



*An Independent Church Journal
March-April 2004*

IN THIS ISSUE...

CUTTING STRAIGHT THE WORD OF TRUTH

[Cutting Straight the Word of Truth](#)

In my short thirty-one years as a Christian I have observed a subtle yet definite shift within Evangelical churches in America. When I first became a Christian it seemed most believers I met were concerned with the question, "what do you think?" Now it seems that many pastors and people have become obsessed with an entirely different question: "how do you feel?"...

Les Lofquist
IFCA International
Executive Director

[Does Doctrine Divide?](#)

Through the years I have heard the statement from many that in the pursuit of Christian unity, we must avoid the discussion of doctrine, for doctrine divides. I have often seen this premise applied to justify overlooking error and to avoid the discussions necessary to refine understanding of the systematic teaching of God's Word. The Apostle Paul repeatedly challenged...

Richard I. Gregory

[Any Shortages in the Atonement?](#)

For whom did Christ die: for just the elect, for the whole world so that the whole world is saved, or for the whole world so that any who believe in Christ will be saved?...

Dr. John Mulholland

[Restoring Repentance](#)

Perhaps you have been as amazed and perplexed, as I, when observing what is taking place within the church, particularly in the United States. All in the name of Jesus Christ, there is a great deal of rationalization to reach the so-called "seekers." I am all in favor of creative ways to effectively reach the lost and build the Body of Christ. But it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between the church and the culture. Even our secular media recognizes...

Daniel P. Fredericks

[Progressive Dispensationalism](#)

A new form of Dispensationalism began in 1986 at the meeting of the Dispensational Study Group at the Evangelical Theological Society's national convention. This new approach to Dispensationalism has been labeled by its advocates as Progressive Dispensationalism. In keeping with the theme of this edition of Voice, here is a very general explanation

of Progressive Dispensationalism...

Bruce Baker

● [Comparisons, Contrasts, Contradictions](#)

Most critical issues of life are theological as they define our relationship with God. Current events have thrust upon the world the issue of faith. As many are aware, the media continues to present us with a mythical diet telling us that Islam is a peaceful religion. In a nine-week period following 9/11, the New York Times carried 64 news items on Islam, all of them positive. Appreciation of Islam has actually increased in the U.S. since the World Trade Towers were demolished. Much of this is due to media misinformation...

Fred Plastow

● [The Big Secret](#)

I don't want to stop being Jewish! There, our big secret is out in the open. The number one, usually unspoken reason why your Jewish friend, co-worker, or neighbor will hesitate to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior is the thought, "I was born Jewish, and I want to die Jewish."...

Robert Morris

● [Patience & Prayer in Local Church Ministry](#)

As a pastor, I find myself getting nervous when "the vision thing" comes up. Somehow, I don't think I'm alone in this. Many pastors who have a heart for the flock of Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Word feel unfavorably compared to strong visionary leaders whose churches gain nationwide attention. That's threatening. Don't get me wrong. I want to be more of a visionary, initiating leader. But, for me, it's a studied and acquired skill not a natural trait. I'd like to give testimony in this article to the power of a sometimes forgotten aspect of church leadership...

Mark D. Johnson

FEATURES...

CHAPLAIN'S DIARY

The Missionary Ministry of Chaplaincy

● [Amazing Opportunities](#)

US Air Force Chaplain Captain Jason Peters has represented IFCA International in some important places around the world. In 1999 he was stationed at Diego Garcia, a 13 square mile island in the middle of the Indian Ocean. While there he participated in the baptism of nineteen new believers and then several other new believers at the Prince Sultan Air Base near Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia.

Ch, Capt. Jason Peters

WOMEN'S VOICE

● [Older Women & Younger Women](#)

Biblical reminders of their responsibility to one another in the Lord...

Gloria Ward

EVANGELISM SPOTLIGHT

● [An Idea to Encourage Your Church in Evangelism](#)

Q. I know I need to spend time with non-Christians if I'm going to witness to them, but I don't particularly enjoy being around them. How can I change my attitude?... more Q&A and evangelistic ministry ideas...

R. Larry Moyer

Cutting Straight the Word of Truth

Rev. Les Lofquist
Executive Director

In my short thirty-one years as a Christian I have observed a subtle yet definite shift within Evangelical churches in America. When I first became a Christian it seemed most believers I met were concerned with the question, "what do you think?" Now it seems that many pastors and people have become obsessed with an entirely different question: "how do you feel?"

Is this true? Has a quest for regular, emotional, spiritual highs replaced a careful articulation of the truths of God? Have we drifted into a morass of mysticism in our churches? Does theology matter any more? Do we still have a place in our churches for the truth of God's Word?

Over a decade ago, theologian David Wells wrote a scathing indictment of the modern American Evangelical church entitled *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993). Devastatingly perceptive, Wells wrote:

"Many of those whose task it is to broker the truth of God to the people of God in the churches have now redefined the pastoral task such that theology has become an embarrassing encumbrance or a matter of which they have little knowledge." (pp. 6-7)

"Evangelicals who were once cognitive dissidents within the culture are rapidly becoming amicable partners with it...This transition has entailed banishing theology from its place in the center of evangelical life and relegating it to the periphery. Behind this banishment is a greatly diminished sense of truth. Where truth is central in the religious disposition, theology is always close at hand."(p. 136)

Elsewhere, Wells has similarly written (*God in the Wasteland*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994):

"There is in present day evangelicalism a hunger for God but an aversion to theological definition of that experience. There is a hunger for God but a disenchantment with doctrine." (p.99)

I don't believe the situation in American Evangelical churches has improved since Wells first penned those words. I think it has continued to deteriorate. Yet, I am quite certain that among the members of IFCA International, theology and doctrine are absolutely essential and central to all that we do! We would state with firm conviction that we seek to understand and proclaim the truth of God's Word no matter what others may be clamoring for. It is my estimation that many, if not all, in IFCA International would resolutely stand against the sweeping tide of doctrinal apathy and theological carelessness, thundering back at this tide with an accurate articulation of God's truth from the Scriptures.

But why? Why is it so vital for IFCA pastors to have such a firm commitment? To answer this question, we need look no further than 2 Timothy 2:15. In this one verse, written just weeks before Paul himself died because of his stand for the truth, we see the importance of a disciplined, careful study and explanation of the truths of the Bible.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling correctly the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB)

A DILIGENT WORKMAN

Because of the quite-familiar KJV translation of this passage, it is commonly misunderstood that this verse refers to a student ("Study to show thyself approved unto God"). However, the figure Paul actually uses is that of a workman (ergaten) who is eagerly zealous and disciplined (spoudazo) in order to accomplish his task. The diligent workman of the Word gives his full and

tireless efforts to scrutinizing, interpreting and explaining the Scriptures. He is persistently zealous in his pursuit of God's truth as presented in the Bible because of his desire to please God ("to present yourself approved to God"). He turns a deaf ear to those who advocate theological indefiniteness, with their aversion to doctrine and attachment to experience, in order to please God and not the crowd. Any other way of ministering will ultimately bring shame...Paul says this kind of ministry means the diligent workman of the Word will "not be ashamed." A pastor or teacher who advocates a truth-minimizing form of Christian ministry ought to be ashamed! Yet, this very thing was celebrated in the cover story of Christianity Today "Reaching the First Post-Christian Generation" (12 September, 1994, pp. 18-23) where it was written: "an emotional experience of God is more important than its theological content" (p. 22). Such notions of ministry as advocated in that article will not meet with God's approval (dokimon) when the work is inspected, but will meet rather with His disapproval (adokimos, 1 Cor. 9:27). Each pastor must remember what it is that he is to do in ministry as well as for Whom he is to do it.

WHO CUTS IT STRAIGHT

God's laborer is to handle His Word accurately and with precision. He is to "cut it straight" (orthotomounta, from orthos "straight" and temno "to cut"). This is a powerful metaphor referring to a craftsman who cuts a straight line, a workman who builds a straight road through forested country, a farmer who plows a straight furrow, a father who cuts a straight portion of meat, or a mason who lays a straight course of bricks or cuts a stone to fit in its proper place. All of these have been proposed by scholars through the centuries. Homer Kent, Jr writes, "Since the context does not provide any light as to what type of workman was in Paul's mind, the interpreter dare not dogmatize. Perhaps he was thinking of his own craft, tentmaking, and pictures the artisan trimming the hides precisely so they will fit together. In some such manner, God's workman must treat with discernment the Word of God." (The Pastoral Epistles, Moody Press, 1982, p. 266).

The pastor is to be an absolutely precise workman who cuts the Word of truth straight. It is his sacred duty to be as accurate as he possibly can be when studying and teaching the Bible. He must be meticulous when piecing together the many individual truths found in Scripture, as Paul had to be meticulous when piecing together the many pieces of cloth when making a tent. This is because truth matters! God's truth, as revealed in His Word, is the sole source of our faith and as such, it must be handled scrupulously at all times (orthotomounta is a Present Participle which refers to continuously, habitually, consistently cutting it straight).

