

Wineskins Magazine

Sacraments

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How Do You Spell LOVE?

by Rubel Shelly

January – June, 1995

The love of God is seen most perfectly in the cross of Jesus Christ. Not in the miracles, awe-inspiring as they were. Not in the sermons or parables, insightful and kingdom-illuminating as they were. Not in acts of compassion for the poor and outcast, compelling as they were. But in the cross. The Cross!

Augustine insisted that the cross was a pulpit from which Christ preached the love of God to the world. “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8). “For God so loved the world that he gave his incomparable Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

It is certainly true that God’s love is disclosed in creation and throughout history. After all, he has created us in his own image and made it possible for us to live with him forever. But divine love is sometimes rather obscure in human experience. We live at considerable distance from God in this world. His real presence and loving nature do not overwhelm us to the degree that we simply cannot fail to perceive them. There are killer earthquakes as well as nourishing showers, painful sickness as well as radiant health. It is only at the cross that God’s love is seen exhaustively and without ambiguity.

A young man I will call Ron was diagnosed with leukemia at Vanderbilt Hospital. There was immediate treatment with chemotherapy, and he improved enough that he was able to return to school. Before he completed two semesters, however, he was desperately ill again. This time his only hope was a bone marrow transplant, with all the risk and pain involved in it.

Drugs and radiation were used to kill his own bone marrow. He was pitifully ill during the process. Vomiting. Chills. Painful ulcerations in his mouth. Then he was given bone marrow from a close relative. The hope was that the drugs and radiation would kill the diseased cells and that he could generate new bone marrow—and get well.

Days became weeks, and nothing worked. He suffered horribly. Over and over, as I visited him in the hospital, his mother would follow me into the hall as I left and sob, “How I wish it could be me instead!” On the day Ron died, she was still telling me, “I wish it could have been me.”

When love sees a crisis in the one who is its object, the immediate impulse is to want to stand in the loved one’s place. So a mother would gladly substitute herself for a son dying painfully from leukemia. A father will push his little girl out of harm’s way and put himself between her and what is threatening her. Did you catch the critical terms? Stand in. Substitute. Put himself in harm’s way. This is what happened when Jesus died on the cross.

In the death of Jesus Christ on a Roman cross, God took our place. Justice required that sin be punished. The full weight of judgment had to come down. When it happened, the spotless Lamb of God stood in our place, became our substitute, and put himself on the altar of sacrifice.

Jesus was not being punished for anything he had done wrong that day. He endured a judgment he did not deserve so we can have salvation we do not deserve. In that awful cry “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46), you and I hear Jesus saying that he had taken our place and experienced the agony of God-forsakenness that we should have to experience for eternity.

The highest and purest love of all is at the center of the gospel. That is why his death is called vicarious and substitutionary.

God did not stand in our place that day because we had pleaded for him to do so. We had not changed our attitude toward him or our behavior in relation to his will. God’s decision to save us by taking the penalty for our sins onto himself was not based on the cosmic calculations of the probability that we would one day

change for the better. It was an act of grace. Undeserved kindness. Pure love. “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

In this issue of Wineskins, we focus again (as we shall repeatedly and without apology!) on the central event of Christian faith. We tell the story of the cross. And we focus particularly on the three historical means employed by the church and ordained of God for its communication. Along with other articles of special importance in this issue, three have been written to develop the idea that Christ’s church exists to present the message of God’s love at the cross through both word (i.e., preaching) and event (i.e., baptism and the Lord’s Supper).

First, Milton Jones focuses on the cross as the heart of preaching. He calls all who claim to “proclaim the gospel” to be sure we are faithful to our claim. Not ourselves as pulpit stars. Not the rightness of our church. But the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Second, Bob Hendren leads us from the shallow water of understanding baptism as “the final step in the plan of salvation” to the deep, biblical water of regarding it as an embrace of grace through faith in the death of Jesus. He exposes the heresy of seeing baptism as our contribution to the salvation process and proclaims the New Testament doctrine of baptism as response (not addition) to the cross.

Third, David Wead teaches the wonderful truth of the Lord’s Supper as a proclamation of the death of Christ until his return. He explains in a compelling manner why this event among believers is not merely our compliance with duty but the church’s ongoing experience of Christ and a bold statement about its expectation of eternity.

If anyone understands the true meaning of the love of God, he or she has discovered the love that is spelled J-e-s-u-s. We hope you will share our delight in exploring the gospel again in this issue. FREE Access!

Saturday Preaching (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Mike Cope

January – June, 1995

Everyone needs a place where they can set their watch. In my home town, Pet Milk was the ultimate authority. People in Neosho, Missouri could set their watches by the noon whistle. It was an authority that wasn't to be questioned — although there always lingered the uncertainty of where the whistle-blower at Pet Milk set his watch!

I like the tradition of a Baptist Church in Abilene. Every April when it's time to set clocks forward an hour—so that non-church-attenders don't notice it while church-attenders are punished (since they have to finish their sleep in hard pews)—this church waits until they meet the next morning. They get their full night's sleep. Then together they roll their watches forward from 10:00 to 11:00. I love this picture: a church gathered on Sunday to make sure everyone knows what time it is.

So much of preaching is helping Christians figure out what time it is. Week after week preachers announce what time it is. We are the ones who help others recalibrate their time frame.

Our two central reference points are the ones communion underscores each week: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"(1 Corinthians 11:26). Our first reference point is the death and resurrection of Jesus; the second is the future return of Jesus. The first is the pivotal event of all history. The second is the inevitable culmination of that event.

The Apostle Paul was quite familiar with the apocalyptic time frame: this evil age and the age of God to come. But while his language is similar, it also has a unique twist. To Paul, the end has already begun. In other words, there is an overlap of the two ages, and it's in this overlap that God's people live.

The old age is one marked by sin. It is the world of death, of pride, of lust, of disregard for God. It is the place of despair and hopelessness. It's a time when old prejudices are savored and hurt feelings are cherished.

The new age is the one marked by grace and by freedom from sin. It is where life is oriented around God and his rule. It is the realm where humans are freed from the evil forces that previously kept a gun to their heads with bullets like fear, anxiety, and meaninglessness.

God's people already are a part of this new age. We already have eternal life; we already have forgiveness; we have already been delivered from our sins and passions. But we have not yet fully experienced the new age. For while we have been saved from sins, we still sin. While we have already been forgiven, we still need forgiveness. While we have been raised to walk in new life, we still face death.

It is the job of the preacher to keep reminding the church what time it is. We, like communion, proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We announce the good news that we aren't stuck in Friday—when there is nothing but darkness covering the earth, when doom and gloom prevail. A funeral dirge shouldn't be our theme song!

But we also announce that it isn't quite Sunday—when darkness is completely past, when we fully experience the resurrection, when all tears are wiped away from our eyes. And so the New Song of Revelation also doesn't quite fit as a theme song either.

We live in Saturday—between the old age of Friday and the new age of Sunday. In our congregations are those who live in the despair of Friday and others who've leaped over Saturday into the fullness of Sunday. To both groups we announce week after week that it is Saturday. We have already but not yet fully been saved. We have already but not yet fully received eternal life.

We are now a people who hope (Romans 8:24), wait (Philippians 3:20f), long (Romans 8:19), and groan (Romans 8:22f, 26). We don't fall into the pit of despair or try to leap to the peak of final triumph. As George Steiner has written, "Ours is

the long day's journey of the Saturday. Between suffering, aloneness, unutterable waste on the one hand and the dream of liberation, of rebirth on the other" (Real Presences).

Every aspect of Christian living must be kept in this framework. If our time frame is skewed, our lives will be as well. So those of us who preach continue pointing to the kingdom that has been inaugurated but not consummated. We prod the stubborn of faith to believe what God has already done through Christ. And we warn the naïve of faith that the final victory remains. In other words, we continue proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes.

Baptism as Gospel Proclamation (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Bob Hendren

January – June, 1995

The meaning baptism has acquired for us as a people is extraordinary. Baptism has often been presented as if it had a life of its own. For many it is the Queen of the Commandments, the final step on the staircase of initial salvation. Quite often, in mounds of literature, baptism is employed as a description of the total conversion process. Reports filter in from various churches listing x number of baptisms occurring during certain meetings or other measured intervals. I do not recall reading in any significant number of cases about x number of persons expressing their trust in Jesus the Christ, or a similar number finding God's grace and turning to the Lord. The number of baptisms is seen as the normative manner of reporting conversions. "Have you been baptized?" is more frequently asked than "Have you been converted to Christ?"

Baptism, in our brotherhood, is also seen as the sine qua non of biblical soundness. "He preaches everything biblically except baptism" is a remark I have heard on more than one occasion. In addition, you may have heard, "If they just required baptism, I would feel more comfortable about their doctrine." How much is measured in terms of baptism? It's even a metaphor used to enforce the importance of any point a preacher wants to make. On several occasions I have heard preachers, making a point on the importance of some idea, state "It's a command, just like baptism!"

