who have already come to faith in Christ. But redemption applies to all (1 John 2:1-2). The gap has been bridged. The price has been paid. The way is open for the human race—like the prodigal son in the parable—to come home.

Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension are proof of the total and unwavering devotion of the Father to his loving purpose of including humanity in the joy and fellowship of the life of the Trinity. Jesus is the proof that the Father will never abandon us. In Jesus, the Father has adopted us and made us his beloved children, and he will never forsake his plans for us.

When we trust Jesus to be our all in all, it is not an empty trust. He *is* our all in all. In him, our sins are forgiven, our hearts are made new, and we are included in the life he shares with the Father and the Spirit.

Salvation is the direct result of the Father's ever-faithful love and power, proven incontrovertibly through Jesus Christ and ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. It's not our faith that saves us. It's God alone—Father, Son and Spirit—who saves us. And God gives us faith as a gift to open our eyes to the truth of who he is—and who we are, as his beloved children.

God's eternal and almighty word of love and inclusion for you will never be silenced (Romans 8:32, 38-39). You belong to him, and nothing in heaven or Earth can ever change that. **co**

1. James Packer, *God's Words* (Baker, 1998), 44.

2. Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Eerdmans 1998), 9.

3. Other theological terms that describe this inner communion of the Father, Son and Spirit are *coinherence*, each existing within the other) and *circumincessio* (the Latin equivalent of *perichoresis*).

4. Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology* (InterVarsity, 2001), 92.

5. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Collier, 1962), chapter 8, page 127).

6. Robert Farrar Capon, *The Mystery of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1993), 10.

Free To Be

By Mike Feazell

Who would you say was the greatest man ever born? If you are a Christian, you might say, “Why, Jesus Christ, of course!”

Suppose Jesus himself were asked the question. What do you suppose he would say?

You might be surprised to know that Jesus did once attribute that distinction of greatness to a certain man. He told his disciples, “I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).

Major celebrity

John the Baptizer was an amazingly popular figure. Everybody in Jerusalem and people from all over the Judean countryside went out to listen to him preach. But they didn’t just listen—they responded; they confessed their sins and were baptized! Not only was John popular, he was also successful.

For all his popularity and success, though, John was strikingly different from the average man. Many people respond to great popularity and success with a certain degree of pride and swagger. But from the beginning, John the Baptizer was different.

‘Not about me’

Perhaps you have seen the slogan, “It’s not about me.”

That was the root of John’s message. He preached about someone else, someone who would come after him whose sandals John did not consider himself even worthy to tie.

John wasn’t interested in the limelight. He wasn’t interested in the praise or admiration of others. He was interested in preparing the way for someone else, and he didn’t let personal ambition get in the way of doing his job well.

Free to be

John was a baptizer. Among the preparations he made for the coming of Christ was the task of preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It was into this kind of baptism that the people listening to him entered.

Baptism was not an invention of John, nor was it unique to the Israelites. From ancient times, baptism

was a well-known symbol, an outward sign, of a new spiritual birth, of entering into a new form of life.

For those whom John baptized, it marked their confession that they were sinners. When we admit we are sinners, we are laying aside our human pride and confessing the truth of what we really are. But we are not making that confession blindly. We are making it in the light of the revealed knowledge that God loves us immeasurably, and that he has made atonement for us in Jesus Christ.

In other words, because God has revealed to us that he is for us, we are free in Christ both to fearlessly acknowledge our sinfulness before God, and free to accept God’s gift of atonement and his new creation of us in Jesus Christ.

We’re free to be who God has already made us to be. Because we have met with the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we can entrust ourselves to him fully and without reservation. Safe in his love, we can give over to him even the crushing burdens of our darkest sins and fears.

New creation

Within that confession of our sinfulness is our recognition that we need God’s forgiveness. We admit that we are rebels who have betrayed God’s love, and we place ourselves at his mercy, having now renounced our rebellion and pledged faithful obedience.

But actually becoming that new person, entering that new life, turning over that new leaf, is another question entirely. When we try to do that, we find ourselves failing—fighting our old ways, but losing so often we can easily fall into despair.

That is, unless we trust God to be who he really is for us in Jesus Christ!

In Christ, we are a new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15). And we are set free (Galatians 5:1)! God has freed us to be the new, redeemed, healed and complete persons he has made us to be in Christ. We can use that gift of freedom to hear and obey our heavenly Father, or we can reject it and continue to live as though God had not made us his covenant partner, as though he had not made us the beloved recipients of his overflowing grace in Christ (verse 13).

No longer must we live in spiritual bondage, struggling in vain to grasp here and there a little respect, dignity, security and love in this heartless world. No longer must everything in life be about us and our

anxieties about not getting all the things we think we want. No longer must we live in opposition to God, ourselves and our neighbor.

The Holy Spirit both gives us ears to hear God's command and provides us our new life in Christ. In that new life provided by the Holy Spirit, we are free to choose to be the person in Christ God has already chosen us to be. To do otherwise is not freedom, but a return to bondage.

In Christ

All this repenting, believing and passing through the waters of baptism have meaning only because God gives them meaning. Only because the Son of God took the indescribable action of becoming one of us—living sinlessly as one of us, dying on the cross as one of us, being resurrected as one of us, ascending to and being received by the Father as one of us—does any of it make any sense at all.

It makes sense because God, in his divine freedom to be who he wants to be for our sakes, makes it make sense. We are saved by God's grace—his love, his utter faithfulness to his redemptive purpose for the humanity he loves so much that in Christ he took humanity itself into himself.

A lesson in humility

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus

Christ, and through Christ to reconcile to himself all things in heaven and earth through Christ's death (see Colossians 1:19-20).

That is the way God chose to make us into a new creation. The Son of God took humanity into himself, and in his perfect obedient sacrifice of love, he reconciled humanity to God. It is to this God, the God who in immeasurable love humbled himself to take all our burdens upon himself, including our ugliest sins, and turn us into a new and beautiful creation in his Son, that we owe complete allegiance and obedience.

John's ministry was a ministry of humility. Baptism is an expression of humility. The Son of God humbled himself to become one of us for our sakes. And the new life in Christ that is given to us by our Creator and Redeemer is a life of humility.

It's not about me. If it were about me, what would I do? How can I heal my own past, my present and future? How can I redeem my own faults, sins, betrayals and rebellion? How can I secure my future or the future of those I care about?

No, thank God, it's not about me. It's all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate (in the flesh) for our sakes. He is the one who heals our personal history, redeems our every dark sin, secures our future and gives us deep peace and rest. co

In Other Words

Hand in Hand

By Kalengule Kaoma

I enjoy watching people at airports and bus stations. Someone is reading a book. A few people are reading newspapers and magazines. Over there, a lady is cleaning her eyeglasses. Then a young man sits down to eat a quick meal. All the busy people are using their hands!

There is a wonderful saying about hands in the Ndebele language of the Nguni people of Matabeleland Province, Zimbabwe. The saying is *Izandla ziya gezana*. Taken literally, it states the obvious. "It takes one hand to wash the other."

