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May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
Col 1:11-14 ESV

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... it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ... Hebrews 13:9

Issue 115—March 2005

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Thoughts on the Book of Ecclesiastes—Part Six

“Timing Is Everything”

John G. Reisinger

As we venture further into the book of Ecclesiastes, we must remind ourselves of the writer's main thesis in 1:2: “Everything is meaningless; all is vanity.” These could be the words of a man in despair, ready to jump off a bridge to his death. They could be the words of a man in mid-life crisis who feels insignificant and unfulfilled. They also could be the confession of a burnt-out hippie with thin gray hair, trying desperately, but without success, to retain the appearance of youth. These words could even describe a modern secular humanist who is coming to grips with the true and certain implications of his man-centered philosophy of life. Apart from an absolute confi-

dence in God's unchanging love and sovereign power, the fatalism inherent in those words is inescapable. Never, though, will they be the pronouncement of a child of God who is walking in fellowship with his Savior. No believer will ever stand on the shores of eternity and cry out, “it was all meaningless.” A sure confidence in God's promise and his power to fulfill his promises affirms the exact opposite of the words “Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless.” A child of God looks at the same world of reality that produced such a dismal declaration and cries in hope, “Romans 8:28 is true! God does

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The Parable of the Two Trains—Part One of Four

by Mark Webb

For the past twenty years or so, the modern “Grace” movement has been plagued and torn asunder by a controversy over the relationship between “Law” and “Grace.” On the one hand are men who are champions of the notion that God's moral character is immutable, and, therefore, His moral standard, the

law, is unchangeable. I appreciate them very much. On the other hand are men who are champions of the notion that the appearance of Christ has ushered in a new age in which great changes have taken place. I also appreciate them very much. Both notions, it seems to me, are biblical. But just how much of the

old is to be carried over into the new? Just how much change is to be allowed?

Disagreements over the particulars have, unfortunately, all too often degenerated into labeling and name-calling. Accusations of

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work everything for his glory and my good.”

In Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, we encountered the beginning of a radically different world and life view from “All is meaningless.” Here is a life with God at the center; here is a world and life view that sees past the sun to the eternal throne of God. This view accords

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with Romans 11:36 as the accurate philosophy of history.

O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Rom 11:33-36, KJV)

Wow! What a difference it makes when we put God into the equation! If we draw a one-inch circle with a compass and then add nine more circles, each one an inch bigger than the last one, without changing the center point, all of the ten circles will be in perfect symmetry. Now, move the center point and draw another circle of any size. Everything is askew. That last circle distorts the balance of all the ten previous circles. It is the same with life. Our view of God affects far more than our “church” life; it affects every area of our life.

My wife had a housecoat that had twenty buttons. One day, before she had her coffee, I watched her put the number one button into the number two hole. When she finished buttoning her robe, she had an extra button with no hole. Did she make one mistake or did she make nineteen mistakes? She made nineteen mistakes and she had to undo all of them and start over. If our starting point for understanding life is wrong, then our whole life is wrong. We may sail along with everything seeming to fit, as my wife did with the first nineteen buttons, but in the end, we discover that our entire life was wrong.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 presents the biblical world and life view. It encompasses the truth of both Romans 11:36 and Romans 8:28; all things originate in God and he uses them

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all for the good of his children. The phrase “there is a time for everything” is one of the best-known and most often quoted texts in the Bible.

*There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity
under heaven: a time to be born*

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choose to die at a wedding. But there is an ordained time for all to weep, and an ordained time to die, even for some to die at a wedding. Remember verse 4, “There is a time to weep and a time to laugh.” Weeping times are just as essential as laughing times. True, they are painful, but they are also far more spiritually beneficial than laughter.

Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

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need to know that GOD can and does use “ignorant and unlearned men” (see Acts 4:13) just as ably as HE does those who sat at the feet of Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3).

Because a man is sent from time to time with a message does not

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with two engineers. The riders on the one train are kept completely separate from those on the other.

Problems, Problems

In my mind, there are many advantages of Covenant Theology over Dispensationalism. It sets forth the biblical teaching that there is but one way of salvation for the saints in every age as opposed to the suggestion of Dispensationalism that there is one way for Israel and another for the church. It sees the people of God as a whole, rather than as the discombobulated, fractionalized groups that Dispensationalism envisions. In short, it does

(Eccl. 7:2-4, NKJV)

The Christian knows something that the unbeliever does not. We know that Romans 5:1-5 is true even while we often fail to apply it. Suffering produces perseverance, which in turns leads to character and character produces hope. Comfort and assurance from that verse is not automatic; we must consciously fight our emotions with truth! We must put what we know into actual practice in a given situation. When an unexpected tragedy happens, no matter what kind, we automatically go into panic mode. The Devil will paint the worst possible scenario. We must stop and say, “Wait a minute! I know that this is under God’s control. I know that Romans 8:28 includes what is happening right now.” I repeat; we must bring our emotions under the truth of Scrip-

mean that every time he opens his mouth he has been sent. GOD is able to shut the same mouth that HE is able to open, lest a man be lifted up with pride and think that the power of his message is in his eloquence and not the HOLY GHOST. “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of

justice to the scriptural idea of the one purpose of God in Christ Jesus that He is performing in all ages.