In the face of a feel-good society where truth matters little, the faithful pastor is to eagerly, even anxiously, cut the Word of truth straight whenever he opens it and teaches it. He is to study it meticulously, shape it rightly, expound it precisely, and preach it fearlessly. Even though there are many who would howl with ridicule at such a mindset, God will approve of it. And His is the only approval that really matters. "Just as we have been approved (dokimazo) by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines (dokimazo) our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4, NASB).

CONCLUSION

It is good to note what Dr. Robert Thomas, long-time IFCA member and Professor of New Testament at The Master's Seminary, has written concerning theological precision:

"People don't often go heretical all at once. It is gradual. And they do not do so intentionally most of the time. They slip into it through shoddiness and laziness in handling the word of truth...All it takes to start the road to heresy is a craving for something new and different, a flashy new idea, along with a little laziness or carelessness or lack of precision in handling the truth of God.

All around us today are startling reminders of doctrinal slippage and outright failure. In case after case someone who should have known the truth of God better failed in upholding that truth.

Precision is a compelling desire to master the truth of God in more definitive terms, to facilitate a more accurate presentation of that truth to others and to safeguard against doctrinal slippage that leads to error and false doctrine." ("Precision as God's Will for My Life", Panorama City, CA: The Master's Seminary, 1989).

God's Word demands precise, meticulous study and an accurate, clear presentation. I am confident my brothers in IFCA International agree with every fiber of their being. To help us along this process (which is not an easy path), the following articles are presented...so that we may cut straight the Word of truth.

Does Doctrine Divide?

Richard I. Gregory

Through the years I have heard the statement from many that in the pursuit of Christian unity, we must avoid the discussion of doctrine, for doctrine divides. I have often seen this premise applied to justify overlooking error and to avoid the discussions necessary to refine understanding of the systematic teaching of God's Word. The Apostle Paul repeatedly challenged Timothy to "teach no other doctrine," "to be nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine," and to consent to the "doctrine which is according to godliness." He reminds him that he is to "hold fast to the form of sound words, which you have heard from me...."

Doctrine was very important to the apostles and the leaders of the early church and when doctrinal differences arose, they were considered and discussed. A good illustration of this is found in Acts 15. The issue of the necessity of being circumcised after the manner of Moses in order to be saved was no small problem. Paul and Barnabas confronted the proponents of this doctrine with "no small dissention and disputation." The result was a formal discussion with the apostles and elders. They went up to Jerusalem to seek an understanding as to the matter of salvation and sanctification. Acts 15:6 records for us that the apostles and elders came together to "consider this matter." In fact, Luke observes that there was much "disputing" or as some would translate this "intense discussion" among the apostles and elders in the process of coming to agreement.

Was this discussion wrong? Did it divide the church? History tells us that there were some that continued to disagree with the decision of the discussions but the work of God was unified around a very central truth essential to the gospel. It is obvious to me that God intended Christian doctrine to bring us together around truth, not to splinter us into opinion groups based upon our preferences and traditions.

Through the centuries it has been necessary for men of God to come together to consider doctrinal questions. The result has often been to keep the church from drifting into doctrinal error. Although these gatherings do not have the ability or power to speak without error, their commentaries on doctrinal questions have proved to be very valuable in understanding the various dimensions of the doctrinal controversies. Students of church history and the great doctrinal controversies of the past do well to carefully consider the conclusions of the great "Councils" in hammering out the details of the controversies they considered along with their recommended solutions.

There are some doctrinal questions that God's people should be talking about today. But one of the characteristics of our Fellowship is that there is room for discussion on the various aspects of doctrine as long as the essence of a doctrine is not altered.

Recently, a friend of mine stated that within the river of historic fundamentalism there are a number of streams. While each stream may have differences, it is incumbent upon us to recognize that they are a part of the same river and are united by common commitment to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. While organizational and procedural differences may necessitate different fellowships or even denominations, it is important that the value of those with whom we may differ not be overlooked. Open discussion on doctrinal differences will either cause blind dogmatism or a careful development of biblical understanding and convictions. Far too many believers are doctrinal conformists without doctrinal convictions. The lack of open discussion is either the abandonment of doctrinal convictions to utilitarian unity or a de-emphasis on the importance of doctrinal truth to the sanctifying process of Christian growth and maturity. Whenever doctrine is de-emphasized liberalism is not far behind.

Doctrinal discussion must always be substantive and must never degenerate into "arguments ad hominem" or discussions for the sake of arguing. Paul warns Timothy not to "give heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith." Apparently there were some that were introducing doctrines of a different kind into the church at Ephesus and Timothy was not to overlook this but "charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3-4). These fables were myths that had no historical reality but were tales from the rabbinical writings. The danger here was the frivolous disputations which a fondness for fables and genealogies naturally engendered. They promoted the "Jewish flavor of the faith" by connecting the gospel with the rabbinical writings and the Law. This was distasteful to the Gentile believers in Ephesus for it left them out of the inner circle and de-emphasized "for by grace are you saved through faith." Paul did not consider entertaining such "discussions" but rather called them "vain jangling" and "old wives' fables." Genuine discussions with a substantive objective of clarifying truth is very profitable, but arguing doctrine with the subjective satisfaction of making your point or defeating your opponent becomes nonproductive and gives much occasion to the flesh.

I trust that you will think clearly concerning your doctrinal convictions. While many think that they have long ago "made up their minds" on matters of doctrine, let it not be said that we cannot learn something new and refreshing from men of God dedicated to the same authority as we--the inerrant Word of God.

Dr. Richard Gregory was IFCA International Executive Director from 1987-2000. He now serves as the Minister at Large.

Reprinted from May/June 1998 Voice.

Any Shortages in the Atonement?

Dr. John H. Mulholland

For whom did Christ die: for just the elect, for the whole world so that the whole world is saved, or for the whole world so that any who believe in Christ will be saved?

The first view, that Christ died only for the elect is called particular atonement or limited atonement; it is particular to the elect and limited to the elect. The second view is called universal salvation. And the third view is the consensus of most evangelical groups, and is sometimes called general atonement.

Reformed and Presbyterian churches almost always hold to the particular atonement view. It was in the post-Reformation battle with the Remonstrants, who insisted on some freedom of decision, that the Reformed Church hammered out its position. Some of the difficulties with the limited atonement view are sketched out below.

First, limited atonement changes the universal gospel promises for all men into limited provisions for all the elect. It must be noted that the New Testament is full of promises of the death of Christ for "all." "He died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14); "gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6); "is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10); "by the grace of God he should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9); "The free gift came unto all men" (Rom. 5:18), and many more. Limited atonement advocates on the other hand are so sure of their view that they say the "all" really does not really mean all but refers to all the elect and excludes all the non-elect.

Their insistence on limited atonement leads them to this radical change. Some of them claim that the term "all" sometimes does not refer to absolutely all without exception; a few times this is true as in Matthew 10:22, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." It is obvious that the disciples would not hate each other and so there are a few exceptions. While it is quite true that a few times the word all means almost all, a kind of a mild exaggeration; "all the elect" should not be substituted for "all men."

Second, limited atonement changes the gospel message to the world into limited promise for the world in general but does not include the world as individuals. As with the term "all" so it is with the term "world." This is illustrated by "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19); "He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2); "the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14); and many more. Some limited atonement adherents claim the term "world" refers to Jews and gentiles, as though that were not the whole world. Others claim that world is used only for the collective whole and not for the individuals of that whole. A conclusion required by limited atonement denies that Christ could die for people that never actually receive eternal life. Thus they view the biblical "world" as "some of the world."

Third, limited atonement advocates refer to sub-groups that Christ died in order to deny the universal promises: "the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (John 10:11); "to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28); "he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16), and so forth. But there is nothing in these passages that excludes the whole world of individuals. If He died for the world, He also died for the Church. The texts that promise that Christ died for Israel (Matt. 1:21; Isa. 53:8) and for Paul (Gal. 2:20) do not intend to teach that Christ died only for Israel or only for Paul; rather they emphasize that He did indeed die for them without excluding others.

Fourth, limited atonement insists that foreknowledge is just another word for predestination. This is done to avoid any semblance of human contribution to personal salvation. They reason that if predestination is based on divine foreknowledge of what man will do, what man does contributes to his ultimate forgiveness and eternal life. Thus they will not distinguish between God's foreknowledge of what man will do and what man actually does in response to God's grace. But the New Testament clearly teaches that predestination is according to God's foreknowledge (Rom. 8:30; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). The words for "predestination" and "foreknowledge" are distinct and separate words that must not be confused. Furthermore, the words for "foreknow" and "foreknowledge" mean to know ahead of time in all seven of the instances they are used in the New Testament. Driven by their own iron clad logic, this the adherents of limited atonement simply have to change the clear meaning of the Word of God. The limited atonement advocates claim that predestination, and predestination alone, determines the number that Christ died for. Of course, all the texts teaching foreknowledge as the determining factor of predestination annul that plank.