"*Izandla ziya gezana*," however, is used to refer to a number of social situations. For example, it refers to the expectation that people in communities should help each other. When one neighbor helps another, the one who is helped will go and help yet another. One act of kindness spreads to others. It takes one to help another.

Another application of "*Izandla ziya gezana*" is when everyone comes together to rally behind a community member who is in need. In times of grief, disaster, weddings, or celebration, the Ngunis come together to support one another. They say "*Izandla ziya*



gezana," with the meaning, "we are all in this together."

Just as hands work together for a common purpose, the Nguni people believe that working together will accomplish much. "*Izandla ziya gezana*" encourages people to join hands with others in order to produce bigger results.

There are many things that need our attention in the communities where we live. Why not look around and find something to do for your neighbor? There is wisdom in what the Nguni say, "*Izandla ziya*

gezana." We can do a lot more if we work together. After all, as one hand washes another, both are connected to the same body. In the same way, all humans are connected to one another in Jesus Christ, in whom we all live and move and have our being.

Kalengule Kaoma lives in Zambia, and is the Worldwide Church of God mission developer for several African nations. co

It Was OK for Timothy

By Kerry Gubb

He was in charge of a congregation, and the work was challenging. He needed help, support and knowledge if he was to serve God's people effectively. Fortunately, he had Paul to help him.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth," wrote the older apostle to his young colleague (2 Timothy 2:15). The King James Version says, "Study to shew thyself approved."

It was—and is—good advice. But that word *study*. Study what? Study how? Study when?

Timothy had Paul. Whom do you have? Perhaps ACCM can help you.

ACCM stands for Ambassador College of Chris-

- Life & Teachings of Jesus
- Survey of the Bible
- Effective Communication
- Small Group Leadership
- Pastoral Care
- Preaching and
- Christian Leadership

Scores of Christian congregations remain viable in today's changing world thanks to God's grace... and the generous, selfless work of people stepping up to the plate and filling ministry needs. Volunteers of all ages and circumstances provide the people-power through which God works, and ACCM is there to help equip them for service.

Made to measure

Every assignment, every piece of class work and every exercise is crafted to be usable in the real-world

service of the spiritual communities in which our students live and share the gospel. We intend that ACCM students are all contributors in the fellowship, however their gifting allows. Their class work is intended to provide beneficial help "in the trenches" for their pastors.

For the *Pastoral Care* course, for example, we consult with the student's pastoral supervisor in order to apply and adapt our assessment criteria into individu-

ally appropriate major assignments that reflect realistic conditions where they live. We deeply appreciate this collaboration and opportunity to integrate our courses authentically into denominational life. While not all the students completing *Pastoral Care* are actually involved directly in pastoral care (although about half of them are), they all experience "a day in the life"—a chance to appreciate the pastor's role, some of the pressures and perhaps how their own contribution might best support the edifying of the Body in love (Ephesians 4:16).

How hard is it?

Remember, this is vocational more than academic.

In the life of the church, ministry best happens in supportive collaboration.



tian Ministry. You may have seen our advertisements in this magazine. We'd like to tell you more about it.

The ACCM Diploma program is more vocational than academic. It's about doing ministry. It's practical. Many elders, lay pastors, pastoral teams and active members haven't had formal education in theology and biblical studies, so we have worked hard to create friendly, accessible grounding in practical, real-world Christian ministry.

Choose one, a few, or all of the wide range of available courses. You'll surely find something to enhance your walk with God:

- Foundations of Faith
- Spiritual Formation

The Greater Fever

By Joyce Catherwood

Matthew 8:14-16; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41

It seemed that the entire city had turned up at our house! As soon as the sun had set, they began banging on our door, peering over our wall, down into our windows. I was afraid they would overrun the house. But Jesus put a reassuring hand on my shoulder and told me not to worry. He pushed the door open and stepped into the crowd.

I saw a desperate mother in ragged clothes thrust her dying baby into his arms. A blind man frantically groped for the healer. A poor soul who seemed half out of his mind screamed and clawed his way to the front. I watched for hours as Jesus patiently healed and comforted the sick and tormented, until the crowd was finally gone. When he had tended to them all, he came back into the house and fell asleep.

What a day this had been! Only a few hours earlier, my mother lay restlessly confined to her bed in an upper chamber. She had been stricken with a great fever, her skin burning hot to the touch. Her breathing had been shallow and raspy and she'd drifted in and out of consciousness.

Then Jesus arrived at our home after preaching in the synagogue. My husband, Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, and I greeted him, filled with anxiety over my mother's condition. He immediately went to her, stood over her bed and took her hand. Lifting her up, he commanded the fever to leave. She opened her eyes, and, somewhat startled, glanced around the room. After gathering composure, she expressed her deepest gratitude to Jesus, then demurely excused herself, got dressed and went downstairs to do what she does best—lovingly prepare food and make a fuss over everyone.

Jesus' new disciples, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, joined us as we shared the meal. We basked in the glow of mom's radiant health and the presence of Jesus, spending an afternoon like no other.

How did it happen that the great healer had come to our home? Weeks earlier, John the Baptist and his disciple Andrew, my brother-in-law, had been together and had seen Jesus walk by. John the Baptist declared, "It's him! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew couldn't wait to tell my husband, Peter, and take him to Jesus. Andrew and Peter were convinced they had found the Messiah! Peter was beside himself with enthusiasm. He had always been given to impulsive behavior, but this was different.

Now, after witnessing Jesus restore my precious mother and compassionately relieve the suffering of the neediest of society, I fully support Peter's desire to be his disciple. I have no doubts our lives are about to change forever! ☪

In the life of the church, ministry best happens in collaboration—multitudes of counsel, supported by a network of faithful colleagues and mentors willing to help us better serve God's precious children.

That's how we plan our course work and assessments. Students can ask, discuss, and touch up their work as often as they want. How well they do in the course isn't decided in a single exam. Why should it? That's not how healthy Christian life works.

Nobody benefits from failure, so we've simply eliminated that possibility. Not in a wishy-washy manner that would devalue an ACCM Diploma; rather, we collaborate with and mentor our students *for as long as it takes to help them succeed*. Q&A, email support, time extensions or just plain personal contact: our purpose is to help our students succeed. When they do, we do!

Pastoral Care is primarily about a **state of the heart**, demonstrated consistently over the period of the course, while acquiring basic pastoral care skills. We're attempting to reflect the grace approach in the course experience. We work with you in a way that encourages: openness to advice and instruction—a distinct absence of "I know it all"; clear willingness to discuss and share with fellow students as "workers together with him" (2 Corinthians 6:1); readiness, within reasonable bounds of privacy, to discuss with fellow students one's strengths and shortcomings—the challenges for them in ministry; evidence of real-world consultation with and consideration for the people being served and a heart of love for the redeemed community into which God has placed them.