Few Bible topics have received as much coverage as baptism. I have difficulty recalling a gospel meeting where the topic was not fully developed even though more than 90% of the audience consisted of persons who were baptized, and had heard scores, if not hundreds of lessons on the subject. The number of sermons on baptism would make you believe the Bible was filled with similar sermons, whereas not a single sermon on baptism can be found in the Bible.

In addition to isolating the topic, the constant generic use of scripture on baptism promotes a shallow understanding of this profound response of faith. The necessity for baptism is underlined by merely quoting or referring to New Testament passages as though they were items in a legal brief. One can often

hear “Be baptized! Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:26, Colossians 2:12, Romans 6:4, etc.”: This is inexcusable, as the specific content of each of these passages is thrown out in service to a generic command. For example, in following this method, gone is the promise of the Holy Spirit from Acts 2:38-39, gone is the awakening to a new life in Romans 6, gone is the call to sonship found in Galatians 3, gone is the emphasis on God’s work in Colossians 2! Such reaching empties the doctrine of baptism of all scriptural meaning.

We may even have invented a new sin, one that did not exist before baptism became such a solitary hallmark of acceptance. I have frequently heard young people talking about “getting baptized” as in “he or she got baptized.” Again, missing is the language of conversion so often found in the Bible. Instead we have a focus on “getting baptized,” and since so many young persons tend to look at their conversions through the keyhole of baptism rather than faith in Christ, it is usually their baptism they question later in life.

This emphasis has created the sin of “not being baptized.” A young person will be asked if they have been baptized, and realizing they have not, they assume they are guilty of the sin of “not being baptized.” They are not at a point to be aware of the magnitude of sinning against God’s holiness, nor of the provisions of the cross for their redemption. They are often not at a stage where these factors have a great deal of meaning for them, but they know they have not been baptized. To make up this deficiency they “get baptized.”

There is no such sin as “not being baptized.” The real sin is to know the depth of one’s transgression and then willfully decide not to respond to Jesus in full surrender. This surrender would certainly include the faith encounter the Bible calls baptism. Perhaps it is time to realize why baptism is important. Baptism is important because Christ is important! One is not saved by faith in baptism, nor, for that matter, by faith in faith, or faith in repentance, or faith in correct issues. One is saved because he or she places trust in Jesus without reservation.

Now apart from law, being in the right with God has been made clear, and this is witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets; it is being right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, it is available to all who believe, for there is no distinction since all have sinned and constantly fall short of God’s glory, but

they are put in the right freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus....1

So many mistaken emphases on baptism have blunted the meaning of this dramatic encounter with Christ. Worse, the conversion of baptism to a human work has imported a legalistic righteousness alien to biblical conversion. It has also scandalized persons of good will who may indeed be open to baptism when it is approached from a grace-faith understanding, but who rightly oppose anything that smacks of human achievement in the obtaining of salvation.

Baptism does not exist in isolation. To give it a life of its own is to kill it. Baptism is a proclamation of the cross in one's own experience. It has the profound meaning of accepting the cross of Jesus as one's deepest need. Baptism also embraces the new life by the power of the resurrected Jesus. In Romans 6 "Baptism implies participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. The break with sin is thereby accomplished and attachment to the life of the new creation effected..."² In other words, our surrender in baptism proclaims the gospel during the very process of our conversion.

Martin Luther's insight is on target: "Baptism is grace clutching you by the throat." In a similarly dramatic passage, William Willimon, a chaplain at Duke University, effectively highlights the fundamental notes sounded by the baptismal experience:

Cleansing, death, birth, refreshment, illumination, the Spirit are all New Testament baptismal themes. But none of these negates the essential image of baptism as participation in the converting, life-changing, submission-evoking power of the gospel, the good news of a kingdom which begins with a cross. Rich New Testament baptismal images underscore the life-changing nature of baptism: Birth (John 3:3-5), a funeral and burial (Romans 6:1-11), a bride's nuptial bath (Ephesians 5:26-27). The bath ends by arraying the body in new clothing (Gal. 3:27) for baptism sets Christians apart as specifically as circumcision sets Jews apart (Col. 2:11). So radical, complete and primal is this experience of baptismal metanoia that only the most limnal, primal human experiences can convey it: birth, marriage, death, bathing.³

A proper appreciation for grace provides the correct understanding of baptism as a proclamation of the gospel. When we understand that leaving grace is really leaving God (Galatians 1:6), we will comprehend that our response to the gospel message is not that of an ignorant person needing logical insights into a command structure, but the reaction of a desperate human being grasped by the loving hand of God. Baptism is throwing oneself upon God's mercy, a proclamation of the absolute necessity of grace. In the words of Albert Schweitzer it is "an elevator not a staircase." Identifying as it does with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, it is nothing less than a faith reaction to Christ's saving acts. To disconnect baptism from the cross is fatal to its meaning.

"God could have as well said, 'Repent and jump through a hoop' as 'Repent and be baptized' and we would have to do it." I could not believe my ears, but these words poured forth from a preacher in a "gospel" meeting. I deny his statement with this simple question, "What does jumping through a hoop have to do with the cross?" Baptism points to the cross. Jumping through a hoop points to nonsense. The cross is God's masterpiece of salvation. Humans, by their obedience, add nothing to the cross. Religious experiences and wise insights are not the answer to our problem (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). The necessity of the cross causes us to recognize there is no human solution to the problem of sin; were it not for grace all would be eternal losers. The cross is God's answer to the problem of sin, the only answer! The cost of this solution is extreme—to God. The cost is—his Son! "He who did not know sin, he made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). And, in taking advantage of this, many Corinthians responded appropriately (Cf. Acts 18:8). Those who responded, "some of them" at least, had been killers, sexually immoral people, macho male homosexuals, female-acting male homosexuals, thieves, drunks, and loudmouths. But "you got yourselves washed [middle voice], you were set apart by God, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

The Corinthians responded out of their desperation, for they had no other choice. When a person appreciates the unique work of the cross and its adequacy for salvation, he or she will want to accept God's gracious offer. The proclaimers of the gospel, as any casual reader of the book of Acts will testify, were not slow to communicate the necessity of responding to God's grace. Though they never conceived the idea the human response deserved grace, they did affirm its

importance. For the one dead in sin, that is, beyond human help, there is one possibility and one alone: "By grace you are saved through faith" (cf. Ephesians 2:8-10).

Baptism apart from grace has no meaning. Baptism alone is like an empty setting for a ring whose central precious stone is missing. Grace cannot be trifled with by hurrying through a pat definition to move toward exhortations for human response. Grace is far more than a definition for God; for him it is no less than the death of his Son (John 3:16). Grace simply cannot be over-emphasized. It is sometimes distorted into anti-legalism or corrupted into permission to sin, but in biblical context grace is the total environment of conversion as well as the believer's subsequent lifestyle. Grace colors the total picture of salvation from inception to completion.

Even the response we make to God's grace is a gift from God. That is to say, we who are sinners cannot create our own response, just as people cannot create the universe in which they live. We can respond appropriately to the universe we find ourselves in, so responding appreciatively to God extends his grace into our lives. But we seriously distort the picture when we attempt to connect legalistic righteousness to our faith response. Persons who attempt this often call baptism a "work" necessary for salvation and invoke James 2 as though James were carrying on a dialog on conversion rather than on the dedicated Christian life. Poor Paul! What a shame he could not develop a complete theology of conversion! James had to finish what Paul omits. James, of course, is not discussing initial conversion in the second chapter, and he certainly would not enjoy being used to trump Paul. The response of faith can add nothing to the cross. Paul must be dealt with on his own terms when he writes:

Now, to the one who works his reward is not based on grace but on a debt owed, but to the one who does not work, but trusts in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.... (Romans 4:4-5).

Baptism must never be depicted as adding anything to the cross. It is a response to the cross, not an addition to it. We must remember the constant message of the Bible is that no person can hope to please God with a wholly external response unconnected to the heart. Also, no element of our response to God can have materialistic or magical powers. In other words, baptism is important

because Christ is important! Persons of good will are rightly repelled by any treatment of the gospel which suggests man's response has coordinate value with God's grace, or that baptism is a human work or a magical act which forces the gratitude of God.

Perhaps a grace-centered dialog on baptism would open more doors than we have imagined. If we move away from the externalism and magical view and hold baptism up in the light of the cross we may find more grounds for agreement than ever found in debates. For example, J. R. Mantey, a New Testament scholar and one of the authors of a well-known grammar of the Greek New Testament noted:

When one considers in Acts 2:38 repentance as self-renunciation and baptism as a public expression of self-surrender and self-dedication to Christ, which significance it certainly had in the first century, the expression eis aphesin ton hamartion humon may mean for the purpose of the remission of sins. But if one stresses baptism, without its early Christian import, as a ceremonial means of salvation, he does violence to Christianity as a whole, for one of its striking distinctions from Judaism and Paganism is that it is a religion of salvation by faith while all others teach salvation by works. (Quoted in H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 104).