Fifth, the doctrine of limited atonement claims that God cannot make a provision which He does not fully use. Other evangelicals teach that Christ died for the whole world and each person has the opportunity to accept or to reject that grace; thus, God has provided for all. God has provided forgiveness and eternal life for the great mass of those who never believe. The limited atonement

school sees this as ineffective of God and not a mistake He would or could make. Yet it is clear that God has provided an abundance that is not fully applied. This is illustrated by the fact that the fullness of the Spirit is not expressed in many Christian lives, many prayers are not answered because of carelessness and unbelief; and much evangelism is ignored due to a lack of vision. Each of these graces could be poured out more and more. The lack is not God's. It's ours.

Sixth, limited atonement teaches that faith is not the condition of but the result of salvation. They reason that if faith is required to receive salvation, faith must be a work that man must do to be saved. Some advocates conclude that there are two new birth experiences. The first provides life and the enablement to believe and the second supplies fuller salvation by faith. However, Paul never considered faith a work; but he contrasted faith and works. Scripture does teach that faith is a gift of God and that salvation is by faith and by faith alone.

Seventh, limited atonement teaches that the gospel offer can only be made in a general sense, not to individuals. They reason that since Christ died only for the elect, when you witness to someone you do not know whether that person is elect; and therefore you cannot say to them, "Christ died for you." You must use a vague statement about Christ dying for sinners. Yet Paul told the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." A statement he could not make if he doubted that Christ had died for the jailer. Paul repeatedly asserted that Christ died for all and for the world. Still, we must carefully note that the Lord has greatly used advocates of limited atonement in historic movements of evangelism.

Eighth, limited atonement claims that none but the elect receive the capacity to believe in Christ. However, evangelicalism in general emphasizes the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit to every man to enable him to believe. Jesus promised in John 16:8, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment." That universal convicting ministry of the Spirit is going on today to the entire world and each person in the world is responsible for his own response. Jesus taught not only that God sent Him into the world that whoever believes on Him might not perish but have everlasting life; He also taught in John 3:18, "He that believeth not is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." It is not election that sends a person to eternal punishment but his own refusal to meet the single condition of personal faith in Christ. The Lord holds each person responsible for believing or for refusing to believe.

Dr. John H. Mulholland taught Bible doctrine and theology for 41 years at the Capital Bible Seminary and the Washington Bible College. With degrees from Houghton College and Dallas Theological Seminary, he retired in 1998.

Reprinted from May/June 1998 Voice.

Restoring Repentance

Daniel P. Fredericks

Perhaps you have been as amazed and perplexed, as I, when observing what is taking place within the church, particularly in the United States. All in the name of Jesus Christ, there is a great deal of rationalization to reach the so-called "seekers." I am all in favor of creative ways to effectively reach the lost and build the Body of Christ. But it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between the church and the culture. Even our secular media recognizes the cultural and political accommodations of the church. A recent feature article in a national magazine observed, in contrast to the purity of doctrine and lifestyle that Jonathan Edwards championed, "contemporary evangelism...has both hewed to and strayed from the path laid down by one of its most brilliant founding fathers."¹ In the same issue one prominent pastor of an East Coast

megachurch unashamedly declared, "abortion and homosexuality are minor concerns in our church. The bell we beat is that we must know Jesus. We are offering people a different and better way to live than secular America offers."

If we are to be true to our Lord and His Word we must not sit idly by. A disregard for the reality of sin at salvation and in sanctification is not true biblical Christianity. Aside from the current debate surrounding this vital doctrine, there is a need to restore biblical repentance as a vital component to the Christian life. Even the most casual study of this scriptural exhortation reveals it to be catalytic in terms of man's relationship to God.

The concept of repentance is a common theme in both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word naham conveys the picture of difficulty in breathing such as "to pant" "to sigh" "to groan" or "to lament," as may occur upon a moment of crisis. The word occurs some 40 times and often is attributed to God, as well as man.² An additional word used by the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is the Hebrew, shubh, translated often as "to turn" or "return." This word occurs prominently in the Psalms and the Prophets and conveys the idea of a radical change in one's attitude towards sin and their relationship God, in particular.³

When turning to the New Testament, one is confronted again with this theme in relation to the condition of man's sin and his standing before God: a call to change one's mind and turn to God. The message of repentance is common to John the Baptist, to the teaching of our Lord, as well as a common exhortation in Acts and throughout the Epistles.

The Spirit of God selected three Greek words to convey the idea of repentance. Each requires the Bible student to carefully study the contextual usage in order to come to a proper understanding and application of this wonderful doctrine.

Epistrepho is used in the New Testament to convey the concept of turning around, either in a physical, mental or spiritual sense (as determined by its context). Both Peter and Paul, along with John, use this word which is often translated to turn or be converted. It significantly connotes the complementary from and to--the negative and the positive--sides of repentance.⁴

Metamelomai is used in the Septuagint and in the New Testament to convey the idea of remorse or regret, a sadness over an unpleasant or undesirable outcome or turn of events, usually a mere human response or reaction. (Exodus 13:17; Jeremiah 4:28; 20:16; Matthew 21:29, 32; 27:3; see also 2 Corinthians 7 where Paul incorporates the words metamelomai and metaneo, conveying a movement from human sorrow to a point of spiritual/salvational repentance).

Metaneo is used in the New Testament to convey a change of mind--literally to have another mind--and heart (attitude, disposition, purpose) about sin in such a way so as to turn from sin to God. It is a change of mind at a spiritual level.

Despite the prevalence in Scripture of this biblical doctrine, in our day it seems it is being distorted on at least two levels. On the one hand it is being categorically discarded, viewed as a detriment to the grace theme of the gospel. On the other it is perverted to some meritorious work of penance. Both extremes distort the biblical intent and the appropriate and vital place it should have in the believer's life.

Limited space here does not afford a full discussion of the debate, and other volumes are available for the reader's benefit, but let this piece simply call for the acknowledgement and call to a restoration of repentance as intended by the Spirit of God in Scripture.

The confusion in part can be attributed to a mistranslation and interpretation of the word itself. When translating the words metaneo, metamelomai, and epistrepho, there is some difficulty. As a

consequence, our English word (which derives from the Latin *repenitire*) has had the unintended result of etymological baggage that distorts the original Greek and adds the notion of some form of penance. In fact there is a gulf of difference between the New Testament intent and the translation.

Herein lies the legitimate concern and caution. Any hint of works and self-effort must be excluded from the gospel message. On this we can agree. However, we must be careful not to eliminate the rightful and needful change of mind and purpose towards one's sin in light of God's command to obey the gospel.

This tension is solved, in part, by acknowledging that the entire process of salvation is exclusively the work of God in the life of the unbeliever. Whatever may occur on the "human side" of the theological coin must also be recognized as a Spirit-generated response.⁵

One need only consider our Lord's confronting of Nicodemus as a perfect illustration of the point. The word "repent" is never used in the discussion. But the demonstration of repentance is clearly manifested as Nicodemus is brought up short in terms of his self-righteousness, and confronted with the reality of a radical spiritual change that must be effected if he was to indeed have eternal life.⁶ One cannot deny the radical change of mind and life that transpired in that encounter with the Christ.

Repentance needs to be restored as a clarion call to the sinner as well as to the saint. The unbeliever must come to understand the clear claims of the gospel regarding the person and work of Christ and the true condition of his or her life and have a radical change of mind and heart in turning to God from sin.⁷ The biblical doctrine of repentance has nothing to do with the work of man, but everything to do with the work of grace in man by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

It is undeniable that from the repeated occasions of the Old Testament prophets preaching to Israel, to the message of John the Baptist, to Christ, to the Apostles, the exhortation to repent is declared to sinners. Mere human regret and sorrow holds no merit before God, but the work of the Spirit in His convicting work leads to a spiritual repentance that is a work of God's sovereign grace.

The gospel message is exceedingly clear: "Christ died for our sins." That is as confrontational as the gospel can be. Everyone is a sinner: "all have sinned." That reality demands a response, contrasting the perfect Christ with the unbeliever who is "dead in trespasses and sins." Only a spiritual change can remedy such a lost condition.

The biblical, Holy Spirit generated, change of mind that is repentance (*metanoeo*, *metanoia*, *epistrepho*) leads to believing the gospel message. Such believing is not generated by the flesh, but is a Spirit-work. This change of mind and believing the true gospel concerning Christ involves knowledge, assent and trust. As Benjamin B. Warfield expressed, "We cannot be said to believe or to trust in a thing or person of which we have not knowledge... Of course we cannot be said to believe or to trust the thing or person to whose worthiness of our belief or trust assent has not been obtained. And equally we cannot be said to believe that which we distrust too much to commit ourselves to it."⁸

Certainly it would be appropriate to appeal to the lost to "change your mind about Christ and believe in Him!" That is their responsibility, even as it is the work of the Spirit of God to regenerate the heart and mind. *Notitia* (knowledge), *assensus* (assent), *fiducia* (trust)! This is a glorious mystery, to be sure, and a theological tension and balance which must be allowed to remain. Therefore, we persuade men. But ultimately it is God who produces the change in mind and life.⁹

Henry C. Thiessen long ago observed, "The importance of repentance is not always recognized as it should be. Some call upon the unsaved to accept Christ and to believe, without ever showing the sinner that he is lost and needs a Savior." Recognizing the importance of repentance in all dispensations Thiessen notes, "Repentance was the message of the Old Testament prophets...It was the keynote of the preaching of John the Baptist...of Christ...of the twelve...and in particular of Peter on the day of Pentecost. It was also fundamental to the preaching of Paul...The dispensational change has not made repentance unnecessary in this age; it is definitely a command to all men."¹⁰

Repentance also needs to be restored as a clarion call to the life of the believer. After his initial turning to God in response to believing the gospel of Christ (which is salvation), the "born again" person commences a life of constant change (which is discipleship). Sadly, it seems, some have made the Christian life one without great demand. Instead of confronting sin in the life, some happily redefine it so as to legitimize anything and everything in the name of Jesus as a benefit of grace. Paul's counter to this notion was clear: "God forbid!"¹¹

It is most instructive to note that of the seven churches of Revelation, four are exhorted to repent!¹² Only the poor and persecuted church of Smyrna and the weak but faithful church of Philadelphia are excluded from this exhortation. Thyatira is warned of the danger of not repenting and separating from the teaching of the woman Jezebel.