We're confident that this would please the Master. It's certainly pleasing a growing number of pastoral care colleagues worldwide who first shared their experiences and challenges in course discussion forums.

If you can relate to what you've read here, maybe you'd like to consider signing up for the Diploma Program, too. All our courses are available online for \$150—just enough to cover our administrative costs.

Another student successfully crossed the line last week with the help of ACCM, his pastoral supervisor and some newfound, ongoing pastoral care colleagues. I find that exciting and encouraging for both the congregation blessed to have him to serve among them. ☪

Could you be next?

If you would like to know more, check us out on the web at: www.ambascosol.org You'll find everything you need to get started in the menu.

Or, you can email us: info@ambascosol.org
Helpful guidance *was* OK for Timothy. It'll be OK for you, too!

Developing a Spending Plan with a “Virtual Cookie Jar”

By Brent Baker

From what I can tell, very few people today have a spending plan, or budget, to manage their personal finances. I’ve discussed this topic with many people who are hesitant to even think about starting a budget because they believe they don’t have enough to make ends meet. But ignoring reality won’t make our financial problems go away.

When things are tight, using a spending plan gives us the opportunity to choose the items we truly need and are able to pay for and to make rational decisions about our spending so we can make ends meet.

The wide availability of credit, including balance transfers and deferred interest, has made managing finances even more essential. That’s because using credit makes it easy to spend more than we are earning. This can lead to a real financial mess! It is important to address this issue as soon as possible before we get over our heads in debt.

Many of you may have seen your parents or grandparents stash money away in a cookie jar or envelopes to pay the bills. My wife told me how her mom used to take the cash from every paycheck and divide it into separate envelopes for family expenses such as food, utility bills and an offering or tithe for church. With five children in the family, things were really tight, but by managing the family income in this way, they were able to survive.

The idea of putting cash from our paychecks into a cookie jar or envelopes may sound old-fashioned, but the truth is that most people would be better off to follow this principle. My family rarely pays cash for anything these days, so we have chosen to use another way to manage our finances—we use a “virtual” cookie jar. The principle is the same as using a real cookie jar or envelope system, except that we don’t use cash. Instead, we keep a record of how much money from each paycheck can be spent for each category. Here is how it works:

First, estimate your annual income and then divide it by 12 to arrive at your average monthly income. This should include all forms of income, such as salary, pension, and investment income.

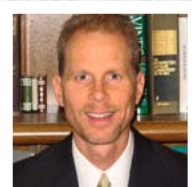
Next, write down all of your payments and “fixed” expenses. Fixed expenses are those that *must* be paid on a



regular basis. These are different from “discretionary” expenses such as food or entertainment, over which we have a greater degree of control. Examples of fixed expenses include a monthly mortgage payment or rent, car insurance, utilities, a commitment to charitable giving, and annual payments, such as for life and disability insurance. Estimate what your annual expenses are for each category, and then divide the total by 12 to calculate your average monthly fixed expenses.

Now subtract the fixed monthly expenses from your average monthly income. You are left with the amount you have for your discretionary expenses, such as food, clothing, gas, entertainment, savings, offerings and miscellaneous items. If your budget is like ours, then on the first pass of your spending plan, you may find that your estimated expenses exceed your income. To make it balance may require going back and cutting expenses in some or all of the discretionary expense categories. This process can be a real challenge, but is rewarding when you come up with a spending plan that works.

What if your expenses greatly exceed your income and you just can’t make the budget balance? Then you will need to find a way to increase your income and/or reduce your ongoing expenses. This may require making some difficult decisions, but there is no other option if you are to make ends meet.



The idea of putting cash from our paychecks into a cookie jar or envelopes may sound old-fashioned, but the truth is that most people would be better off to follow this principle.

Budget Category	Subcategory	Monthly Budget	Monthly Actual
Housing	mortgage/rent		
	insurance		
	maintenance		
	property taxes		
Utilities	electricity		
	gas		
	sanitation		
	water & sewer		
	telephone/Cell		
	internet cable		
Food	groceries		
	eating out		
Charitable	tithe/offering		
	other donations		
Transportation	gas and oil		
	insurance		
	license/taxes		
	maintenance/repair		
	replace		
	bus		
Insurance	medical		
	life		
	disability		
Liabilities/Loans	automobile		
	student loans		
	credit cards		
Entertainment/Recreation	activities/trips		
	vacation		
Savings	education		
	general		
	retirement		
Medical Expenses	dentist		
	doctors		
	prescriptions		
Miscellaneous	allowances		
	beauty, barber		
	gifts		
	toiletry, cosmetics		
	subscriptions		
	other		
School/Child Care	lunches		
	activities		
	materials		

You may find this worksheet helpful. It is based on one I use. Why not download it from our web site and adapt it to your own situation? Go to www.christianodyssey.org/money/budget.doc.

Once you have managed to get income and outgo balanced, then your spending plan is complete and you can begin allocating your income to the respective discretionary expenses categories. In these days of electronic deposits and on-line bill payments, it may not be practical to literally put cash into a cookie jar or envelopes. But the principle is the same. The idea is that each time you get paid, you should put money into each of the categories that you have designated. If you use a cookie jar or envelopes, then there should be enough cash to meet your expenses when they come due. If you do this “virtually,” electronically, then the funds should be deposited into a bank account and you should track the amount for each category on a spreadsheet or in a notebook each time you make a deposit or expenditure.

In our family, we use a credit card for most of our expenses, but we pay the entire credit card balance off each month, so we do not pay any interest or fees. We make an effort to keep track of the expenses at the time of purchase, and then reconcile the expenses on our credit card statement after-the-fact to ensure that the spending for any category didn't get out of hand. We also regularly transfer money from our checking account into a savings account to accrue for

expenses that we have budgeted for but won't be spending immediately, such as an annual payment or a vacation. In this case, our checking and savings accounts serve as our “virtual” cookie jar. As long as we are disciplined to not spend more than we have budgeted in any category, then the spending plan works well.

Occasionally we have an expense come up that we didn't count on, or we want to purchase something that is not in the budget. This means that we will have to cut back expenses in another area, or use savings to cover the deficit. It is important to revisit your spending plan often—especially in times like these when inflation is causing certain items to rapidly get more expensive. Recently we made some adjustments in our budget to accommodate the rising cost of gas and food by cutting expenses in other categories.

As a family, we discuss our spending plan and include our children on certain decisions, such as how to spend our vacation and entertainment allotment. Also, we give our children an allowance and expect them to use it to pay for their own entertainment and toys. This has been a great teaching tool because they have learned to save money for things they really want. **co**

Brent Baker has worked in the financial services industry for more than 22 years and is currently the Investment Services Risk Manager for a financial services company. He conducts seminars on responsible personal financial management. He is Assistant Pastor of Christ Fellowship Church in Cincinnati, OH.