A grace-centered view of baptism is a biblical view. Much healing will be made possible by a return to baptism as gospel proclamation, a testimony of the saving power of Jesus! Disconnecting baptism from faith has been a red flag for those who respect God's grace. It is unfortunate many may have envisioned only the ceremonial possibilities and lost sight of the true self-surrender envisioned in biblical baptism. Salvation by faith is certainly the only way, yet we need to be clear on one thing, faith is not limited to the intellect alone!

Approaching Jesus by faith requires a readiness to surrender our whole persons to him. Our sin has involved our whole being (cf. The analysis of sin in Romans 1:24, 26, 28). We have sinned "in word, in thought, and in deed," that is we have sinned with our emotions, our minds, and our bodies. Our whole beings have been caught up in living for self. Jesus asks us to return along the same road we left by. We come back by faith, but it is a faith that responds intellectually, emotionally, and physically. In other words, by faith we respond with our entire beings. Why

should I hold my mind back from God? Or my emotions? Or even my body? I want to come to God with all my self.

Consider that Jesus came to us in all these ways. If he had only understood our predicament and no more, then we would still be lost. If he had understood and felt great compassion for us, and no more, we would still be lost. But his knowledge and his feelings coupled with a love of surpassing depth resulted in his incarnation. He came to us as a Whole Being; can we hold back anything of ourselves? As we thankfully give our entire beings in faith to God, let us realize baptism is God's work (Colossians 2:12) and declare the saving acts of Jesus to all who witness.

1 Romans 3:21-24.

2 Albrecht Oepke, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 541.

3 William Willimon, "Baptism: Deadly Work." *The Service of God*, pp. 97-98. *Wineskins Magazine*

The Old Testament: The Heart of Christian Worship (Jan – Jun 1995)

by John T. Willis

January – June, 1995

The Bible of Jesus and the early church was the Old Testament. Jesus and his disciples quoted and appealed to the Old Testament for their beliefs, way of life, and corporate worship. Not only do the New Testament writers frequently appeal to the Old Testament for religious teaching, they also accept and reassert the content and ideas of the Old Testament. To fail to use the Old Testament, to reject its message, or to deny its basic unity with the New Testament is to oppose the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and all the New Testament writers, because for them the Old Testament was an indispensable witness to God, his mighty works, and his will for humankind.

The Old Testament is filled with teachings about and examples of worship of the one true God. These teachings and examples were authoritative in early Christian worship and played a very important role in that worship.

A study of the history of God's people reveals a tendency to define worship as ritual performance of specific external acts in a specific manner at a specific place. Some have reduced worship to "five acts": partaking of the Lord's Supper, praying, singing, preaching, and giving. They assume that when one performs each of these acts "correctly," God guarantees approval, acceptance, protection, and security. Such an understanding strokes the worshiper's ego and makes her or him feel good for doing righteousness before fellow human beings and gaining their applause (see Matthew 6:1-18). It shifts the focus of worship from spiritual motivation, intentions, struggles, and attitudes of heart to physical activities "learned by rote" (see Isaiah 9:13-14). It relieves the worshiper from entering into an ongoing, growing, personal dialogue with God like Job, Jeremiah, and Jesus, encouraging him or her to come to God only in a time of crisis or need (see Jeremiah 2:26-27; 3:22c-25).

The Old Testament books of Genesis through Deuteronomy address this issue. Particularly appropriate to those who loved to boast that they had been circumcised, they point out that although Yahweh had instructed the Israelites through Moses to circumcise every male on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:1-3), he

had emphasized that outward circumcision of the flesh has no value without an inward circumcision of the heart (see Leviticus 16:41; Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6). Similarly, the author of the book of Jeremiah denounces the view of many of his Judean readers that they excelled all other peoples because they had been circumcised, declaring that they are no better than the peoples around them, because while others are uncircumcised in the flesh, they are “uncircumcised in heart” (see Jeremiah 4:3-4; 9:25-27). Likewise, Paul reproved Jewish Christians who boasted in fleshly circumcision, but had never experienced circumcision of the heart, the only “true” and “real” circumcision (see Romans 2:25-29; Colossians 2:11-13; Philippians 3:2-7).

The continuity of thought between the Law, the Prophets, and early Christianity on this fundamental principle of worship is typical of the theological unity of the entire Bible: first one’s heart must be right with God, and only then can her or his external acts of worship be acceptable (see Psalm 51:10, 16-19; Isaiah 1:10-17; Hosea 6:4-6; Micah 6:6-8). This suggests that one’s heart must be baptized into Christ or else external baptism of the body in water cannot be acceptable (Colossians 2:11-13; 1 Peter 3:21).

Emerging from this fundamental principle, the Old Testament reveals insights which illuminate and enrich every aspect of Christian worship:

- All creation (Psalm 19:1-4; 98:4-9), everything that breathes (Psalm 150:6), all nations (Psalm 100, 117), all God’s faithful people (Psalm 145:10), and every individual (Psalm 103:1-2) are to praise God for creating, and sustaining them, for giving them strength and protection, and for guiding them through life. This praise is to be continuous (Psalm 113:2) and everywhere (Psalm 113:3). God deserves such praise because his glory is above the heavens (Psalm 113:4; 148:13). Since the Old Testament was the Bible of the early church, praise was a vital aspect of early Christian worship (Acts 2:47; 3:8-9). Christians quoted the Hebrew Bible as authority for this (Psalm 117:1 in Romans 15:11). They declared that everything God did in Christ called for humans to proclaim “the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). Thus God’s people are to live “for the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11).

- The only appropriate human response to God's acts and gifts in nature and history is genuine, heartfelt thanksgiving. The Old Testament is full of model expressions of thanksgiving. One psalmist summons God's people to enter for worship with thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4). Another exhorts his fellows: "Come into his [God's] presence with thanksgiving," because he is a great God and a great king above all gods, and the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains, the sea, and the dry land are his (Psalm 95:2-5). The author of Psalm 107 calls on hungry and thirsty travelers, guilty prisoners, those sick as divine punishment for sin, and sailors once caught in a mighty storm to "thank the Lord for his steadfast love" (verses 6, 13, 19, 28). The early church, following such teachings, thanked God "in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18), "at all times and for everything" (Ephesians 5:20): at mealtimes for their food (Acts 27:35; 1 Timothy 4:3-5); in times of sin and spiritual weakness for strength (1 Timothy 1:12-14); in periods of anxiety and concern for triumphal guidance (2 Corinthians 2:12-14); in death for victory through the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:57).
- It is natural to complain or lament in times of reversal, loss, stress, and death. The Old Testament contains many complaints or laments, uttered by one who has been hurt or mistreated by enemies (Psalm 55:1-15), or who is experiencing pain because of sins committed (Psalm 38:3-8, 17-18), or who has lost a loved one in death (2 Samuel 1:17-27), or who feels God has forsaken him or her (Psalm 88; 22:1-21). Such laments reveal the worshiper's honesty in expressing true feelings to God, as well as total dependence on God for resolution or deliverance. Mary, Martha, and Jesus wept and lamented over the death of Lazarus (John 11:31-38). While Jesus was dying on the cross, he complained or lamented that God had forsaken him, quoting Psalm 22:1 (Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:34). Paul appealed to the Lord three times that his "thorn in the flesh" would leave him, complaining because it "tormented" him. But the Lord's grace enabled him to tolerate it. And through this experience, Paul learned to be "content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

- A major aspect of biblical worship is “remembering” what God has done for his people and for all humankind. “Remembering” does not mean that one recalls intellectually some great deed that God did in the past, but that one “relives” past events in which God worked by some dramatic reenactment of those events, and that this reenactment controls his or her will for daily living. In other words, it means that one has a personal encounter with God in worship, and enters into spiritual communion with him.

Obviously one cannot “remember” a mighty act of God until that event takes place. For example, it was impossible for the Israelites to “remember” that God brought them out of Egyptian bondage through Moses until that event occurred. Likewise, it was impossible for human beings to “remember” Jesus’ death on the cross until that event occurred. Throughout biblical history, new events in which God worked in his world were added as events which God’s people were to “remember.” Since God was at work in each of these events, there is a continuity among them, not a conflict or antagonism.