We must return to a pure love for Christ, repenting of our infatuation with novel doctrines and toleration of culturally acceptable lifestyles, rejecting the notions of wealth and ease and embracing the persecution and ridicule that accompanies all who are devoted to Christ. The Scriptures are clear that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.¹³

Allow me to offer this exhortation. Let us not exclude the legitimate exhortation to sinners to repent, qualifying it not a meritorious work but a response to the clear terms of the gospel. Secondly, and most importantly, let us restore the call to the church to repent. Having begun in the Spirit, are we now attempting to live the Christian life in the power of the flesh? I fear the greater indictment of our Lord will not be that we didn't properly teach the doctrine of repentance at salvation, but that we have neglected all together the need for ongoing repentance for the purpose of spiritual maturity in sanctification.¹⁴

Nearly seventy years ago now, Harry A. Ironside wrote, "Grace is God's unmerited favor to those who have merited the very opposite. Repentance is the sinner's recognition of and acknowledgment of his lost estate and, thus, of his need of grace. Yet there are not wanting professed preachers of grace who, like the antinomians of old, decry the necessity of repentance lest it seem to invalidate the freedom of grace."

"More and more it becomes evident that ours is an "age of shame." Unreality and specious pretence abound in all departments of life. In the domestic, commercial, social, and ecclesiastical spheres hypocrisy is not only openly condoned, but recognized as almost a necessity for advancement and success in attaining recognition among one's fellows"...Nor is this true only where heterodox religious views are held. Orthodoxy has its shallow dogmatists who are ready to battle savagely for sound doctrine, but who manage to ignore sound living with little or no apparent compunction of conscience."

"Shallow preaching that does not grapple with the terrible fact of man's sinfulness and guilt, calling on 'all men everywhere to repent.' Results in shallow conversions; and so we have myriads of glib-tongued professors today who give no evidence of regeneration whatever."¹⁵ Perhaps the lack of biblical repentance in the Church is the result of a neglect of repentance in the gospel proclamation.

May we take this exhortation to heart and may we reconsider the biblical doctrine of repentance. Let us restore this wonderful biblical doctrine to its proper and appropriate place in both the proclamation of the gospel for salvation and to the exhortation to the saints in sanctification! The people of God must reflect the holiness of God that the purity of the Church might be a glory to its Christ, who gave Himself for her.¹⁶

1 See for example, U.S. News and World Report, December 8, 2003

2 Genesis 6:6; Jonah 3:10; see also 1 Samuel 15:29; Job 42:6; Jeremiah 8:6

3 For a fuller study the reader is referred to The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, pp. 2558-2559 ("Repentance") and Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 2, p. 909.

4 John 12:40; Acts 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25

5 John 16:8-11

6 Do a thorough study of John 3

7 Acts 17:30; 26:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9

8 B.B. Warfield, "On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects," Studies in Theology, pp. 402-403.

9 2 Corinthians 5:10-21

10 Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology, (Eerdmans, 1949, pp. 352-353).

11 Romans 6:1-10

12 To the church at Ephesus (2:5); to the church at Pergamum (2:16); to the church at Sardis (3:3); to the church at Laodicea (3:19).

13 2 Timothy 3:12

14 Galatians 3; Revelation 2-3

15 I would recommend the reader of this article read (or re-read) this classic work by Dr. Ironside, Except Ye Repent (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1937, pp. 8-9). A more recent book worthy of consideration was written by Richard Owen Roberts, Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002).

16 Ephesians 5:25-27

Progressive Dispensationalism

Bruce Baker

A new form of Dispensationalism began in 1986 at the meeting of the Dispensational Study Group at the Evangelical Theological Society's national convention. This new approach to Dispensationalism has been labeled by its advocates as Progressive Dispensationalism.

In keeping with the theme of this edition of Voice, here is a very general explanation of Progressive Dispensationalism. I say very general because Progressive Dispensationalism is a complex and involved system. It must also be noted that not all "Progressives" hold to the same theological and hermeneutical tenants. Still, this general overview should be sufficient to gain a general understanding of the movement as a whole.

The term "progressive" became the descriptive term for this new theology because of its emphasis upon the successive stages in the unfolding of God's progressive kingdom program. This kingdom program includes the present age. In other words, they view each dispensation as building upon the previous one so that they flow from one to the next with each dispensation progressively completing more of God's plan. This is in contrast to the view of Traditional Dispensationalism, which holds that the church age is a parenthesis in the overall succession of God's plan with Israel.

In order to justify this type of interpretation, Progressives will often use Higher Critical methods in their exegesis of texts. We should be careful to note that this isn't all wrong, depending on what we are talking about. But Progressives routinely go far beyond the bounds of what I would find acceptable. For example, most Progressives will contend that the New Testament uses the same type of exegesis as the rabbis of Jesus' day. Therefore they will employ such methods as midrash and peshet to justify their finding new meaning in Old Testament texts--meaning that cannot be found in the context of the Old Testament. In other words, Progressives contend that the New Testament uses the Old Testament in such a way that it provided new meanings to Old Testament texts that cannot be found in the original context of those texts. Nearly all Progressives are heavily into redaction criticism, where they are more interested in the differences between the Gospels than the harmony of them. Redaction criticism also tends to make the Gospel writers more like editors than authors.

If this type of exegesis sounds similar to that employed by some Covenant Theologians, that is no accident. Progressive Dispensationalists see themselves as a half way house between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational theology. Traditional Dispensationalism seeks no harmony with Covenant Theology other than spiritual kinship in Christ. In other words, while we love them as brothers in the Lord, we do not attempt to harmonize their theological system with our own. In contrast, Progressive Dispensationalism seeks theological harmony with Covenant Theology. This attempt to blend the two systems has forced Progressives to challenge the notion of an essential set of beliefs that is common to Dispensationalism.

Traditional Dispensationalism accepts a core set of beliefs that is generally true of all Dispensationalists at all times. In other words, there is a common thread to the tradition that is rather substantial. Progressives, on the other hand, reject the idea of any essential core beliefs to Dispensationalism. There is no sine qua non. Instead, there is only a list of hermeneutical and theological concerns.

For example, Traditional Dispensationalists list literal interpretation, the distinction between Israel and the church and the doxological purpose of history (Ryrie's essentials) as the very things that make Dispensationalism distinct. Progressives reject this idea. They claim that the history of Dispensationalism is so varied that it is impossible to reduce Dispensationalism to universally common understandings within the tradition. They also claim that Ryrie was taking too much authority upon himself when he defined the limits of Dispensationalism. So instead they hold to a list of "concerns" or those things that Dispensationalists have always been interested in or have cared about. As a result, Progressives have moved from an essentialist viewpoint of

Dispensationalism to a descriptive view: from "you must believe this" to "most Dispensationalists believe this." Therefore, Progressives list such things as Premillennialism, Pretribulationism, the Universal Church, and a future for Israel as Dispensational "concerns," but not essentials.

There is one doctrine, however, that they leave off this list. For the Traditional Dispensationalist, the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church has always been a significant doctrine since it has a relationship to the distinction between Israel and the Church. In other words, the fact that the church will be snatched away while national Israel remains for the Tribulation is a significant feature of Traditional Dispensationalism. But this isn't a significant doctrine for the Progressives. Since they tend to downplay the distinction between Israel and the Church, they do not insist upon this doctrine nor do they, at least from my perspective, talk about it very much.

Now, this isn't to say that Progressives do not hold to a Pre-Tribulation position. To the best of my knowledge, most if not all Progressives hold to the same doctrine of the Rapture that we in IFCA International do, mostly because of exegetical reasons. My only point is that they put no emphasis upon this doctrine. The timing of the Rapture is unimportant in their eyes. They view this as a minor doctrine while traditionalists often consider this doctrine to be essential to the outline of God's purposes.