Saying Grace *Graciously*

By Paul Hailey

I have been thinking about how we “ask a blessing” at mealtime. Quite often we say something like this: “Please make this food healthful and nutritious, take out the impurities, restore the vitamins and minerals, remove the carcinogens and replace them with numerous antioxidants, make the calcium/magnesium ratio 2:1, annihilate the bad bacteria and put in some good bacteria. Please replenish the trace elements, make the pH 7.0, provide the electro-chemical energy for the synapses in our brains to snap properly, normalize the glucose, reduce cholesterol, and may it build strong bodies eight different ways. And, oh, yes, may it shrink our hemorrhoids. Amen.”

The above is a composite of words we might say during different mealtime blessings—with just a bit of hyperbole here and there to make the case.

My wife is a good cook. I don't want to insult her by asking God to make her meals fit to eat.

The point is that saying these things makes it almost appear that we view food as hazardous to our health until God rearranges the atomic particles. It seems to me that this kind of prayer is a little offensive to the cook. (“Please make this horribly degenerate, polluted, tainted stuff fit to eat.”) My wife is a good cook and works hard in the kitchen. I don't want to insult her by asking God to make her meals fit to eat.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm one who is very concerned about what goes in my mouth, especially since reaching the prune-eating stage of life. Many of us experience numerous health problems, often caused by years of poor diet. It would be nice if God made all of our food nutritious, if we could eat fries and get the nourishment of veggies.

In light of all the health problems, even among Christians, I don't think God makes junk food nutri-



tious even when we ask him to. Experience tells me that if I eat a sugary doughnut, it tastes like a sugary doughnut in my mouth, and I strongly suspect that it goes into my digestive tank as a blob of devitalized sugar and flour. Nutritionists tell us that the most nutritious part of a doughnut is the hole. I doubt that God transforms the solid portion into something healthful on the way down. Maybe I'm wrong, but won't we assimilate pretty much whatever we poke into our mouths? Those Twinkies don't turn into carrot juice.

Do people who smoke ask a health-promoting blessing on cigarettes before they put them in their mouths and set them on fire? Who knows? Maybe some do.

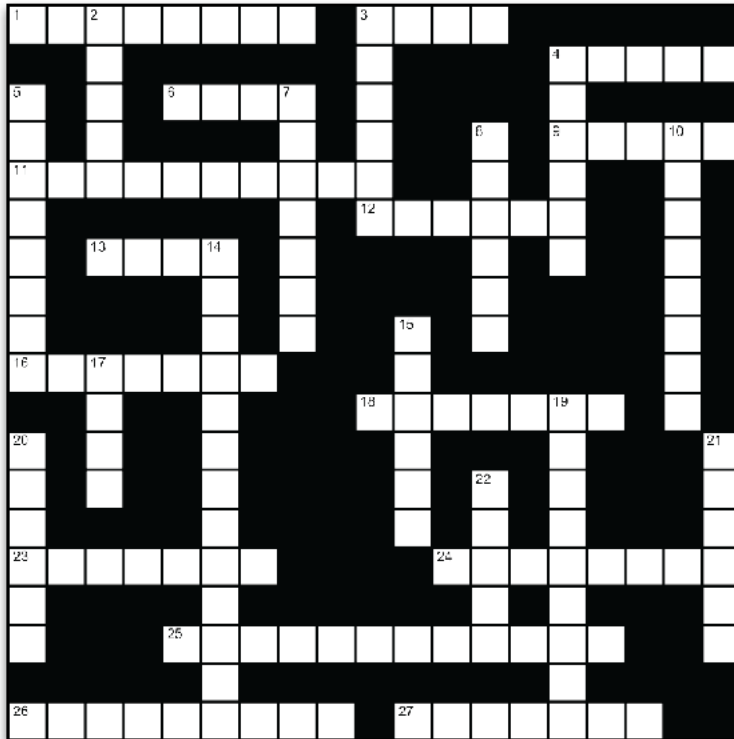
In looking in the Bible, I could find only one incident of God cleansing food. It's in 2 Kings 4:38-41. In this case the chow was so toxic that the diners would have died on the spot if God hadn't intervened.

Jesus' example

Scripture cites several occasions when Jesus prayed before eating. Matthew 14:19 uses the Greek word *eulogeo*, meaning “speak well of.” The King James translation reads, “he blessed” (the food). However, in John 6:11, which recounts the same event, the sense is “thank, be thankful.” In this case the King James reads, “He had given thanks.” The NIV translates both verses as Jesus “gave thanks.” Matthew 15:36 and Mark 8:6 are other examples where Jesus “gave thanks.”

Christian Word Crossword Puzzle

How to play: Solve the crossword puzzle by first looking at the clues. The answers are in the articles in this edition of *Christian Odyssey*.



Designed by Christopher Sealey

Across Clues:

- 1. Discretionary gift to the church
- 3. Wrote the epistle to the Church in Rome
- 4. Coercion—Never used by God
- 6. Food that affects our health
- 9. 10 percent of our income
- 11. Another term for salvation
- 12. A title for Jesus
- 13. Most nutritious part of a donut
- 16. Greek for “speak well of”
- 18. Outward sign of a new spiritual birth
- 23. Karl Barth’s commentary published here
- 24. In a _____ budget, expenses match income
- 25. Greek work for mutual indwelling
- 26. We are not in bondage, physical or _____
- 26. Money set aside for future use

Down Clues:

- 2. _____ expenses are mandatory
- 3. Idolaters who misunderstand God
- 4. It is assured by God
- 5. Fixed expenses for paying housing loan
- 7. One of the basics of Christian faith
- 8. Three in one: Father, Son and Spirit
- 10. Characteristic of John the Baptizer
- 14. Discretionary expense for fun
- 15. Latin for gift, implies thanks
- 17. Fabric of a Christian’s life and behavior
- 19. A rescue that flows from God’s love
- 20. Used to manage personal finances
- 21. Card can lead to serious debt
- 22. Mealtime blessing

In all these examples, Jesus expressed appreciation for his food. Even when the word “bless” is used in some translations, it is an expression of gratitude. Jesus didn’t ask the Father to purify and cleanse food. He simply expressed thanks to him. Romans 14:6 speaks of giving God thanks for food, and 1 Timothy 4:3 speaks of receiving food with thanksgiving.

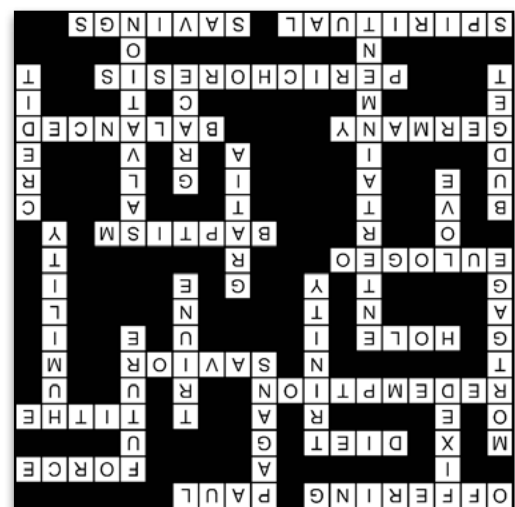
Incidentally, we often use the phrase “saying grace.” The word “grace” comes from the Latin word *gratia*, meaning “good will” or “gift,” and implies “thanks.” It’s the origin of the Spanish word *gracias* or “thank you.” Before meals, Spanish-speakers say *gracias* just as we say “grace.”