One outstanding example of this continuity is Jesus’ instituting the Lord’s Supper at appropriate places in the course of the Jewish Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-22). This meal began with a prayer of grace, when the individual in charge would bless God for the bread and distribute small pieces of the loaf to the guests. At this point, Jesus compared the broken bread with the sacrifice of his body. After eating the main passover meal, there was a dialogue, then the blessing of God for the wine and a longer blessing of God, in three parts, for the food, the land, and the people. Then a cup of wine was shared by all present. At this point, Jesus compared the wine with the shedding of his blood. In this context, Jesus designates himself as the passover lamb offered for the redemption of all humankind (see John 1:29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Jesus was born a Jew, and Christianity was born in the matrix of Judaism. The authoritative scriptures of the first century church were the writings of the Old Testament. Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Paul admonished Timothy: “Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it, and how from childhood you have

known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work": (2 Timothy 3:14-17) Since Timothy had known these "sacred writings" or this "scripture" from childhood, it is clear that Paul is referring to the Old Testament. Paul also wrote: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Like Jesus, his apostles and preachers, and the early church, the Old Testament is the root and foundation of Christian beliefs and practices. It is the heart of Christian worship.

A Tribute To Megan (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Mike Cope

January – June, 1995

Megan Cope was born in Wilmington, North Carolina on August 26, 1984. Shortly after she was born, a hurricane with 110-mile-per-hour winds came through our coastal city. Later, we learned to appreciate this heavenly omen.

For Megan was a hurricane. Her gale-force winds blew so hard sometimes that they tested our structural soundness. But she was also a refreshing breeze who for 10 years blew the smog and pollution out of our lives.

One reason I needed to do Megan's eulogy is that there are so few people who knew her from both her seven years in Arkansas and her three years in Texas. Those from Texas can't really imagine that robust, muscular little girl who spent every waking hour (which was about 23 each day!) singing, marching, and clearing out every drawer and closet in the house. And those from Arkansas can't picture very well the medically fragile little girl who went from hospital stay to hospital stay and who eventually was on oxygen 24 hours a day and was given all her liquids through a button in her stomach.

But despite this change, Diane, Matt, and I saw the same girl. This was the girl who created a whole new genre of literature called "Megan stories." They're the kind of stories that people who didn't know her assumed were embellished. They were too unbelievable.

We remember Megan's constant, frustrating attempts to talk. Actually, she talked all the time and knew exactly what she was saying. We just didn't always know! Matt thought he had figured out when she was three or four that she was probably speaking Chinese and was actually precocious instead of slow.

When she got on a phrase, she'd stay with it. We went through the "SHEGAH" stage—which came with the related "SHECOME" and "SHEGO." I can't wait to get to heaven to have someone explain. We went through the "I'm mad" stage. And the stage when she continually uttered what sounded like an obscenity—which was her closest attempt to saying "Diane." There were a few strange looks at

church! And then here in Abilene, she settled for the simple “I’m Megan.” Most of us never really know who we are. Megan didn’t have that problem, did she?

Through it all, though, Megan’s language was singing. She loved to hear music videos. She enjoyed the “ABC’ song, “Jesus Loves Me,” and “The B-I-B-L-E.” But her favorite song never changed. It was always

*I may never march in the infantry,
ride in the cavalry, shoot the artillery.
I may never fly o’er the enemy,
But I’m in the Lord’s army.
Yes Sir!*

Megan never compiled much of a resume. There were not a lot of accomplishments to cram into an obituary. All she did was quietly change people’s lives. Within a couple hours of her death Monday, a fax came from Uganda, East Africa from some former Harding students. One of them wrote: “Medical people may have called her handicapped but looking deep into Megan’s beautiful eyes made us all wonder who the handicapped in this world really are. She was shortchanged in quantity of life but I hope that no one dares eulogize her as being shortchanged in quality of life. She had life and she had it abundantly...so abundantly in fact...that she left a little behind for each of us. She lives on in our hearts and deep in our souls.”

Our society tells a lot about itself by what it considers success. For example, we have classes for “gifted and talented” students. By that standard, Megan wasn’t very successful. She was, of course, mentally retarded. But what if our society considered joyfulness and forgiveness and kindness to be of greatest importance. Megan would have been valedictorian! She was the most forgiving, least bitter, most loving, least judgmental person I’ve ever known. Some may rejoice that in heaven Megan will be more like us. Maybe what happens in heaven is that we become more like Megan!

She didn’t worry about what others thought. We spend a lot of time and money on what clothes we wear. Megan was happy with anything that wasn’t too warm or too cold—even the ridiculous combinations that Daddy would put on her. If she saw something on her plate she didn’t want, she threw it on the floor. On the

other hand, if she saw something she did want on someone else's plate she reached over and took it. We learned to sit a long way away from everyone else at restaurants.

We learned to be simple around Megan—and quick. How many of you had your glasses stolen by Megan? I'll always cherish the memory of one older woman at College Church who held her, smiled, and said, "You're the most precious thing I've ever seen." Megan smiled back like a mongoose smiles at the snake before striking. Then in a nanosecond, Megan had her glasses and tossed them across the room, still flashing her crooked smile. And how many of you learned not to wear earrings, necklaces, or anything else that could be grabbed when helping with Megan?

The Lord surrounded us with people who helped us raise and care for Megan. My guess is that all of you feel like you received much more than you ever gave. Perhaps you even wondered about what the Hebrews writer said: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained strangers without knowing it."

How could we express our love and gratitude enough to you? To all the friends and family who helped us—I can't even begin. But we know it wasn't easy. I'll always remember the time my mom kept Megan a week, and during that time called one of her friends, offering her a hundred million dollars if she'd come take care of Megan for an hour.

A couple of things have to be said though. First, to her brothers. Matt, you were Megan's hero. It didn't matter how much we did for her, you were always her hero. She idolized you. You were a wonderful brother—even though at times Megan's many, demanding needs meant less of our time for you. And Christopher, you'll have to know your sister through pictures and videos—and even more through stories. Many worried about how Megan would be with you when you were born—since her love could at times be a bit rough. But with you her gentle spirit was always matched with gentle hands.

But Diane, while many loved Megan and cared for her—you gave her your life. While many have heard me preach, many more have been taught the gospel by your life. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life

for me and for the gospel will save it.” You are the strongest woman I’ve ever known. How did you give up so much sleep and still survive? How did you keep your sanity? How did you give Megan 20 hours a day—and still give so much love to Matt, Christopher, me, and so many friends?

Megan’s greatest desire has now come about. She is now marching in the Lord’s army. We have a deep hole of sadness to face because this sweet angel is gone. But we also have buried within us incredible joy because one who could never march in the infantry, ride in the cavalry, or shoot the artillery is now in the Lord’s army.

Please save a few spots in the ranks for us, Megie. Because your mother, your daddy, your brothers, and many others will always look forward to seeing you again.

This beautiful eulogy was delivered by Mike Cope at Megan’s funeral on November 23, 1994. Despite Mike’s reluctance, Rubel Shelly and Phillip Morrison insisted that the tribute be shared with Wineskins readers.

Two Pulpits (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Milton Jones

January – June, 1995

Two pulpits with two signs. From one I listened. From the other I speak. One was mammoth and elevated. The other is little more than a lectern. From one I learned the emphasis. From the other I learned the effect.

Considering that most pulpits don't have signs, it is a little unusual that the two most significant pulpits in my life both had signs on them. The signs were not billboards on the front advertising an aspect of the church's ministry, or even messages to instruct the church in its response to God. No, the two signs were little reminders mounted on the top of the pulpits where only the speaker could see them. But these little signs have become monumental in my mind and philosophy of preaching.

THE EMPHASIS: "Sir, We Would See Jesus."

The first sign is on the pulpit of the Broadway Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas. I heard messages from this pulpit from 1972 to 1978. These were the formative years for my ministry as I listened to preaching as a college student and later as a campus minister.

After hearing that there was a sign on the pulpit, one day I dared to sneak up and take a peek. There on an inexpensive plastic sign were the words, "Sir, we would see Jesus." It was a comment and a call to every person who would ever step behind that pulpit. It was a sobering and significant challenge to any preacher that what needed to be seen and heard from that pulpit was none other than the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus was to be the emphasis of that pulpit.

Knowing that numerous great preachers had stood behind that pulpit, I often wondered who was responsible for the sign. I discovered that it wasn't one of the preachers. Instead, it was "Big" Don Williams who was the youth minister at Broadway at the time. He said, "I put it there because it is so easy for a preacher to lose focus in a sermon. He may do a lesson to appease the people or to appeal to the people when the purpose of the sermon is to share Jesus with the people."

This reminder is definitely needed not only for preachers but also for listeners. How many have left a church assembly more with the thought of “what a good sermon” rather than “what a good Lord”? It is the problem of preachers with big egos who fall into the trap of finding their identity based upon compliments of their sermons. But it is equally the problem of listeners who care too much for pulpit flash and charisma and not enough about character and the cross. Preachers and congregations can develop an unhealthy mutual admiration society where the ultimate issues and consequences of the cross are often avoided.