Additionally, in keeping with their role as a halfway house between Covenant and Dispensational Theology, they contend that Dispensational and non-Dispensational systems alike have used a consistent literal interpretation. They claim that Ryrie was mistaken when he labeled this a major issue that separated the two camps. Progressives maintain that Traditional Dispensationalists do a better job of exegesis in the Old Testament, while Covenant Theology does a better job of exegesis of the New Testament. Thus, Progressives combine the results of the two systems into a new synthesis.

Traditional Dispensationalists see this present age as a parenthesis in God's plan for Israel. This doesn't mean that somehow God was surprised by Israel's rejection of Christ and threw this Dispensation in as a stop gap measure by any means. But it does mean that this Dispensation has nothing to do with the national plan that God has for Israel. Instead, the prophecies of the Old Testament were not completed and an entirely new age, unforeseen in the Old Testament, has been placed between the first and second comings of Christ. In contrast, Progressives see this age as a harmonious continuation in succession of the entire sequence of Dispensations; God doesn't have a plan for Israel which is distinct from God's plan for the Church. The Age of Law naturally flows into this Age of Grace. Nothing has been put on hold, but rather this age naturally builds upon the one that has preceded it. Instead of a disruption or interruption in God's plan for Israel, the Church is a natural extension of it. Now, we should be careful to point out that the Church is indeed part of God's harmonious plan with respect for the ages. We have been chosen before the foundations of the world. But while that is true, the Church is not a continuation of God's plan for the nation of Israel.

Traditional Dispensationalism recognizes not only the historical distinction between Israel and the Church, but also the heavenly/earthly dichotomy between them. Thus, the main emphasis for Israel is on this earth, while the main emphasis for the Church is spiritual or heavenly. Progressives will accept the historical distinctions between Israel and the Church but reject the heavenly/earthly distinction between them. As a result, they would say that Israel in the Old Testament is distinct from the Church in the New Testament, but that God's plan is not separate for them. As a result, while Traditional Dispensationalism would say that God has a separate plan for both Israel and the Church, Progressive Dispensationalism would say that there is only one plan of God for the one people of God. In other words, Traditional Dispensationalism would say there is only one way for a person to be made right with God. This is through faith in the work of the Messiah. But God's purpose in history that He used to bring himself glory has two distinct

tracks: one for Israel and one for the Church. Progressives would agree that there is only one way of salvation, but they contend that God's plan is a single track and that the Church is an extension of God's plan for Israel so that ultimately there is only one people of God. It is important to note that they are not saying that the church is equivalent to Israel like Covenant Theology teaches. They maintain the historical distinctions between Israel and the Church. What they contend is that the Church is a natural extension of God's people in the Old Testament. There is still a future for national Israel, but that future is shared with the Church.

This is in essence the conclusion of George Ladd's Historical Premillennial scheme. Ladd and Progressive Dispensationalism end up with pretty much the same result. Still there are differences between the two. Progressives maintain that the Messianic Kingdom has already begun at the Ascension of Christ. Ladd starts the Kingdom in the Gospels. Ladd also has a very vague future for the Jews and Israel. Progressives generally hold to a concrete national ethnic Kingdom for the Jews.

This next distinction is probably the easiest to understand. Traditionalists believe that the Messianic Kingdom will start in the future at the Second Coming of Christ to this earth. We recognize Christ's headship of the Church and His general sovereignty (reigning) in the world at large, but we deny that this is a fulfillment of the Davidic rule promised in the Old Testament. Furthermore, no Davidic "kingdom authority" is needed to right injustices and demonstrate love for people in social action.

Progressives counter that Kingdom rule in the present age should be emphasized in order to pursue the rebuilding of social structures according to the ways of Christ. This concept has slipped into popular Christianity in some subtle ways. You probably recognize this popular chorus written by Pastor Jack Hayford, who is associated with the Foursquare Gospel movement:

Majesty, worship His majesty
Unto Jesus be all glory, honor, and praise
Majesty, kingdom authority
Flows from His throne unto His own
His anthem raise.

So, in this chorus, we see kingdom authority flowing to the church now. Progressive Dispensationalism would agree that this kingdom authority is what is needed in the Church in order for it to actively engage our society and move it toward social justice. It is also instructive to notice that this concept of kingdom authority in the present age is a common doctrine between Progressive Dispensationalism and Charismatic Theology.

What conclusions should we draw, therefore, from this brief examination of Progressive Dispensationalism? First, we must recognize that Progressive Dispensationalism has some positive aspects to it. For example, 1) It seeks to support its view with solid exegetical, biblical theology. These are not people who are dismissing the Bible as fiction, but rather are engaged in some difficult exegetical work. 2) They still firmly hold to the authority and inerrancy of the Word of God. It promotes harmony and unity in God's overall plan. Progressive Dispensationalism has provided a valuable reminder that God's plan is a unified one which was formulated before the world began. 3) It seeks a unified spirit with Covenant Theology as brothers seeking the truth. This again is a valuable reminder. I consider them wrong in their conclusions, but I am going to spend eternity with them and it is good for me to remember that we agree on much more than we disagree. Progressives have taken that to heart. 4) It seeks a foundation for optimism and social action in the present age. Progressives are firmly committed to social action and the practical application of their theology in this world. We would do well to follow their example in this.

This being said, the underlying assumptions of Progressive Dispensationalism are incompatible with an accurate understanding of the Bible as a whole and God's plan for the ages in particular. As a result, we as members of IFCA International should be aware of this new theology so that we may spare our flocks from the negative consequences of this new errant theology.

Bruce Baker is Senior Pastor of Open Door Bible Church and professor at Calvary Bible College and Seminary.

Comparisons, Contrasts, Contradictions and Some Myths

A look at the Islamic faith

Fred Plastow

Most critical issues of life are theological as they define our relationship with God. Current events have thrust upon the world the issue of faith. As many are aware, the media continues to present us with a mythical diet telling us that Islam is a peaceful religion. In a nine-week period following 9/11, the New York Times carried 64 news items on Islam, all of them positive. Appreciation of Islam has actually increased in the U.S. since the World Trade Towers were demolished. Much of this is due to media misinformation.

Islam does not mean "peace," but rather "submission." A reading of the Quran indicates that Islam means submission to God and his prophet. "...if any contend against Allah and His apostle Allah is strict in punishment..." (Q8.13, 14). This has tremendous political consequences for Islam and the world, as Islam is not simply a religion to minister to man's inner spiritual needs, but has political ramifications with a worldwide goal. Islam and Shariah law are to dominate humanity. Hassan Banna, one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood stated one of their principles as, "I believe that the Muslim has the responsibility to work to revive the glory of Islam, in promoting the revival of its peoples, in restoring its legislation. I believe that the banner of Islam should dominate humanity, and that the task of each Muslim consists of educating the world according to the rules of Islam; I commit myself to fight as long as I live to fulfill this mission, and to sacrifice all I possess to it." This view is foundational to radical Islam today.

Religion and the postmodern mindset

Another myth that contributes to this evaluation of a peaceful Islam is the postmodern secular view of religion which reasons, "Religion teaches good. Islam is a religion so it must be good. All religions are equal. Therefore Islam is to be given status with all other religions." While this sounds culturally sensitive, it is void of discernment and historical perspective. Islamic goals are not simply religious. They are theopolitical and envision Islam and Allah's law dominating the world.

Monotheism

While Islam is a monotheistic religion it holds to the "unicity" of God rather than the unity of God. It holds a strict absolute monotheism that will not tolerate the teaching of the Trinity. While Islam may appear unified, we find a cleavage between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims that began with the selection of the fourth Caliph (or successor) in Islam. Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, was chosen because of his ties with him through marriage. His sons, Hassan and Hussein, were considered descendents of the prophet and were to be followed. Hussein was killed at Karbulla by the Sunnis and a division was created in Islam. In their pursuit to follow the succession of the prophet, the Shiites have developed a sort of saint-worship or adoration of Hussein and other holy men of Islam. The Sunnis and the strict Wahhabi sect see this as polytheism and numerous have

been the conflicts between them. Thus while both Islam and Christianity are considered monotheistic religions, there is a vast contrasting difference in understanding.

Testimony

The Muslim testifies: "There is no god, but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah." There should be no doubt that while the Muslim testifies to one god, he joins this in his mind with his belief that Muhammad is the apostle of God. There is not one without the other. Muhammad is the one who received the revelation of the eternal word of Allah, through Gabriel to himself. This word includes laws for the Muslim community by which they are bound. Laws then become the basis for life and politics. Consequently, Islam is theopolitical, and the goal of Islam is for the world to be governed by Islamic law, which is Allah's law.

Christianity, however, sees a spiritual kingdom that is being constituted from peoples around the world, in preparation for that kingdom to be revealed at the return of Christ. The laws of Jesus are not imposed on society. They are lived in the lives of the believers among a hostile and unbelieving world. The Christian parallel to the Muslim's shahada or witness is: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3). Our faith is not based on a statement about the absolute oneness of God, but upon the knowledge of Him as revealed in His Son through the Spirit-inspired Scriptures.