It seems to me that we should focus more on giving thanks and praise to the One who supplies all our needs, and less on asking him to perform miracles before we eat.

If I die of food poisoning you’ll know I made a mistake.

We live in a society where “Give us this day our daily bread” is just a formality. Let’s remember those millions around the world where food is scarce—for them every meal is something to be grateful for. As recipients of God’s generosity, we can give abundant thanks for the food our Father so graciously provides. ☪

Solution





Mid-life Melancholy

By Barbara Dahlgren

The good news is: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the suicide rate for teens has increased only 2 percent, and the rate has decreased for people 65 or older. The bad news is: The suicide rate among 45-54 year-old men has increased nearly 20 percent—and among women in the same age category, 31 percent. This gives a new meaning to “midlife crisis.”

Experts are baffled! We have more, more, more of everything, yet feel less, less, less satisfied. Some lean toward the use and abuse of prescription drugs as a possible cause for the suicide increase, since the CDC also reports more Americans now die from misuse of prescription drugs—including antidepressants, painkillers, and sleeping pills—than from heroin and cocaine.

As a self-medicated society, there seems to be a

pill to accommodate every mood or disorder. We have pills to keep us awake and others to put us to sleep. We have pills for pain or just mild discomfort. Even sadness is treated as a mental disorder. According to the official diagnostic manual used by mental-health professionals, depression is defined as two consecutive weeks of despondency, diminished pleasure in life, and/or difficulties in sleeping or eating. It matters not that you may have a reason to feel sad, such as the death of a loved one, a job loss, or a life-threatening illness. If you can't cope with a major setback in two weeks or less, you are labeled depressed and offered a pill.

This type of quick-fix diagnosis does a disservice to psychologists trying to help the genuinely depressed who may actually need medication. Is it any wonder that if we aren't happy all the time, we feel like something is wrong? Add to this a media montage telling us we aren't thin enough, pretty enough, rich enough, smart enough, talented enough, or young enough, and it's no wonder that mid-lifers are dissatisfied.

The midlife years have always been a time of reflection. With one's life supposedly half over, we try

The roots of these feelings run deeper than emotional dissatisfaction with life. We all want to feel significant in some way—to leave a positive mark on society and those around us.

to reevaluate who we are and what we want to do with the rest of our lives. Factor in anxiety about growing older and comparisons to others or unattainable standards set by advertising, and it is easy to see how this period of time segued from what was once called the “midlife transition” into a “midlife crisis,” a term introduced in 1965 by psychoanalyst and social scientist Elliot Jaques. How do we cope with all of this midlife melancholy without becoming suicidal?

The roots of these feelings run deeper than emotional dissatisfaction with life. We all want to feel significant in some way—to leave a positive mark on society and those around us. When the midyears hit, we realize many of our youthful dreams will never come true. It can be deeply disappointing. Even if those dreams did come true, it can leave us unfulfilled and wanting more. We are dissatisfied. So either way, almost any path looks better than the one we’ve taken.

Mid-lifers search in all the wrong places to fill the void of lost youth, unrealized dreams, or discontentment. Some have an extramarital affair, get plastic surgery, buy a new convertible, or switch jobs—finding out too late that these outward appearances cannot replace the emptiness inside. Perhaps that’s when suicide looks appealing.

Society has made it easy to bail out. Just a handful of pills, an endless sleep and all feelings of inadequacy are over.

But is midlife suicide a solution or a symptom of our modern society? Society tells us we must be happy all the time. Yet society tells us ever so subtly that we will never measure up: We are not young enough, pretty enough, thin enough, rich enough or smart enough. Even religion often makes us feel that we are not good enough and that we do not do enough. This “not enough” syndrome leaves people feeling helpless and hopeless, making the void in their lives seem even bigger.

But feelings and truth are not the same thing. The truth is that our lives do have great value—and we are never alone. God is always with us. Even when our backs are turned on God and we are blind to his presence, he loves and holds us and will never let us go. God is not some far away entity, separating himself from us until we are worthy of his presence. He is here!

And we don’t have to do anything to earn his approval, respect or love. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). The apostle Paul explains this further in Ephesians 2:4-5: “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 transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

God has always loved us and always will, regardless of our appearance, how much money we have, how successful we are, what kind of car we drive, how much we do, how bad or good we are—whether we are young, old, or middle aged. All we have to do is open our eyes to this reality by believing in Jesus Christ. As we embrace him, we become aware of his embrace of us, an embrace that has been there all along and will never go away.

Society makes us feel worthless, then supplies an easy means for our demise. God never promised a life without pain. His purpose is not to shield us from all hurt, stop us from aging or make us rich and beautiful. His purpose is to draw us into eternal loving fellowship with him through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Whether we know it or not, God walks with us through every crisis we face—even in midlife. His presence in our lives has made us significant and valuable from the moment we drew our first breath, for he is the “enough” we need (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Society provides ways for us to keep our eyes closed to who we really are in Jesus Christ. But when we turn to God, our eyes open to his light, and we see things the way they really are.

We are never alone; Jesus is in the Father, we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in us (John 14:20). Our lives always have value and meaning; God works in us and through us continually in ways we do not even know. We are God’s beloved children and he will never let us go.

When we realize how much God loves us, midlife can be a time to look forward with anticipation, not back with regret. **co**



Barbara Dahlgren is a former newspaper columnist and currently a humorist/freelance writer. She has been a pastor’s wife for 39 years. She lives in San Jose, CA.

Karl Barth: “Prophet” to the Church

By Paul Kroll

Swiss theologian Karl Barth has been called “the most outstanding and consistently evangelical theologian that the world has seen in modern times.” Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) called Barth the most important theologian since Thomas Aquinas. By any measure, Karl Barth has had a profound influence on modern Christian leaders and scholars across a wide variety of traditions.

Student days and faith crisis

Barth was born on May 10, 1886, at the height of liberal theology’s influence in Europe. He was a student-disciple of Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922), a leading proponent of what was described as self-authenticating religious experience in German Protestant thought. Barth wrote of him, “Herrmann was *the* theological teacher of my student years.” In these early years, Barth also followed the liberal teachings of German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), hailed as the “Father of Modern Theology.” “I was inclined to believe him blindly,” he wrote.

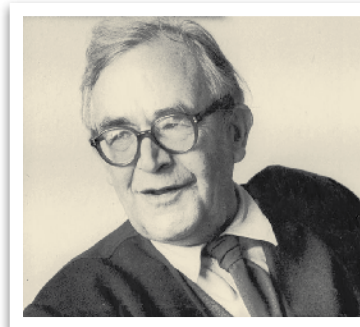
Barth served as pastor for the Reformed congregation of Safenwil, Switzerland, between 1911 and 1921. In August 1914 his liberal Christian belief

system “was shaken to the foundations” by a manifesto signed by 93 German intellectuals in support of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s military aspirations. The liberal theology professors Barth venerated were among the group. “I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history,” he said.