Preachers don't last. Jesus does. During a preachers' meeting in Washington, an older man circulated a photograph throughout the crowd. After all of us had looked at it, he asked if any of us could identify the man in the picture. Not a single one of us could, and yet, nearly every one of us was preaching at a church where the man in the photograph had previously preached. J. C. Bunn considered himself an evangelist of the state of Washington and traveled, preached, and planted churches all over the state. He was still preaching frequently in the church where I now preach until he died in 1978 at the age of 96. And yet not one of us in that audience recognized him. Brother Bunn has left us. The message of the Christ that he proclaimed is still alive and well in the pulpits where he preached. J. C. Bunn may be forgotten, but Jesus is still being remembered. “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Another mistake we can make is to think that the church is the message. Too often the message coming from the pulpit has much more to do with the church than the Christ. The central message can be focused on the church in differing ways. In some cases, the focal message of the sermon is that we are the right church. It is true that the church is important and that Jesus shed his blood for her. But the church is the result of the cross, not the central message. We are the church. He is the Christ. I don't know how many “gospel” meetings I've been to where the main message to the non-Christian is that we are the only church rather than Jesus is the only Savior.

Another way to make the same mistake is to become the super-church which markets itself and its ministries to the point that the church is promoted more than the Christ is lifted up. I am all for exciting church assemblies and think that it is wrong for many of our meetings to be so boring. But it would be ever so easy to

convert someone to a moving worship service, and still not have that person be converted to the Christ. "Sir, we would see Jesus."

And it is all too easy for the message of the day to replace the message of the cross. In an age of self-help, it is very easy to take today's pop psychology, dress it with a few Bible verses and get a popular and motivational message. But it won't be enough to solve the ultimate need of the listeners. It is true that psychology can help us with many of our problems, and it is good to get some counsel when we face life's dilemmas. But the audacity of the message of Christianity and gospel preaching is that it is saying that Jesus alone can solve your ultimate problem. No one else can. "Sir, we would see Jesus."

According to Paul, this message of the gospel is central in our preaching. "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By the gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Only in Jesus himself do we find the gospel.

When I was taking a graduate course in Romans, Dr. Stephen Eckstein translated Romans 1:16 this way: "I am not ashamed of the gospel for in him is the power of God for salvation...." Several of us thought he had mistranslated and we asked, "Shouldn't that 'him' be 'it'?"

Dr. Eckstein replied, "The gospel is not an it. Jesus is the gospel." He was correct. Too many sermons have acted like the gospel was an organizational chart of the church, or steps we take to become Christians, but these things are not the gospel. Jesus alone provides the dynamic for our faith. Other things may be interesting and useful topics, but Jesus himself is the source of our power.

Years ago, a woman left our congregation in Seattle and told the elders she was leaving because I no longer preached the gospel. I had been preaching expository sermons directly out of John for over a year. But I knew what she meant. She was looking for a sermon every week where she heard specific steps on what to do to

be saved or what she called “first principles.” What she forgot was that Jesus himself is the first principle. “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

THE EFFECT: “What Would Jesus Do?”

The second pulpit which has dramatically influenced me is the one at the Northwest Church of Christ in Seattle where I have preached since 1978. From this pulpit, I have learned that there is not only an emphasis on seeing Jesus, but there is also a response. The little sign on the Northwest pulpit asks the striking question “What Would Jesus Do?”

This sign was put on the pulpit in response to a sermon that I preached many years ago. As I looked down the aisle during the invitation song, I could see Bill Roberts making his way to the front. We were singing “Where He Leads Me, I Will Follow.”

My sermon had been based on Charles Sheldon’s classic book *In His Steps*. It’s the story of a preacher, Henry Maxwell, who, upon neglecting to help a down-and-outer who died, preached a sermon from the text of 1 Peter 1:21: “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” At the conclusion of Maxwell’s sermon, he invited the congregation to commit for a year to asking the question, “What would Jesus do?” before they made any decision. And then, based on the answer to that question, they would do what Jesus would do no matter what the cost.

I had decided to preach the same text and ask the people to make a similar commitment. If they were willing to ask “What would Jesus do?” and do it, they were to write me or respond to the invitation. And now, here was Bill walking down the aisle.

The first time I had met Bill Roberts was the first time in his life that he had ever gone to church. A young woman from his office had invited him to attend our Sunday morning assembly. It was an eventful day for Bill. My sermon that day was on the second coming of Jesus. I preached that Jesus could come back at any minute and then there would be the judgment. Bill believed his first sermon, and it scared him to death.

The next morning Bill called me from work and told me that he wanted to become a Christian. I asked him when he wanted to be baptized. He said immediately because Jesus may come back very soon.

We met at the church building, and I proceeded to explain the message of the gospel from the Bible. I'll never forget what happened when I opened up the Word. Bill said, "That's a first."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He responded, "That's the first time I've ever looked at an open Bible." I couldn't believe it. He was 41 years old, living in Seattle, and had never read a word from the Bible. I continued telling him the story of Jesus and our response to him. I also explained the cost of following in the steps of Jesus.

After about two hours of studying, Bill said, "Milt, I promise that I'll read that book every day for the rest of my life. Now can I please be baptized? Jesus may be coming back at any minute!" Bill was baptized, and as far as I know, he's kept that promise.

Now Bill was walking down the aisle in response to a sermon on, "What Would Jesus Do?" I was ready for him to say, "Great sermon, Milt. It's about time you preached a hard-hitting message on discipleship." But Bill surprised me by saying, "Milt, that's the most confusing sermon I've ever heard you preach."

Confusing? I don't know how I could have been more blunt. I was asking the church members to figure out what Jesus would do and then do it no matter what the cost.

Then Bill continued, "Yes, Milt, it's the most confusing sermon I've heard here. Are you trying to tell me that I'm sitting here in the middle of a church that hasn't even decided if it wants to follow in the steps of Jesus? That's what you told me I was supposed to do when I became a Christian!"

Bill was right. We all need to be reminded that if we see Jesus we must make a response. We can no longer be the same. The call of the sermon is to follow Jesus. It is not simply a call to go to the right church, or to respond to an invitation song. It is ultimately a call to walk in the steps of Jesus at every point in your life.

Peter describes Jesus as our example or pattern. There has been much discussion about pattern authority, but most of the discussion is about the pattern of the church. Peter is talking about a pattern for life, and that pattern is Christ. We are to be like him.

The word for pattern is the one used to describe a model that small children would use in learning how to write the alphabet. At first, when they traced over the master pattern their copy would be similar but obviously flawed. However, the more they traced over the master, the more their copy was like the master. The same applies to our lives. Our first efforts to be like Jesus are drastically flawed. But as we trace our lives over his again and again, we become more like the Master. Certainly our copy is not perfect, but the goal is still to be like him. He is the pattern.

The audacity of our preaching is that we are proclaiming in the midst of hundreds of other religions and self-help philosophies that there is only one way to live your life. There is only one way to live your life and find ultimate wholeness, and that is to respond to Jesus and do what he would do.

How do you know what Jesus would do? Certainly a lot of different subjective answers could be given to this question. But the way to know what Jesus would do is to know him. That is why the emphasis must come before the effect. We must see him or else we will not know what to do. But once we have seen him, the call is there. We must walk in his steps.

I'm concerned that the emphasis of some pulpits has been merely on what to do to become a Christian. Certainly the Bible addresses this, but it also talks about how to live as a Christian. Jesus has been called a peripatetic teacher. That means that he taught while he was walking around. If you wanted to be his disciple, you took a walk with him. Today, he still says, "Follow me." And the response must be more than a one-time decision or even a weekly one. It is a response to walk with Jesus every day through every life situation. "What would Jesus do?"

As I stand to preach and face a sign asking, "What Would Jesus Do?" it is difficult to limit that question to the hearers. It is the call of the preacher, but it is also the

call to the preacher. What would Jesus say? How would he say it? Am I careful to walk in the steps of Jesus before I ever walk up to the pulpit?

Clarence Macartney writes, “The better the man, the better the preacher. When he kneels by the bed of the dying, or when he mounts the pulpit stairs every self-denial he has made, every Christian forbearance he has shown, every resistance to sin and temptation will come back to him to strengthen him. To strengthen his arm and give conviction to his voice. Likewise, every evasion of duty, every indulgence of self, every compromise with evil, every unworthy thought or deed will be there at the head of the stairs to meet the minister there on Sunday. To take the light from his eyes, the power from his voice, the ring from his glow, and the joy from his heart.”

In response to preachers who don't take their walk with Christ seriously, Charles Swindoll writes, “I don't know where you are, but I want you to know there are a whole lot of guys today fiddling around in the ministry and have no business staying in the ministry. They prefer to compromise and satisfy their flesh. And I think for the sake of the glory of God they should quietly and graciously step aside. If that happens to be your mindset and you're in training for ministry, stop your training until you can get your heart right and make a decision that your life will be unique. Not prudish, not even an attempt to being perfect, but at a holy constant desire to glorify Christ.” “What Would Jesus Do?”