Scriptural Authority

The two books of each faith must be contrasted: the linear Bible and the punctuated Quran. The Bible is an integrated historical unity revealed over a 1500 year period by over 40 writers. The Quran, however, is purported to have been revealed in a twenty-two year period and is considered the final revelation, which supercedes all others. The Quran is referential concerning the Bible. That is, it summarizes the Old Testament biblical stories, but quotes none of them accurately. This may be one reason why the Jews of Mecca rejected Muhammad. He didn't quote the references. The New Testament, in contrast, quotes abundantly from the Old Testament in attestation to the fulfillment of prophecy. We carry the Old Testament and New Testament together in one book and see no contradiction. One could not, however, add the Quran to these two covenant books without creating a vast discontinuity. While the Bible sustains its internal unity, the Quran accuses the Jews of corruption of their scriptures. This is a serious charge which Muslims today interpret as textual tampering and not just verbal twisting. This also leads to one of the most contradictory doctrines of Islam, that of "naskh wa'l mansukh," "abrogating and abrogated." That there are contradicting verses in the Quran is explained as one verse abrogating, or setting aside, an earlier verse. Problems arise when an abrogating verse precedes an abrogated verse. Since the Quran is structured by chapter length rather than chronologically, it is difficult to pinpoint the historical sequence. One thing is clear. There are Quranic verses that are viewed as abrogated yet constitute part of the text considered as eternal in the heavens. The Christian who holds to an authoritative biblical text finds this untenable.

Hermeneutics

In seeking to interpret the Bible we take the historical grammatical approach. This is so we won't misappropriate commands given to someone in the historical past and seek to apply them as normative to our life today. We instead look for life guiding principles. We take a grammatical approach so that we pay attention to the integrity of the text. For the Muslim, however, his Quran is conceived as written on tablets in heaven from all eternity and so is applicable to life today. The men who flew into the World Trade Center left a note with the following "...God said: 'Smite above their necks and smite all their finger tips.' (VIII-12) And know that the Gardens of Paradise are beautified with the best of ornaments, and its inhabitants are calling you. And...do not let differences come between you, and listen and obey, and if you kill, then kill completely, because

this is the way of the Chosen One (i.e. Muhammad)." While some Muslims may interpret this verse in an historical context of the past, these men saw it as applicable to today. The interpretative concept of an eternal word from God that must be practiced to the letter, apart from history, can have grave consequences.

Community

While the Bible emphasizes the truth of the body of Christ, Islam speaks of the Muslim Ummah. Islam began in 622 AD when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina. It may seem strange to us that such a time was selected as the beginning of a religion. But it makes sense to the Muslim who sees the beginning of Islam as the time when the Muslims were constituted as a community and initiated social, religious and government laws. The Muslim community must come under the Islamic Shariah or law. Thus the Muslim community is bound together by faith, religion, law and politics. In contrast to Islam, the body of Christ is a spiritual organism comprised of those from all nations who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ and await His coming in the air. The body of Christ was formed at Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Since the Muslim perceives the Ummah as worldwide, any action against any Muslim anywhere is perceived as a threat to the worldwide community. One problem that has beset the Muslim world is that the succession to the prophet was never adequately established and so history has not produced a model Islamic state.

Law or Shariah

To the Christian the law is our school teacher to bring us to Christ for deliverance from a standard we could not keep in our own power. For the Jew, the keeping of the law meant salvation. For the Muslim the law is the revealed will of God that must be obeyed. The Muslim believes that the Muslim community must be guided by the Shariah or Islamic law. The Shariah derives its sources from the Quran, the Hadith or traditional sayings and doings of the prophet, and judicial precedents. Since Islam is theopolitical in its perception of the world, everywhere Islam is established, its community must be guided by Islamic law. As Islam grows in the U.S., appeals will be made by the Muslim community to be judged by Shariah law rather than secularly established laws. For the Muslim the state is only viable if it governs according to Shariah.

Christ

The Quran mentions Jesus in 93 verses scattered in fifteen chapters. He is called the Son of Mary, and the Word of God. It attests that He did miracles, raised the dead, and is coming again. However, it denies the deity of Christ, His Sonship, and His crucifixion. The Quran affirms that Jesus was made like Adam. Thus while Islam has a certain picture of Jesus, it has a distorted and incomplete one. In consequence, when a Christian seeks to testify to the glories of Christ and His person, he is met with resistance by the Muslim who believes he has a fuller revelation. This presents us with quite a few challenges.

Salvation

I believe one thing that distinguishes biblical Christianity from all other religions of the world is the assurance of salvation. This is not arrogance. It is simple faith in the integrity of our God who has said that "he who has the Son has life" (1 Jn. 5:12). Salvation is based upon faith in Christ alone, apart from self- fulfillment of the law or through works. Christ alone purchased our redemption which we in no way deserved. Salvation is provided by the grace of God. The Muslim, on the other hand, through his attachment to a system of law and works, can never be assured of forgiveness and salvation. He can never know if he has done everything or done enough. The only hope of salvation indicated in the Quran is through martyrdom, fighting in the cause of Allah. Islam, in its zeal to do God's will by effort, has missed the greatest truth for all mankind; the sacrifice of Christ which gives us the assurance of sins forgiven and eternal life.

Rev. Fred Plastow is an IFCA International member. He has had 30 years field experience among Muslims with Avant Ministries (formerly Gospel Missionary Union). During the past year he has presented a seminar series on Understanding Islam in many churches with good response. He can be contacted at fplastow@avmi.org.

The Big Secret

Robert Morris

I don't want to stop being Jewish! There, our big secret is out in the open. The number one, usually unspoken reason why your Jewish friend, co-worker, or neighbor will hesitate to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior is the thought, "I was born Jewish, and I want to die Jewish."

The Problem

What is going on in the private recesses of his mind? Rattling around in his thoughts, consciously or unconsciously, is the rabbinic answer to the question, "Who is a Jew?". The rabbinic answer to that question goes something like this. "A Jewish person is anyone born of a Jewish mother and who practices Rabbinic Judaism, the religion of the Jews." The issue blocking the reception of Jesus as Savior and Messiah centers around personal identity, "Who am I, a Jew or a Christian?" The rabbinic definition is an incorrect, manipulative, non-biblical statement deliberately designed to accomplish two goals. First, it is designed to keep the Jewish person away from Jesus, and second, to enhance rabbinic authority. Implicit in the definition is the threat of excommunication (formal or informal) from his heritage, friends, social standing, economic ties, and family. In the past, although rarely today, a Jewish Christian was considered dead to the extent that a symbolic funeral was held for them.

Unfortunately, on many occasions, Christians have bought into this answer and have reinforced the roadblock. One end of the spectrum is the well meaning Christian who is insensitive and ignorant of Jewish culture and concerns. The well meaning Christian makes statements like, "Aren't you glad you're no longer Jewish?" with a knowing and patronizing smile. However, a much more serious reinforcement of the erroneous rabbinic definition is found in church history. In the past, Jewish Christians were required to make statements denouncing the whole Jewish people. Such reinforcement of the rabbinic definition has been immeasurably harmful to Jewish evangelism in the past as well as today. Now that we know what the roadblock is, how do we remove it?

The Solution

The solution is to clearly understand and communicate the biblical answer to the question. The correct answer to the question "Who is a Jew?" must be derived from Scripture for two reasons. The first reason is that Scripture is our unchanging, objective source of authority. The second reason is that we must derive the definition because there is no verse stating, "A Jewish person is..."

Derivation

For the biblical answer to the question, we need to turn to the book of Genesis and the Abrahamic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant was instituted with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 (see also Genesis 13, 15, 17).

**Now the Lord said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives**

And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

The Abrahamic Covenant was then confirmed and passed on to Isaac, not Abraham's son Ishmael, in Genesis 26:2-5.

The Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you.

"Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham.

"I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."

Isaac passed the Abrahamic Covenant on to his son Jacob, not Esau, in Genesis 28:13-14.

And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.

"Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Finally, Isaac passed the covenant on in Genesis 49 when he extended his blessing to each and every son of Jacob. From Genesis 49 the Abrahamic Covenant comes down to every Jewish person today.

From this succession, we can derive the biblical definition of "Who is a Jew?". The biblical definition is this: "A Jewish person is anyone who is descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Jewishness is a family relationship. As a family relationship, Jewishness can never be lost. An individual is inextricably bound to his family no matter what he thinks, says, or does. In addition, it is impossible for religious belief or practice to undo the genetic identity within each individual. This factor of permanence can also be clearly seen in the pages of Holy Scripture.

Example of Permanence

The best way to demonstrate the indissoluble permanence of Jewishness is to look at Israel's history in the Bible. Repeatedly in the Bible, we became involved in the worship of all kinds of false "gods." For example, Judges 10:6 states:

"Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him."

Not once do you read in the pages of Scripture that we ceased to be Jews when we were involved in false religions no matter what they were, how foul their rites, or how deep their penetration into

Jewish society. Rather, instead of disowning us, God punished us because we were Jews. We were punished because the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had entered into a covenant relationship with the God of the universe. In other words, Jewishness is not lost because of what you believe or because of your religious association. Punishment might come, but not the loss of Jewishness. Jewishness is permanent.

Confirmation

The confirmation of this definition is succinctly stated in Amos 3:2.