Barth believed his teachers had betrayed the Christian faith. “When the Christian gospel was changed into a statement, a religion, about Christian self-awareness, the God was lost sight of who in His sovereignty confronts man, calling him to account, and dealing with him as Lord.”

Eduard Thurneysen (1888-1974), pastor from a nearby village and Barth’s close friend from their student days, experienced a similar faith crisis. One day, Thurneysen whispered to Barth, “What we need for preaching, instruction and pastoral care is a ‘wholly other’ theological foundation.”

Together they struggled to find a new basis for Christian theology. “We tried to learn our theologi-



cal ABC all over again...by reading and interpreting the writing of the Old and New Testaments, more thoughtfully than before” and “they began to speak to us.” A return to gospel basics was

needed. “We must begin all over again with a new *inner* orientation,” he concluded, “recognizing God once more as God.”

Romans and Church Dogmatics

Barth’s ground-breaking commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans*, first appeared in 1919 and then was completely rewritten for a 1922 edition. His reworked *Romans* introduced a bold new theological system “concerned quite simply with *God* in his independent sovereignty over against man, and especially the religious man.”

Barth found a “new world” in Paul’s letter to the Romans and in other scriptures that spoke “not the right human thoughts about God but the right divine thoughts about men.” He declared God as “the wholly other”—beyond our comprehension, hidden from us, alien to our sensibilities—knowable only in Christ. Barth said “God’s very *deity*, rightly understood, includes his *humanity*,” and should be thought of as “a doctrine of God and man.”

In 1921 Barth was appointed to the position of professor of Reformed theology at the University of Göttingen, where he taught until 1925. There he lectured on dogmatics, which he described as “reflection on the Word of God as revelation, holy scripture *and Christian preaching*...as it is actually given.”

Barth became professor of dogmatics and New Testament exegesis at the University of Münster in July 1925 and five years later was appointed to the chair of systematic theology at Bonn, a position he held until 1935. In 1932, Barth published the first section of his *Church Dogmatics*. The new work grew year by year out of his class lectures.

The *Dogmatics* has four “volumes,” each in two or more part-volumes or sections and consists of 13 separate books in English, in 8,000 pages and 6 million words. Barth planned five volumes, one for each of the major doctrines of the faith: Revelation or the



The Church “is directed every day, indeed every hour, to begin again at the beginning.”

Word of God (CD I), God (CD II), Creation (CD III), Reconciliation (CD IV), and Redemption (CD V). He was unable to complete the Reconciliation volume and the Redemption volume remained unwritten at his death.

Thomas F. Torrance described Barth's *Dogmatics* as "far and away the most original and remarkable contribution to systematic theology that the modern age has seen." He called CD II, parts 1 and 2 "the high point of Barth's *Dogmatics*," especially "his doctrine of God as *being-in-his-act and act-in-his-being*." Torrance believed CD IV to be "the most powerful work on the doctrine of atoning reconciliation ever written."

Christ: Elected One and Elector

Barth challenged the full range of Christian doctrine, reinterpreting existing theology in the light of the Incarnation. He said: "My new task was to rethink everything that I had said before...as a theology of the grace of God in Jesus Christ." Barth sought to position Christian preaching as an activity that proclaims "the mighty acts of God" rather than being "a proclamation of the acts and words of man."

Christ is the center of the *Dogmatics* from beginning to end. "Karl Barth was a *Christian* theologian, one concerned above all with the *uniqueness and centrality of Christ and his Gospel*," according to Torrance. Barth said, "If one goes wrong here, one is wrong all along the line." This starting point in Christ kept him free from entrapment in "natural theology," the idea that man "has a legitimate authority of his own over the message and the form of the church."

Barth insisted that Christ is the revealing and reconciling address of God to man, and as Thomas Torrance explained, "the place where we know the *Father*." "God is known only through God," Barth would say. True talk about God exists "when it conforms to Jesus Christ." Barth insisted that "between God and man there stands the person of Jesus Christ, Himself God and Himself man, and so mediating between the two." For Barth, it is in Christ that "God reveals Himself to man. In Him man sees and knows God."

Barth declared "the divine predestination" to be "the election of Jesus Christ" with "a double reference—to the elector and to the elected." Jesus Christ is "the electing God" and "also elected man." Election, then, has to do wholly with Jesus Christ, in whose election we are elected by him to share. "In the light of the election of the man

Jesus, all election can be described only as free grace," Barth concluded.

Before and after World War II

Barth's teaching years at Bonn coincided with Adolph Hitler's rise to national power. The Protestant church in Germany, the "German Christians," supported Hitler believing the *Fuehrer* was sent by God to rescue the nation.

In April 1933 the "Evangelical Church of the German Nation" was created on the idea, in Barth's view, that the German ethos "about race, blood, soil, people, state" was a second basis and source of revelation for the church. In response, the Confessing Church was formed, utterly rejecting this nationalist, human-based ideology, with Barth as one of its leaders.

The church produced the May 1934 Barmen Declaration, mostly written by Barth and echoing his Christ-centered theology. The Declaration in six statements called on the church to give faithful allegiance to Jesus Christ rather than to human powers and authorities. As Barth would say, "There is no different source of church proclamation from this one Word of God."

Barth was suspended from teaching at Bonn in November 1934 for refusing to sign an unqualified oath of loyalty to Adolph Hitler. Formally dismissed from his position in June 1935, he was immediately offered the chair of theology at the University of Basel, Switzerland, a post he held until his retirement in 1962.

Barth was invited back to Bonn in post-war 1946, where he delivered a series of lectures published the following year as *Dogmatics in Outline*. The book, using the Apostles' Creed as a framework, discussed themes he had developed in his massive *Church Dogmatics*.

In 1962, Barth visited the USA, lecturing at Princeton Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago. According to church lore, during his trip he was asked to summarize the theological meaning of the millions of words in the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth thought for a moment and said: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Whether or not he actually said this, it is the way Barth would often answer a question. It undergirds his understanding that at its heart the gospel is a simple message pointing to Christ as our Savior who loves us with a perfect, godly love.

Barth did not consider his revolutionary *Dogmatics* as the last word in theology, but "as the opening of a new conversation." He mused about the ultimate importance of this work: "I shall be able to dump even the *Church Dogmatics*...on some heavenly floor as a pile of waste paper." He concluded in his last lectures that his theological insights would require rethinking in the future because the Church "is directed every day, indeed every hour, to begin again *at the beginning*." Karl Barth died in Basel on December 10, 1968 at the age of 82. [co](#)

Sources Used

Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Westminster-John Knox Press, 1960).

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I.1, edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (T.&T. Clark, 1975).

Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (William B. Eerdmans, 1975).

Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (T.&T. Clark, 1991).

Our Children's Heroes

By Jeb Egbert

I waited anxiously for my father to come home. I was 11 years old at the time, and I knew he'd be home in a few minutes. Dad *always* came home within the same 15-minute window, and he *always* had the same routine. He would walk through the open door, hug each of his kids, and then go find mom. When he saw her, he engaged in "gooey" talk about how much he loved her.

None of those parts of his routine were of interest to me. My anticipation was directly linked to the fact that after he had finished greeting us, he would change his clothes and we would trot across the street to play basketball. And we did this *every day*.

I cherished that time with my dad. It wasn't what he said to me, and it certainly wasn't the level of basketball training that stands out most. It was the fact that he spent time with me...usually 45 minutes a day, sharing in something that I loved.

When we first began playing together, he would give me a point advantage to keep the score close. He was so much better at the game than I was that I would have been discouraged if he hadn't. But as the years passed, my skills passed his, and I needed to give *him* a point advantage. I remember how much it meant to me as he would gush over my improvement during our walk back to the house.

I don't know when my dad became my hero. Perhaps it was only after I had children myself that I began to realize what he had sacrificed, and what it meant to me. Over the years, I've given a lot of thought to how my dad showed his love. Here are some of the ways he did this.

Time. Dad gave his time to me. And it wasn't just leftover time. Dad sacrificed his *prime time* for me. Every day, he gave me 45 special minutes shortly after coming home from work. When I became a dad, I realized what a commitment that was. I knew later that he had just as many work commitments as I have ever had tugging at him to stay "and get the job done." And while those things were important to my dad, they weren't as important as spending time with me, my two sisters, and my mom.

Sharing something I loved. Dad spent his time with me doing something I loved. Dad enjoyed basketball, but it wasn't the obsession with him that it was with me. He never let me know that. I learned later that his real love was tennis. But he just came out to play basketball, night in and night out, because it was what I wanted to do. He loved tennis. I loved basketball. We



I don't know when my dad became my hero, but over the years, I've given a lot of thought to how he showed his love.

ended up spending most of our sports time together doing what I loved.

Conversation. Dad spent an enormous amount of time conversing with me. When we were playing ball together, it was easy to discuss the issues of life. This wasn't lecture time, not some stilted, artificial, "Son, we need to have a talk" type of encounter. It was just part of the basketball game.

I still remember some of the lessons that he taught me on the court. "Son," he would say, "don't ever walk an old lady across the street...unless she wants to go." This was his way of telling me that when people don't want to do something, I shouldn't force the issue. Or he might say, "Often wrong, but never in doubt." This was a shorthand way of saying, "Before you get too dogmatic about something, make sure you have your facts straight."

Some 40 years after those experiences, my eyes well up with tears thinking about what my dad meant to me. The things he did to become my hero were quite simple and ordinary, but I know it couldn't have always been easy.

Who are *your* children's heroes? You might be surprised. One of them could be you! ☺

Being Human

By Bill Winn

After a long dry spell, the rain was welcome. My family and I watched the huge drops fall on our thirsty lawn and the struggling dogwood trees I had planted earlier in the spring. We listened to the song the raindrops were playing on our roof. It was like experiencing nature's musical ensemble.

The soothing rhythm of the rain-drop melody was rudely interrupted by a cacophonous, off-beat, out of sync crash. It was as if the kettle drummer or cymbalist in a symphony had stuck his instrument at the wrong time. With this single clap of thunder, the house lights went out.

It was late in the evening when the power company arrived to restore the electricity. A 1.5-million-volt lightning bolt had melted our transformer, and the three-man crew and their equipment would need access through our yard to replace it.

It was nearly 10 p.m. when the crew moved their equipment into the work area in our yard. They told me that the three of them had worked together on the same crew for almost 30 years. I asked if I could hang out and watch them work.

I spent the next five hours fascinated by how well the crew worked together. These three men knew each other so well that they sometimes seemed to function as one person. They gave me a small sense of how the Father, Son, and Spirit relate. They even drew me into their relationship. I loaned them a shovel and helped them take down a part of a fence that was blocking access to the work site.

They were three close friends and they were just enjoying being themselves and sharing the joy of their friendship with me.

They finished at 3 a.m. As I helped them load up their tools, one of the men asked me the question I had hoped all night would not be asked.

"What do you do for a living?" Cornered and on the spot, I said, "I'm a pastor."

With those words everything we had shared that night ended. All three men stiffened, and one even corrected his posture, as if he were not standing straight enough to be in the presence of a "minister." In a flash the conversation turned superficially

religious. They became nervous and not at all like the comfortable, relational people with whom I was interacting earlier. It was as if they had gone from real people to plastic and fake robots. Instantly and automatically I had been excluded from their circle of friendship.

Religion does that to people. It makes them think that being real, being really human, is either wrong or not good enough. It teaches us to be ashamed of or embarrassed about who we are. It teaches us that God is around only when we're acting or thinking "religiously."

This is all wrong. The gospel is not religion; it is good news. It teaches us that God is always present with us in all the "everyday" things we do, and that he loves being with us. The Son of God became



We are no more or less in the presence of God at work than we are at church or any other time.

flesh, one of us, Jesus, because God values us in every detail. In Jesus, who is our life (Colossians 3:4), we are redeemed, made righteous and brought into the love and the joy of life he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

We are no more or less in the presence of God at church than we are at any other time in our lives—working, enjoying life and in our interactions with loved ones, friends, co-workers and people we have just met. If we truly live and move and have our being in Jesus (Acts 22:17), then are we not always in his company?

That means we are free to be ourselves everywhere and anywhere, all the time. We can be ourselves when we're fixing transformers. We can be ourselves when we're cracking jokes and making new friends. And we can be ourselves in the company of pastors.

We can even be ourselves with God.

Bill Winn is the pastor of the Richmond Grace Fellowship church in Richmond, Virginia.

We Were Not a Burden

A study of 1 Thessalonians 2

By Mike Morrison

Paul began preaching the gospel in Macedonia somewhere around the year A.D. 50. After some success, he was forced to leave Philippi. He and his group journeyed west 100 miles to Thessalonica. After a short ministry there, they were again forced to leave (Acts 17:1-10).

Probably less than a year later, Paul heard that the believers in Thessalonica were being persecuted. Paul wrote a letter to reassure the believers that their faith and sufferings were not in vain. As he writes to encourage them, he reviews his ministry and relationship with that church.

Trying to please God (verses 1-6)

Paul reminds them that he preached despite persecution: **You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.** Since the gospel always comes with opposition, the readers should not be surprised if they encounter difficulties as well.

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are

Paul was as gentle as a woman nursing a baby. He supplied their needs, but did not ask them to supply his.

we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. The ancient world had its share of traveling snake-oil salesmen, and whether people were accusing Paul or not, Paul defends himself against possible misunderstandings.