Many churches are growing. But you could probably grow a church without being much like Christ. Instead of merely seeing growth, my prayer is that we will see revival in churches—a growth that is sparked by and rooted in Jesus himself. In *The Glorious Revival*, Wilbur Smith describes the characteristics of revival. First, revivals occur in times of great moral darkness. Second, they usually begin with one dedicated person. And, third, they are ignited by biblical preaching.

Preaching will be at the forefront of any genuine awakening among God's people. It always has been. It will be that way in the future. But it won't be just any preaching. It will be preaching with an emphasis on seeing Jesus, and producing the effect of doing what Jesus would do.

Of Pear Trees and Grapevines: A Childhood Memory (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Jonathan A. Partlow

January – June, 1995

Some time back my wife brought a pear home for me. I didn't think too much about it, at least not right then. She knows I like pears. She also knows that, when I was a child, I had a pear tree and a cherry tree in the backyard. Well, she put the pear in a brown lunch bag and set it on the kitchen counter to ripen.

A couple of days passed before I remembered the pear and decided to have it for a snack. But what I discovered was more than I bargained for.

As I bit into the pear, suddenly, memories flooded my mind. Memories of my brothers and me climbing the trees in our backyard. Memories of my sister getting scared when she was stuck in a tree, allowing only Dad to help her down. Memories of telling ten-year-old Richie, "We don't jump from that branch," because it was too high, then watching him successfully make the leap. Memories of David and me hiding candy and baseball cards in our trees until we could sneak them past Mom into the house. Memories of the rain ruining our baseball cards because we forgot we had them in the trees.

Memories of Dad and me fulfilling requirements for Cub Scouts by building a red and green birdhouse and securing it to the tree. Memories of watching the family of robins build their nest inside my birdhouse. Memories of telling Lehman Hall to cut off a branch—the one giving shade to the house—when it was the other branch Dad wanted cut off.

Memories of our garage filled with pears and the aroma filling the house. Memories of going downstairs, scanning the fruit, finding the biggest, ripest, juiciest pear to pack in my Snoopy lunch box. Memories of Mom sending us kids downstairs to find another jar for her canning projects. All of these memories came from biting into a pear!

Our senses are powerful. They can be triggered by something as simple as biting a pear, and suddenly, we find ourselves traveling down memory lane.

You're at a table in a restaurant. You're alone. You're almost oblivious to the people around you. Then someone walks by. You feel the breeze. You smell the fragrance. You look up, savoring the scent. You know the perfume. It's the one your wife was wearing the day you met her. It's also the perfume she was wearing the day she died.

It's 1975. The alarm clock on the nightstand sounds off just as it does every morning. But it's not the alarm getting you out of bed this morning, it's your husband screaming at the top of his voice. He's under the bed crying his eyes out. All you know is to get under the bed with him, hold him, and tell him, "It's all right, Honey. The war's over. You're home! You're not in Vietnam!"

You're long past the age of retirement. Most of your friends, the ones you've known all your life, are gone. Your children have moved away. Your wallpaper design is "Old Photo." There's a knock at the door and it's your neighbor, an attentive young lady living across the street. In her arms is her three-week-old little boy. You invite her in and she lets you hold him. You gaze at him and touch him—so small, so dependent on his mother for everything. After listening to her story of the big day, you get the joy of telling her about births before birthing rooms.

You walk on campus at your alma mater. The sign reads, "Welcome, Class of '64." On the walls are the senior class pictures of years gone by. You find the appropriate frame and, like reviewing one last time for a biology test, you study the names and faces of those you once knew so well. You enter the room where your former classmates are gathered. You discover that some things never change, some others do. Jerry is still the life of the party, but the skinny cross-country runner now looks more like a linebacker for the football team. Some of your classmates have blossomed, others have wilted. Yet, as you see them that night, you relive days gone by.

God knew the power of our senses and how they are triggered, giving us an emotional experience—a memory. We Christians experience this phenomenon every Sunday. But the source triggering our memories is not fruit from a tree but fruit from the vine. The juice we drink and the bread we eat at the Lord's Supper symbolize Christ—his body broken and his blood shed for us. As we partake of it we don't just state or announce his death, but we proclaim it until he comes. And,

as a body, we participate in the “commune” or fellowship by remembering him. But what exactly are we to remember?

Maybe we ought to understand that “remembrance” has less to do with recall than it does with experience. When Jesus told his disciples to take bread and wine in remembrance of him, he was not talking about the details of his ministry or crucifixion, but reliving or reexperiencing the pain and suffering of the crucifixion: to weep with him in the garden, to look inward when Peter denies our Savior the third time, to hear the words from the cross as he looks at us as well as them, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Just as the pear caused me to relive my childhood, so the Lord’s Supper causes us to relive Christ. And while we mourn the death he died, the burden he bore, and the sin he suffered, we celebrate the life he lived, the righteousness he renews, and the salvation he secures for us. So, this next Sunday, allow your senses to trigger a memory and take you back to the foot of the cross to see the one who died so you could live.

New Wine (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Matt Condon

January – June, 1995

They told me I had to admit my weakness and ask God to remove my defects of character.

They told me that through prayer and meditation I had to improve my conscious contact with God.

They told me that if I would only turn my life over to the care of God...I would be saved.

No, not from sin... from alcohol!

“They” were the people of Alcoholics Anonymous, a group founded in 1935 by two seemingly incurable alcoholics. Though that first “meeting” didn’t seem especially momentous, it spawned a movement that has grown steadily in size and influence for the past 60 years. Under the broad heading of “the recovery movement” millions today are using AA’s 12 steps and other principles to successfully deal with problems ranging from overeating to sexual compulsions. When I went to AA for help I was surprised to hear language that was decidedly spiritual in nature and a prescription for sobriety that could have come straight from the Bible.

Because of this movement the ancient language of redemption and modern language of recovery have become almost indistinguishable. The Lord’s Prayer is intoned at meetings of alcoholics, addicts, overeaters, and victims of all kinds of abuse. Basic spiritual concepts such as prayer, confession, and faith are being applied successfully to help people stop destructive behaviors and become productive members of society. At the same time, “recovery” language is creeping into the Christian vernacular. Behaviors long considered sins, such as alcohol abuse and overeating are now spoken of as “diseases.” Just about everybody is “dysfunctional” or “co-dependent” and if you don’t think so, you’re “in denial.”

As a Christian, a minister, and a recovering alcoholic, God has worked in my life through AA as well as through the church. A recovering Christian friend of mine once told me, "AA saved my life so Jesus could save my soul!" I believe that statement strikes at the heart of the Christian dilemma. Didn't Jesus come so we might have life and have it abundantly? Isn't a relationship with God through Christ sufficient to make my life healthy and full? And isn't God's "support group" supposed to be his church? Why is it, then, that so many people, both Christian and non-Christian, have found in these groups what they couldn't seem to find in the church?

My first trip to an AA meeting was aborted. I had finally admitted a problem, had finally agreed to go "just to listen" yet when I walked into the room, the first person I saw was a member of my church! This was supposed to be Alcoholics Anonymous, and if I was going to admit to the former, I wanted the assurance of the latter! Seattle being a large city, I finally found another meeting (across town) where I saw no familiar faces. As I listened to people talk, I realized that the demands of sobriety sounded remarkably similar to the demands of the gospel! Hadn't I already "turned my life over" to God? Wasn't I already seeking to improve "my conscious contact" with him? Didn't I just need to repent and apply some good, old-fashioned self control? Skeptical as I was, my skepticism wouldn't let me ignore the fact that months of repentance and attempts at self control hadn't given me the one thing these people had... sobriety.

Alcoholism has been passed down in my family like an unwanted heirloom. When I was 15, my dad took his last drink and I took my first, completing a bizarre handoff that started with my great grandfather and maybe even earlier. I drank for only two years before I started going to church with some friends and when I became a Christian I was sure that I was through with alcohol. I didn't know that it wasn't quite finished with me.

I had been to college, married, and was the youth minister for a large church in Texas when things began to fall apart. It started with a small pain in the middle of the morning that by noon had worked itself into the mother of all pains! The dentist said it was something called "TMJ." Treatment would be protracted, so in the meantime I received what would be the first of many prescriptions for pain killers.

I know now that the drug prescribed was a powerful new medication that has its chemical roots in the opiate family, of which morphine is the most famous child. All I knew at the time, however, was that two pills replaced that vast ocean of pain with a floating euphoria that made everything right with the world. I've never known exactly when I crossed the line between use and abuse, but sometime in the next couple of months it happened. The pain went away, the need for the drug didn't, and I was hooked.

The drug addict and alcoholic may be enslaved to different drugs, but everything else is essentially the same. Almost by instinct, when I couldn't get "legitimate" prescriptions often enough, I went back to the only other drug I'd ever abused... alcohol. This was a little harder to justify to myself. Driving across town to purchase it, hiding it and sneaking around to drink it were not actions I could easily rationalize. Rather than admit a problem, however, it was much easier to chalk it up to a teetotaling religious tradition that "just wouldn't understand" one of their ministers having a little drink!