"You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

In Amos 3:2, the Jewish people are primarily considered a family, not a religion. Why is religion not a factor? Religion is not a factor in the definition because Israel is sinning in Amos 3:2. Israel is involved in false worship. Are the Jewish people told they are no longer Jewish? Absolutely not. We are told that we will be punished because we belong to the family that was chosen to be God's conduit of revelation to the world. Religious belief, or any other kind of belief, is not a consideration. Jewishness is permanent no matter what you believe because Jewishness is primarily a physical, family identity. In contrast, your citizenship might change and your religion might change, but if you are born a Jew, you will die a Jew.

Rabbinic Recognition

In fact, if you press the rabbis on this issue, they are forced to admit that their definition does not hold up to analysis. Rabbi Alfred J. Kolatch in his book *The Second Jewish Book of Why*, makes these honest and revealing statements on page 35.

"Why do Jews never lose their Jewish identity, even if they convert to another religion? Jewish law adopted the view of the third-century Palestinian Rabbi Abba ben Zavda, who said, "Even when Jews sin, they continue to be identified as Jews." He followed that statement with this picturesque comparison: "A myrtle though it stands among reeds is still a myrtle and continues to be so called." ...Jewish law insists that a Jew may never be denied his basic rights as a Jew, even if he goes so far as to convert to another religion."

Unfortunately, the majority of rabbis have not been as honest and forthright as Rabbi Kolatch when it comes to a Jew placing his trust in the Messiahship of Jesus.

Practical Application of the Correct Definition

Once the biblical definition of "Who is a Jew?" is clear in the Christian's mind, three issues need to be communicated to the Jewish friend. 1) Jewishness, 2) the Good News, and 3) spiritual identity.

In the beginning of the evangelism process, the Christian must clearly communicate the true, accurate, biblical definition of "Who is a Jew?". Your friend must recognize that the authority of the Bible supercedes the authority of the rabbis. Show him that the rabbinical definition stands in opposition to the Bible and that his identity as a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will never change. He was born a Jew and he will die a Jew. His religious belief will change. His religious practice will change. He will no longer follow the religion called Rabbinic Judaism, but he will remain Jewish. This is the major hurdle to be jumped.

As the evangelism process continues to the point of decision, the Christian must inform him of the Good News. The Jewish person must understand that if Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, then trusting

Him for salvation from sin is the most Jewish thing he can do. He will gain a personal relationship with God, forgiveness from sin, and the gift of eternal life. That is good news.

Finally, inform your Jewish friend of his new spiritual identity. He has not converted to a Gentile "god" or followed a Gentile religion. He has been converted from sin to righteousness, from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God. He has become a spiritual Jew. He is doing the most Jewish thing any Jew born anew can do. He is trusting in the Messianic promise that was delivered to his ancestors and that has been hoped for and prayed for from time immemorial.

Robert Morris, a member of IFCA International, is Director of HaDavar Messianic Ministries, an outreach of Irvine Community Church of Irvine, CA.

Patience and Prayer in Local Church Ministry

Mark D. Johnson

As a pastor, I find myself getting nervous when "the vision thing" comes up. Somehow, I don't think I'm alone in this. Many pastors who have a heart for the flock of Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Word feel unfavorably compared to strong visionary leaders whose churches gain nationwide attention. That's threatening.

Don't get me wrong. I want to be more of a visionary, initiating leader. But, for me, it's a studied and acquired skill not a natural trait. I'd like to give testimony in this article to the power of a sometimes forgotten aspect of church leadership.

The Lord has been teaching me that one of the keys to local church ministry is concerted prayer about specific goals, even those goals whose accomplishment is beyond our ability and logic. If I'm burdened to see God do something in our church, I'm learning that the first step is to begin praying and to keep praying.

Homegrown Missionaries

About ten years ago our church began praying specifically to send out more homegrown missionaries. A slogan developed--"Ten in the Nineties," meaning ten homegrown missionaries by the year 2000. We didn't reach the goal. But by God's grace and a church-wide prayer effort, we sent out seven. Now we are praying for "Ten By Ten By Prayer"--ten more homegrown missionaries from within our Body by the year 2010. By God's grace, six have been commissioned and four more are raising support and it is only 2004.

Multi-cultural Ministry

During our first year in Martinsburg fourteen years ago, my wife and I became aware that there were significant numbers of migrant workers, especially Hispanics, in our community. There was a couple interested in initiating a ministry to this group, but they relocated before doing so. Gerri and I prayed off and on about the growing Hispanic population around us. We really had no idea of how our church would find time and personnel for such a ministry. But, we did pray. Joe Henriques (IFCA International member and expert in cross cultural ministry then with People of the World) challenged us about the international population in our area. "We're praying about that", I replied somewhat lamely.

Five years ago, God began to quietly answer that prayer. A member of our church and faithful witness led his Mexican neighbor to Christ. Jimmy Salinas and his family began to attend church and get involved in our Foundations Class for new folks. As Jimmy grew in Christ, he displayed a great burden for his own people and a God-given gift for evangelism. It has become evident that

God had sent us a "missionary" to the Spanish speaking population of our area. What an answer to prayer this was.

A multi-cultural ministry team was formed and Joe Henriques met with them for training. For the first several months of its existence this team primarily met weekly for prayer. Out of prayer the vision was refined. They started a new class called El Camino ("The Way" in Spanish). Around twenty attend on Sunday mornings and twelve on Thursdays. Other outreaches have developed including English as a Second Language classes, soccer outreach, and "Jesus" video distribution in Spanish. A "Hispanic Fiesta" Outreach was held for a weekend in September for the past two Septembers and drew over two hundred Hispanics for food, soccer tournament, and concert and preaching in Spanish.

Jimmy Salinas, the main Spanish Bible teacher, continues to grow and is part of my leadership training class. It was about thirteen years ago that my wife and I prayed that our church would touch our Spanish speaking population. It was also about thirteen years ago that Jimmy entered the United States illegally, as a nominal Catholic, not knowing the Gospel and not speaking English. He had no idea that thirteen years later he would not only be an American citizen running his own successful business, but that God would have intervened in his life, saved him, and used him to lead many other Hispanics to Jesus Christ.

At our last two baptisms at Independent Bible Church, we have had to have translation of testimonies from English to Spanish as five new believers from El Camino have followed the Lord in believers' baptism. This ministry is still young and small. But God is building it in answer to prayer

Church Planting

Another ministry in which we have seen God do more in answer to prayer than we expected has been church extension. I have been interested in church planting ever since Bible College. That is why I was excited when I received a letter from a regular attendee at our church asking if we would sponsor a daughter church to help him reach his neighbors about thirty minutes from us. Woody Beddow, a new Christian who had fallen in love with Bible teaching, was personally content to drive the thirty minutes to our church. He was burdened, however, to reach his unsaved neighbors that he knew would not drive half an hour to our church.

The year was 1991. Unfortunately, our board did not feel led at that time to begin a daughter church. They had their hands full. Besides, the previous church plant they had tried to help an hour away had not gone smoothly. I asked if we could keep praying. The Board did give me permission to start a week-night Bible study in Woody's home. Six months later, they gave me permission to miss Sunday School in order to hold an early service in an abandoned church building near Woody's home and then drive the thirty minutes back to Independent Bible Church in time to preach. This went on for six months. Thus, Fellowship Bible Church of Charles Town, WV was born. They called their own pastor and Independent Bible Church put them into our missions budget. God had again done the unexpected.

It was only by prayer and God's grace that Fellowship Bible Church survived their first four years. They moved to a school building but little growth occurred. Their first two pastors only stayed a year each. After the second pastor left, their two elders met with our elders to ask for advice and assistance. They were afraid the church would fold but believed God wanted it to continue. In that meeting, God touched the heart of our Youth Pastor Van Marsceau and burdened his heart to offer to become pastor Fellowship Bible Church if the church would agree. They did. And that church of 35 people has grown under Pastor Van's leadership to an average attendance of well over two hundred.

We are now praying about actually parenting a church in our growing county. Again, we don't know the details of how this will develop; but God does.

They did; and that church of 35 people has grown under Pastor Van's leadership to an average attendance of 250. They have called a full-time youth pastor, support eight missionaries, have purchased fifty acres of land, and plan to break ground for their own building in the Fall of 2004. It has been exciting to watch God grow this church and to have had a small part early in its launch.

As our people have watched God raise up this new church, they have become more interested in future church planting. We are now praying about actually parenting a church in our growing county. I'm still not a great visionary leader; but I have learned that vision can become reality through patience and prayer by the grace of God.

Mark Johnson is Senior Pastor of Independent Bible Church of Martinsburg, WV. He is a graduate of Appalachian Bible College and Grace Theological Seminary.

CHAPLAIN'S DIARY

Amazing Opportunities

US Air Force Chaplain Captain Jason Peters has represented IFCA International in some important places around the world. In 1999 he was stationed at Diego Garcia, a 13 square mile island in the middle of the Indian Ocean. While there he participated in the baptism of nineteen new believers and then several other new believers at the Prince Sultan Air Base near Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia.