A critic might have said: Paul gave his *spiel* in Thessalonica, but only a few gullible people fell for it, and they had no money, so Paul left to try his luck somewhere else. He didn't really care about the people who fell for his scam.

So Paul responds: Our time in Thessalonica was not a failure. We are not trying to trick anyone—we are serving God, delivering his message, and that's what we did. We get beaten up for our gospel, but we keep preaching because that's what God sent us to do.

You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. There is no evidence to support any accusation. Paul does not fit the pattern of a traveling trickster—there was no flattery, no self-promotion, nothing shady going on.

Working hard, helping others (verses 6-12)

Paul could have asked for some financial support, but he did not: **As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.** Although teachers were normally paid by their students, Paul did not ask for payment—he did not want people to question his motives (1 Cor. 9:12). He was as gentle as a woman nursing a baby. He supplied their needs, but did not ask them to supply his. That is evidence of sincerity, and along with it, the truth of the gospel.

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Paul cared for the people so much that he shared his life with them. (This was probably a cliché expressing friendship.)

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. This is quite an achievement: Paul, Silas and Timothy could move to a strange city and quickly find jobs that supported them. This was part of Paul's strategy: he did not want to be confused with the traveling speakers whose main motive was money.

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. He says this not to boast, but to forestall any accusations that would cast doubts on the gospel. This is the example he set for them to follow.

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. Fathers did not always deal with their children kindly, but Paul is appealing to the ideal: a father was supposed to help his children and encourage them to



be good citizens.

What is a life that is “worthy” of God? Taken literally, this is an impossibly high standard. But this is motivational rhetoric, not a formula for earning salvation. It simply means, I urge you to live the way that characterizes God and his kingdom—the way of love.

Accepting the word of God (verses 13-16)

In chapter 1, Paul thanked God for choosing the believers in Thessalonica. Now, he gives thanks that they believed the gospel: **And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.** The word of God had begun to work in their lives.

What is the evidence that their faith was genuine? It was their willingness to endure persecution: **For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews...** Paul draws attention to this example because he wants them to continue in it, to be faithful despite the persecution.

In the ancient world, people wanted the gods to give them good crops, good health, and good fortune. When people were suffering, it was assumed that they had offended the gods in some way. So when the believers in Thessalonica experienced difficulties, others would say: “Trusting in Jesus isn’t doing you any good, is it?”

So Paul says that persecutions are not proof that the gospel is false—God’s truth has always encountered opposition. The pattern began where the gospel began—in Judea. (Apparently Paul had already told them a little church history.) The unbelievers didn’t like the gospel there, either.

Paul then comments on the Jewish persecutors: **They killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also**

drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

These words are surprising—unlike anything Paul wrote anywhere else. They are anti-Semitic, some say, and an unfair condemnation of an entire ethnic group. But Paul is not condemning all Jews. He is referring only to the Judeans who killed Jesus and drove the early believers away (see Acts 7 for similar comments). Paul is not presenting a calm analysis of the place of Jews in God’s plan (for that, see Romans 9-11). Rather, his purpose is to strengthen the Thessalonian believers to remain true to their convictions. The context implies that a similar criticism could be said for the Macedonian persecutors.

Paul says that God’s wrath has come upon the Judeans. We do not know what he is referring to. Apparently God’s wrath can happen without making much of an impact on history. In some cases his wrath means only that he lets people continue doing the sins they want to do (Romans 1:18-32; John 3:18). It is difficult to know precisely what Paul means by the term. **co**

Questions for discussion

- Do I know anyone who has been tricked into following a false religious message? How can I tell the difference between a deliberate fraud and an honest misunderstanding?
- Should all religious leaders work night and day to support themselves? (v. 9)
- How can I urge people to live a life “worthy of God” without being legalistic? (v. 12)
- Have I suffered because of the gospel, or was it my own fault? (v. 14)

The Greeks Had a Word for It

“Εκκλησία”

The Greek word *ekklēsia* comes from *ek*, meaning “from” or “out of,” and *kaleō*, meaning “to call.” So the roots of *ekklēsia* mean “people who are called out.” Root meanings can sometimes shed light on an obscure word, but they do not determine what the word actually means (for example, consider the English word butterfly). The meaning is based on the way the word is used, and that can change as the years roll by.

In ancient Greece, an *ekklēsia* was the town council—citizens called out of their homes and into the amphitheater for a meeting

(Acts 19:39 is an example). The people are not called out, as much as they are called *together*. “Assembly” is a good translation.

Ekklēsia eventually became used for the church, the gathering of believers—but when Paul wrote his letters, that meaning was not yet common, so Paul had to specify which *ekklēsia* he was writing to. He was not writing to the assembly of the Thessalonians—that would be the town council—he was writing to the assembly of those who were “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). **co**

Hmm...

So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable.

Christopher Reeve

When the church is seen to move straight from worship of the God we see in Jesus to making a difference and effecting much-needed change in the real world; when it becomes clear that the people who feast at Jesus' table are the ones in the forefront of work to eliminate hunger and famine; when people realize that those who pray for the Spirit to work in and through them are the people who seem to have extra resources of love and patience in caring for those whose lives are damaged, bruised, and shamed, then it is...natural for people...to recognize that something is going on that they want to be part of.

N. T. Wright

Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church

Our entire life together as members of the church can be interpreted as a kind of participation in the life of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. Our fellowship (*koinonia*) is a participation in the eternal communion of the Father, Son and Spirit, in which we share through Christ.

Our service (*diakonia*) to others is an extension of the life and service of this fellowship we have been drawn into. Our worship (*leiturgia*) becomes our sharing in the Yes that Jesus Christ has spoken and continues to speak in our flesh to God on our behalf.

Michael Jinkins,
Invitation to Theology

Arthur Burns, a Jewish economist of great influence in Washington during the tenure of

several Presidents, was once asked to pray at a gathering of evangelical politicians. Stunning his hosts, he prayed thus: "Lord, I pray that Jews would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Buddhists would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Muslims would come to know Jesus Christ."

And then, most stunning of all: "And Lord, I pray that Christians would come to know Jesus Christ." Such a good prayer, I've started praying it myself.

Mark Buchanan,
in *Christianity Today*, February 2008

There's the rub; an icon can far too easily become an idol. Idols always bring disaster to the idolater. An icon is an open door to the Creator; when it becomes an idol, the door slams in your face.

Madeleine L'Engle

Some men see things as they are and ask "Why?" Others dream things that never were and ask "Why not?"

George Bernard Shaw

Ambassador College of Christian Ministry Online Learning



Equipping men and women for more effective and informed service in the work of the gospel.

ACCM's flexible learning site provides practical, quality training in Christian ministry and a valuable source of informative and stimulating Christian studies through both credit and audit programs.

www.ambacol.org

Enjoy Reading Christian Odyssey?

Why not share with a friend?

Give the gift that gives
all year! A **free** gift
subscription to
Christian Odyssey.

To request a subscription, see
addresses and phone numbers on
page 3. You can also subscribe at:

www.ChristianOdyssey.org