On the surface, I held things together for a surprising length of time. Four years later I was working for a church in the Northwest, first as the youth then as the pulpit minister. By this time I had conceded (to myself, at least) that there might be a problem and had "quit" many times. I can't tell you how often I had flushed pills down the toilet or thrown unopened beer cans away, desperately wanting this to be the last bout of repentance. A day (or a week or a month) later, I would find myself with another bottle of pills or booze, feeling totally defeated and hopelessly trapped in what seemed like an endless cycle of despair.

Finally, I could stand it no longer. When I went to the elders to offer my resignation, however, they wouldn't accept it. Instead, they called the congregation together on a Sunday night and said, in essence, "Matt has something to share with us." What came next was the longest 10 minutes of my life followed by the most extraordinary example of Christianity in action I have ever witnessed. For several moments after I finished we all seemed frozen in time, fixed in our seats by the ultimate pregnant pause. No one jumped up to lead a song or a prayer. We simply sat as if waiting for something. Then, one of the most timid men in the congregation made his way to the front, took the microphone with trembling hands and looked at me with tear-filled eyes. I wasn't sure what to expect, but what came flooding forth in an amazing burst of

abbreviated eloquence was a pledge of support and a promise to do anything in his power to help me see this through. One by one, for over an hour, people came to the front and spoke similar sentiments while I listened, overwhelmed by this demonstration of understanding and love. The next day I left for 30 days of in-patient treatment, still awash in the glow of the previous day's experience.

That Sunday evening and the subsequent flood of mail that came to me at the treatment center left no doubt as to the congregation's desire to help. Aspiration and ability, we all soon found out, were not inseparably linked. One very real dilemma was that, though my brothers and sisters knew very well how to love, they had no idea how to help! That was where AA and the 12 steps came in.

For almost four years now, I have been both a member of the church and Alcoholics Anonymous. Why both? There are several reasons. First, though the love and support of Christian friends was an integral part of my recovery, what I also needed was rapport! I needed people who could not only sympathize but empathize because they had been where I'd been, felt as I'd felt, and who could, by virtue of their success, give me hope that things would get better. I also found a level of honesty in AA that was lacking in the church. I don't mean to imply any dishonesty in my brethren, but it is sadly true that the depth of personal sharing in the average Bible class, small group or worship assembly isn't even close to what you'll find at most AA meetings. Another reason for my dual membership has to do with affirmation. Every sober day is a victory and when I stand up at a June meeting and say, "I've made it a year" or "two" or "three" there is cheering and applauding and genuine joy for the miracle of me! I need that! I thrive on that and it reminds me that this precious gift of sobriety isn't worth throwing away for a drunken spree or for "one drink to settle my nerves."

Some have wondered if Christians shouldn't attend more Christ-centered groups instead of an overtly pluralistic group like AA. Though I have participated in and am supportive of Christian recovery groups, I have found a unique ministry among AA's pluralism. Many desperately addicted people seeking help are ready to accept that there must be some undefined "higher power" out there, and most are even willing to "turn their lives over" to the care of such a One. They are definitely not willing, especially at first, to join forces with "organized religion" or even to further clarify the nature of their new deity. What I have found, however, is that having become open to the spiritual realm and the reality of a "god" that is

helping them day by day, many people are very open to learning what others believe about their own higher power. At times I have felt very much like Paul at Athens defining the “Unknown God” for the Greeks as I helped someone understand this “higher power” they were already worshipping.

How are Christians to respond to such a sweeping and popular movement? Dale Ryan, executive director of the National Association of Christian Recovery warns, “The worst possible responses would be either to caricature the movement and throw it out as unnecessary, or to embrace it without discretion” (Dale Ryan, “Addicts in the Pew,” Christianity Today, July 1991. P. 20). The middle ground, he suggests, is to learn from it. I believe that the recovery movement calls us back to what we were meant to be as the body of Christ. It challenges us by example to refocus on the essence of Christian “koinonia” and to become honestly and intimately involved with each other’s lives. It reminds us that sin has impacted every one of us in some way and to that extent we all have something to “recover” from.

Even as we learn, however, let us realize that the recovery movement has its roots in basic biblical principles! At first I wondered how my fellow alcoholics were experiencing such amazing transformations while giving the credit to some nebulous “power” that wasn’t Jesus. The more I worked the 12 steps, however, the more clear it became that these steps were simply a collection of Christian disciplines—confession, forgiveness, prayer—and that God honors these disciplines. Just as a good crop is given even to a non-Christian farmer who aligns himself with God’s laws of nature, so a recovering person reaps the benefits of practicing honesty instead of deceit, pardon instead of reprisal, and restraint rather than recklessness. In view of this, I see the success of the recovery movement as a reaffirmation of the truth of the Bible and the reality of the spiritual principles it contains.

As successful and effective as the recovery movement has been, it is not God’s instrument to save mankind. It does not carry the message of salvation through Christ, nor does it bring people to a relationship with the living God. The church needs to learn from support groups and recognize the healing that they provide, while at the same time carrying the message that the ultimate healing, the healing of the soul, is something only Jesus can supply.

Hope Network Newsletter: What Language Shall I Borrow? (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Lynn Anderson

January – February, 1995

Get specific with me. How does the 1995 passenger on spinning Spaceship Earth waltz to the ancient Apostle Paul's lead and "become all things to all men...?" Especially when it comes to worship? Put your finger at the end of this sentence, close your eyes and think. No doubt several ways of worshipping come to mind. "Not really," you say? Geography does sometimes limit our imagination. Need someone to prime the pump?

Well, then. Now with your eyes wide open, lift your finger and read on I am delighted this month that my Hope Network Newsletter can feature the following lines from Annette McRay. She will color your soul with a rainbow of worship shapes and sounds, drawn from all sorts of settings. Real worship. From real brothers and sisters. In real, but totally dissimilar, settings.

Annette and her husband, Dr. John McRay, have been in Christian leadership for four decades in both local church ministry and academics. Annette has an M. A. from Wheaton and teaches social studies in the public school system. John is a professor of New Testament and Archaeology at Wheaton College Graduate School. Their family represents the best of what most of us only shoot for. To complement their intelligence and excellent academic and professional training, Annette and John are both people of great warmth, tenderness, and compassion. Integrity has always marked their pathway as well, sometimes at great cost to them. Most important of all, the genuineness is validated in the crucible of family relationships that really work. Annette and John enjoy a long and healthy marriage and have reared a loving family of three believing sons, all of whom are Christian leaders. One is a medical missionary, another is a former youth minister now finishing a degree in psychology, and the third is a preacher.

Read on and be blessed. When you finish Annette's stirring words, read the postscript by John.

Psalms, Hymns, and a Spiritual Song

by Annette McRay

It is the morning of the Lord's Day and I have begun this day as most other Sundays in the past several years—listening to Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of all kinds as I have prepared to meet the rest of the Lord's Day. It has become our family custom, whether at home or away, to let the many talented Christian artists of varied musical genres prepare our hearts for collective worship with our brothers and sisters. At times, these quiet moments of opening our hearts to the messages of these musical offerings have seemed to elevate and lift us to heights rarely found in our corporate devotions.

On this particular morning, I have been blessed and challenged by the Easter edition of Wineskins and have felt compelled to put down some of my ponderings. Lynn Anderson's statement of interest in others' experiences with worshipful music sent my memory racing over the years, skidding to pauses as special remembrances forced fleeting vignettes into my consciousness, and stopping to savor one particularly poignant moment of praise, then another.

My personal musical tastes are untrained but varied, having been influenced by my odyssey of worship in so many locales. This morning, as usual, the CD player in our cozy little den has been loaded with discs so dissimilar as to puzzle and amuse a critic with more well-honed taste. Prelude and Hymnworks reflect that part of me that belongs in the Wheaton College setting with its fine classical emphasis, Sandi Patti thrills my ecumenical evangelical tastes, and John Michael Talbot brings out that acquired desire for a more reverent liturgical expression.

But there is another side to me that hearkens to my religious roots and a cappella preferences. Ray Walker and the Abilene Christian University Chorus lift my spirits and the newer groups like Hallal bring tears of joy and devotion to my eyes. And I even on occasion love the rousing bluegrass renditions on Smoky Mountain Hymns of the old favorites I remember from my Tennessee childhood.

I know that while all my brothers and sisters may not share my erratic and eclectic musical tastes, there are likely people in any local congregation who are most moved and inspired by any one of these types. This may mean that worship leaders have a large task and a real responsibility to try to minister to everyone in a group.

Over the last 15 years my archaeologist husband and I have in our various travels visited and worshipped in magnificent cathedrals and humble meeting houses of many kinds and been touched by the songs of the devoted ones there. We have removed our shoes in awe of the beauty of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock and Al Aksa mosques and noted the reverence of the Muslim worshipers there and in the simple village mosques throughout the Middle East. We have heard the muezzins loudly and rhythmically proclaim from the minarets that there is but one God.