"What an unbelievable experience!" says Chaplain Peters about the Diego Garcia baptisms. "I felt so small. I was standing waist deep in the Indian Ocean, literally halfway around the world, with probably 100 people on the beach watching as I baptized 19 believers. As American Christians, our understanding of God is so limited to our context. This experience clearly demonstrated that our God is working in powerful ways around the universe.

"God strategically placed me there at that precise moment to help these believers in their journey of discipleship. I am still in touch with some of them to this day and they are growing fantastically -- what a blessing," says Chaplain Peters.

Then he returned to the U.S. and was assigned to minister to the 5000 Air Force personnel at the Pentagon. He was stationed there on September 11, 2001.

Reflecting on that tragic day Chaplain Peters says, "As part of my current assignment, I helped with the first group following the attacks on the Pentagon. That afternoon and well into the evening, we worked, and I was able to personally counsel and minister to the police and firefighters following the tragedy."

Chaplain Peters says his present Pentagon assignment has given him ample opportunities to minister, most recently in conjunction with the war in Iraq.

"There has been a different temperature and tension in the offices," he said. "With coworkers and fellow service men and women deploying, it has been challenging. It hasn't changed my ministry and work directly, but I have been counseling and caring for many more family members of currently deployed personnel."

A stained glass window was dedicated in the memorial chapel where relatives can dedicate sections in memory of the 184 individuals killed at the Pentagon, which marks the hijacked plane's point of impact. Several dignitaries, including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and House Speaker Dennis Hastert, attended the dedication service, which was broadcast live on CNN, FOX and C-Span. Chaplain Peters read Scripture and led music during the service. The stained glass window was dedicated in the chapel. "What an honor and excitement it was to see God's Word proclaimed in these types of contexts," Chaplain Peters says. "The assembly of the stained glass window by those who had lost loved ones was a very solemn event, and it really promoted healing among the troops."

Chaplain Peters' father is Pastor Loren Peters, an IFCA member pasturing Faith Bible Church of Sacramento, CA. His undergraduate degree is from Calvary Bible College of Kansas City. He and wife Kim have three children.

WOMEN'S VOICE

Gloria Ward

Titus 2:3-5 says of older women that they are to "be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things--that they teach the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their husband--that the Word of God may not be blasphemed."

In order for older women to teach this effectively you can use the following acrostic:

O bey

L ove

D elicate

E xample

R espect

W atchful

O verseer

M agnify

E ncourage

N egllect not

Y oung

O vercome

U nderstand them

N ever put them down

G ive of yourself

E steem

R enew

W orkers

O pportunity

M ature

E rror

N eed

To

Obey

2 John 6 says "And this is love that we walk according to His commandments."

Love

John 15:12 says, "...love one another, just as I have loved you."

Delicate

Jeremiah 6:2 says we are to be "lovely and delicate women."

Example

1 Peter 2:21 says "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."

Respect

Romans 2:11 Younger women need to be respected as part of body of Christ.

Watchful

Matthew 26:41 says to "watch and pray... for the flesh is weak."

Overseer

Titus 2 reminds older women of their responsibility to younger women.

Magnify

Ps. 34:3 says that we are to "magnify the Lord" with others.

Encourage

Phil. 4:13 Remind younger women that they can do "all things through Christ."

Neglect not

1 Tim. 4:14 Help the younger women to use the gifts which God has given them.

Young

Deuteronomy 32:7 Remember that you were young once too. Reflect on how God has worked in your life; teach lessons you have learned.

Overcome

Romans 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Understand them

Proverbs 16:22 "Understanding is a wellspring of life to him who has it."

Never put them down

Prov. 31:26 Use your tongue/words to show kindness.

Give of yourself

Acts 6:4 Take time with them for prayer and the Word.

Esteem

Phil. 2:3 Don't be selfish. Look out for the interest of the younger women.

Renew

Romans 12:2 Teach the younger women how to renew their minds through the Word.

Workers

Titus 2:5 Show the younger women how to keep a godly home with excellence.

Opportunity

Gal. 6:10 Look for opportunities where you can "do good" to younger women.

Mature

Phil. 3:15 Help the younger women to become mature in their walk with the Lord.

Error

Ecclesiastes 8:5 Instruct the younger women so that they can discern error in doctrine.

Need

1 Corinthians 12:14 The Body of Christ is many members that all need each other. Reach out to a younger woman and include her in the fellowship of the Body of Christ.

TO

For Older Women to teach Younger Women is not an option. It is an order from the Commander and Chief--Jesus Christ Himself. What a change would occur in our churches and what a testimony to the world if our older women would step up and teach our younger women as God has instructed us to!

TEN MOST WANTED WOMEN

1. A woman who puts God's business above her own.

2. A woman who brings her children to church rather than sending them.
3. A woman who is willing to be the right example to every girl she meets.
4. A woman who thinks more of her Sunday School class than her Sunday sleep.
5. A woman who measures her giving by what she has left, rather than by what she gives.
6. A woman who goes to church for Christ's sake, not for any other reasons.
7. A woman who has a willing, teachable mind, and not just a brilliant mind.
8. A woman who has more of a passion to help than to be helped.
9. A woman more concerned about winning souls than having worldly honor.
10. A woman who sees her own faults before she sees the faults of others.

Gloria Ward is Head Counselor for Girls at Cedine Bible Camp in Spring City, TN. When camp is not in session she is the Hostess for many women's retreats that are held at Cedine Ministries. She is referred to affectionately at camp as "Miss Gloria".

An Idea To Encourage Your Church in Evangelism

To advertise your Good Friday service, use door knob hanger plastic bags to invite the neighborhood. In each bag, place a miniature flashlight, invitation to the service, and a gospel tract which gives a clear presentation of the gospel. Include a note explaining that your church desires to be a light in the community, introducing people to Christ.

At the Good Friday service, consider showing a special quality-produced video dealing with the death and resurrection of Christ. After the video, use a "communication card" to determine those with further interest. Ask each person to fill one out so you will know how many attended, where they were from, what ages they represent. Ask those with further interest in talking about spiritual things to check the upper right hand corner. It's important to keep the card generic and not put your church's name on it. Otherwise, they will fear they are signing up for church membership. Visit those who indicate an interest in talking further. By making this an annual event some churches have attracted many from their community.

If your church has an idea to encourage others in evangelism, send it to Larry Moyer at lmoyer@evantell.org. Visit EvanTell at www.evantell.org

To Answer Your Question

Q. I know I need to spend time with non-Christians if I'm going to witness to them, but I don't particularly enjoy being around them. How can I change my attitude?

A. The issue is not whether you enjoy being around non-Christians, but whether you have a concern for them. The New Testament tells us eight times that Christ was filled with compassion for unbelievers. Matthew 9:36 says, "But when he saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."

Compassion means a heart filled with pity toward others. The father of a missionary who was martyred by the Auca Indians of Ecuador said, "I feel sorrier for those poor Indians than I feel

for my own son." That's the spirit of compassion Christ wants us to demonstrate toward the non-Christian.

Beware of a "what's in it for me" philosophy. Love puts others first, even if it means sacrificing self.

Personal evangelism demands personal contact. Even though time with Christians might be more enjoyable, spend time with unbelievers. How else will they see the love of Christ? Anyone can love the lovable. To love the unlovable takes a heart filled with Christ's love.

If you look beyond the person to the problem it will help you to demonstrate a spirit of compassion. In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul characterizes the non-Christian in distressing but descriptive terms. He reminds the Ephesians, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

Scripture presents unbelievers living in bondage to Satan's desires. However, as Christians we have been set free. "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Pause for 60 seconds and remember what you were like as an unbeliever. Recall the patience and forbearance of the people who were instrumental in your salvation. By His grace, return the favor.

Q. I've been told that I should not spend time with unbelievers because of how they can affect me spiritually. Some have even told me that it's wrong to spend time with unbelievers. How should I respond?

A. It is not wrong to spend time with unbelievers. Paul even says that if one made up his mind not to keep company with non-Christians, he would have to leave the world (1 Cor. 5:10). Christ Himself was known as a friend of sinners. His pattern ought to be our practice.

Verses that appear to teach that we should not spend time with unbelievers are frequently stretched out of context. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul says, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with the sexually immoral people." He was referring to a Christian. This person needs rebuke, not fellowship.

When James said, "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy with God" (James 4:4), he was not condemning being a friend to an unbeliever. In context, he explained that conflicts in their assembly of believers were because they were living closer to the world than to Christ.

It is imperative to spend time with believers who can spur us on to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). But if we refrain from spending time with unbelievers because of possible detriment to our spiritual growth, that's a commentary on us. I heard a man say, "If your spiritual life goes 'down the tubes' as soon as you're around unbelievers, that's probably where it belonged in the first place!" Scripture teaches we should be so in tune with God that when we're around unbelievers our life affects theirs rather than theirs affecting ours.

R. Larry Moyer serves as President of EvanTell, Inc. and is a consultant in evangelism to IFCA International. These questions may be reproduced in your church newsletter with the footer :

"Used by permission of EvanTell, Inc. Larry Moyer, EvanTell's President, serves as consultant in evangelism to IFCA International."