We have separated ourselves with the Jewish men and women as they stood and fervently prayed to the Almighty at the Ha Kotel (Western Wall) in Jerusalem. Their chantings have melodically emphasized the oneness of Yahweh (Jehovah) as they have recited the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One." We have also visited the varied ethnic neighborhood synagogues throughout the land of Israel and the great cities of the world where Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform branches of Judaism have congregated to express their devotion to the one God.

Likewise, we have felt our souls lifted with the methodical voices of the Boys' Choir at Canterbury Cathedral as they beautifully proclaimed, Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring.

Our attention has been drawn heavenward by the ornate spires of the world's best-known Christian houses of worship, such as St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, St. Paul's Cathedral in London, St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, and the National Cathedral in Washington where the great choirs have filled the lofty chambers with their thunderous exclamations of praise and devotion.

And how well I remember that cold March Sunday afternoon in 1991, when I sat in the balcony of Moscow's Baptist Church and felt the tears flowing unexpectedly down my cheeks as a thousand evangelical Christians sang their hauntingly beautiful hymns, extolling the grace and majesty of their Lord and mine. Their dedication and affirmation of faith in such trying circumstances left me convicted by my own comparatively frivolous confessions. Did my often loudly and once exclusively pronounced statements of faith and endurance have an underpinning of strength equal to their quiet fidelity?

Of all the worshipful experiences I have observed or participated in, however, my particularly savored remembrance of worship was just such an occasion as that mentioned by Cliff Ganus III in *Wineskins*: “[A] solo was a text that was important to the presenter ... a hymn was a text of praise that was joined by a tune. The hymn was important; the tune was irrelevant.”

In the summer of 1985, while excavating at Herodian near Bethlehem, we worshipped each week with the Jewish Christian Netivyah Congregation (Church of Christ in Jerusalem) led by Joe Shulam, our dear friend and brother since the late 1960s when he was John’s student at David Lipscomb College.

On one particularly warm Sunday evening, we were crowded into the small meeting house with a virtual ethnic smorgasbord of fellow believers. We had sung or hummed along to the exuberant Hebrew choruses with their many Hallelujahs sung in the characteristic minor keys. We had chanted from the Psalms in English as many others did likewise in their daily tongues of Hebrew, Finnish, or some other of the several languages spoken there that night. We had listened as the sermon was simultaneously translated into those same languages, and we could not help noticing one worshiper in particular who had sat so intently and reverently in a corner of the crowded room.

His crown of snow white hair with not a trace of its earlier color and his neatly trimmed silver beard bespoke his advanced age. As he sat erectly on that uncomfortable seat through the lengthy service, his startlingly blue eyes eagerly watched the face of a younger brother who retranslated into Russian the remarks of the visiting English speaker which had been conveyed to him through a Hebrew translator.

Near the end of the service, the translator let it be known that our elderly brother who was a recent immigrant from Russia and spoke only Russian wanted to thank all the people who had ministered to him that evening. He also asked permission to contribute something to the corporate service which had blessed him. He was given that permission and his offering will forever linger in my heart and mind as a very special gift. In a clear and melodic voice he sang the incomprehensible Russian words to the unmistakable melody we love so well, and “How Great Thou Art” took on a new dimension of loveliness.

To use the phrases of Calvin Warpula in his Wineskins article on special music in worship, this brother's "special music" was done for the "edifying of all present" as he "spoke to all the others" with his "spiritual song." How thankful I was and am that the modern day church in Jerusalem had a place for the solo praise of this dear old brother who so blessed all of us present.

One Day in Jerusalem

by John McRay

I was uncomfortable, but I am always uncomfortable when riding in one of those pre-World War II buses in Israel's West Bank, as I have most of the summers during the past 25 years. But an archaeologist doesn't work in Israel for the comfort of the experience.

The day was hot, as usual. The bus was crowded, as usual. The atmosphere was stifling, as usual, and, as usual, the locals sitting upwind of me, sweating profusely in their long heavy clothing had not been told that Right Guard deodorant works under the left arm too.

We stopped once on the way back from Bethlehem, to pick up a woman with a chicken in her arms. While she struggled to get on board, a man waiting to board as well, tried to push his portable bedstead through one of the back windows of the bus. After some obviously caustic (though to me incomprehensible) words were shouted in Arabic by the driver, the bed was withdrawn and we started moving again. Now, we were blessed with the smell of the chicken added to that of the goat that was standing in the aisle a few feet away. The Holy Land! A wonderfully strange place to be, I thought. I love it!

By the time we reached Suleiman Street in Jerusalem, the one that runs along the northern wall of the Old City, I was pushing my nose out the window to find some fresh air. Just as we passed the Damascus Gate, I saw a sight I shall never forget—two young boys walking down the street, one leading the other, both blind. And I gasped, "The blind leading the blind!" There they were, just as Jesus had said. I had always thought his words were only hypothetical, a story told to illustrate a point. He had said that if the blind lead the blind they will both fall into the ditch,

but how would anyone presume to lead another when the leader cannot see where he is going?

My feelings of incredulity were overwhelmed by emotions of pity. Then, as I pondered this page of biblical history which had materialized before my very eyes, I wondered which of these two was deserving of more pity—the one who thought he could lead another without himself possessing the ability to see, or the one who trusted another, as blind as himself, to lead him?

Tragic as this scene was, it is even more lamentable that the deeper meaning of Jesus' words, the meaning he intended to convey by what he said, has so often fallen on deaf ears. The blind have also become deaf. What Jesus meant for us to understand was that we cannot teach others what we do not know. We cannot share with others an understanding which we do not have. We cannot give what we do not possess.

Those of us who do presume to lead the blind must ourselves seek the truth of God with all our hearts, be prepared to sacrifice all selfish ambition, hunger and thirst after righteousness, and practice what we preach. Otherwise, we become blinded by our own arrogance.

James' words have echoed with excruciating frequency in my ears since I preached my first sermon 43 years ago. "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes" (James 3:1-2). And why shouldn't we be judged with greater strictness, those of us who profess to lead the blind and are blind ourselves?

Paul wrote: "[I]f you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself?" (Romans 2:19-21).

The church is entering an exciting new stage of change and recommitment, unlike anything I have seen in almost a half-century of preaching and teaching. But real change is possible only for those of us who are willing and able to see where we are, where we need to go, and what we must be when we get there. In this

exciting but awesome process let us remember that, as always, God requires people of vision to lead his own and the blind cannot lead the blind. May God grant to those who lead, the eyes of Christ, the heart of Christ, and the patience of Christ for his kingdom's sake.

And may we seriously contemplate the words of a cherished professor at David Lipscomb College, John L. Rainey, who taught Greek to more than one generation of preachers, and who had a maxim for every occasion: "No one is as blind as he who will not see."

AfterGlow: Sacraments and Sacrelige (Jan – Jun 1995)

by Phillip Morrison

January – June, 1995

We were friends who preached at different churches in the same city. We completely misunderstood each other. I thought he belittled the importance of baptism by insisting that it was “not essential to salvation but was necessary to please God.” He thought I preached baptism as the foremost item on a list of merits to be presented to God at the judgment.

I was surprised to learn that he attached great importance to baptism. He was surprised to learn that I believed in salvation by grace through faith.

A lady was thrilled by my announcement that the Lord’s Supper would be served before rather than after the sermon. She could arrive early, do her “sacramental duty,” skip the “unimportant” parts of the worship, and get an early start on her Sunday afternoon at the lake.

How did baptism ever become such a battleground? Or the Lord’s Supper such a ritual?

Among the many evidences of Jesus’ incomparable love, two are especially significant: his symbolic death and resurrection when he was baptized by John and his actual death and resurrection outside Jerusalem’s walls. Our observance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are intense and appropriate responses to that love.

What older versions of the Bible call communion, later versions call participation. “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). Participation is clearly an appropriate description of what happens in baptism as well (Romans 6:3-8).

The first-century church at Corinth bore an uncanny resemblance to the twentieth-century church we know: so many of the squabbles in both revolve around baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Isn’t it time to forget the peripheral and

focus on the truly important? Does it really matter who did the baptizing and what formula was recited? Does God really care about the number of communion cups, or whether the wine is fermented or unfermented?

The real question is whether, in being baptized, I share in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. And the burning issue in the Lord's Supper is whether my eating and drinking is a participation in his redemptive sacrifice.

I know a community church which structures one of its Sunday services around the Lord's Supper for the benefit of those who desire that weekly participation in the Savior's sacrifice. And I know another church which has traditionally practiced sprinkling for baptism, but which now offers immersion for those who wish to symbolically join Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection.

Thank God that people of good will are taking Bible study seriously and wanting their belief and practice to be shaped by the Word! Let us join them in both studying the Word and testing our own faith and practice by that divine standard.