However, Covenant Theology just doesn’t satisfy me in the long run. In my mind, it fails to do justice to passages—such as Jeremiah 31:31-34—which not only express the New Covenant in quite different terms than the Old, but lay stress upon the differences. It certainly seems to me that the biblical writers are describing far more than a mere change of administration of the same system—it surely sounds like the replacing of the old system with a completely new system. Neither, in my opinion, does it do justice to the scriptural emphasis concerning

ture.

If you have never wept, you have never missed Eden or felt the effects of the fall. You have never felt your sin and shame if you have never shed tears. Tears prove the reality and pain of the effects of sin; weeping makes us long for better days when all of the effects of sin will be gone. This world will be a vale of tears. Most of the time, the good guys do not win. We are engaged in a war that we know we cannot fully win, but we dare not and will not give up and quit.

Next month, we will consider the implications to our personal life that follow when we grasp the truth of Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the SPIRIT and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of GOD” (1 Cor 2:4-5).

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the great change brought about with the appearance of Christ. Neither am I (as one who is admittedly a Baptist in his thinking) comfortable with the dependence of Covenant Theology on “logical inferences”—leading to practices like infant baptism, for which I can find no scriptural support at all!

Is there no alternative but Dispensationalism? Is there no other covenantal model to be found which retains the strong points of Covenant Theology but avoids the weaknesses of Dispensationalism? Well, you know very well I wouldn’t be asking the question if I didn’t think there is an alternative!

To be continued.

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Luke 2:1-5 is another example.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. (KJV)

Why did Caesar issue that decree at that particular time? A historian, a sociologist, and a psychologist may give us three different answers and all three will be partly correct. An economist may say the queen was spending too much on clothes and the royal treasury was getting low. I will not comment on that. The ultimate reason for the tax at that time was that it was the means God chose to move a specific pregnant woman into a specific town, so the birth of her child could fulfill a specific prophecy uttered many years before. We must remember that God accomplishes his sovereign purposes in a world of sin and rebellion, without infringing on the free moral agency of any creature. He uses temporal means to reach ordained ends.

Basically, Ecclesiastes 3:1 teaches that God not only ordains all things, he also ordains the time of their happening. That is the way it is—period—whether you like it or not. The unbeliever hates the very idea of God’s controlling all events and their timing. He cries, “If that is true, then I am only a robot. I am like a trapped animal!” On the other hand, the believer is glad that Jesus rules and reigns over

every aspect of life. He sings, “His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.” Pain is still pain, grief is still grief, but now we can see it as serving a purpose in God’s plan.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3 emphasizes our non-control over both the event and the particular time that the event takes place. God ordains both the “thing itself” and the “timing” of the thing. His plan includes every detail and embraces every person. Jesus said, “Even the hairs of your head are numbered.” Spurgeon has a great quote on that text:

There is no attribute of God more comforting to His children than the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe troubles, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children of God ought more earnestly to contend than the dominion of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of his own hands—the throne of God, and His right to sit upon that throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. **Men will allow God to be everywhere except upon His throne.** They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and to make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of Heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures gnash their teeth; and when we proclaim an **enthroned God**, and His right to do

as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter, then it is that we are hissed and reviled, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for **God on His throne is not the God they love.** They love Him anywhere better than they do when He sits with His scepter in His hand and His crown upon His head. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust. It is God upon His throne of whom we have been singing this morning; and it is God upon His throne of whom we shall speak in this discourse. (From: *Divine Sovereignty*, by CH Spurgeon, New Park Street Pulpit, Vol 2, page 305).

Let me illustrate the idea of “times” and “timing” with a wedding. The bride has carefully planned every part of her wedding, and the day has finally arrived. Everything is going as scheduled, until her father, walking her down the aisle, falls over with a heart attack and instantly dies. Everyone, including the father and daughter, knew he would die “someday.” But why did he have to die on that particular day and at that specific hour? Everyone knew this event would happen, but no one had any way of knowing or controlling when it would happen. There was no way to prepare for that tragedy that day. How often have you said, “Why **this?** Why **me?** Why **now** of all times?” We ask this question both of the things we knew would happen “someday” and also of the things we never did expect to happen. It is easy to think that everything is against us, just because on one day, it rained on our parade. We forget all the many good days when things went right.

No one chooses a “time to weep” any more than one would

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In the Mount of the Lord, it shall be Provided!

Murray McLellan

I can think of no more delightful subject upon which to meditate than the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why such joy floods my soul in the study of God’s Word. The very heart of the Bible is the unfolding theme of God’s gracious work to glorify himself in bringing about our salvation in and through the Lord Jesus. Our glorious God reigns supreme. To bring glory to his name, God purposed and planned a creation and a history in which he might show forth the exceeding riches of his grace throughout the ages to come. This redemptive history flows throughout the Scriptures. God, therefore, was not merely a spectator in the creation and the fall, the onward march of time, and the history of humankind, but the designer and the administrator of it all.

Throughout history, God was showing that the promised blessings of his favor come upon a sinner only through the grace and wisdom of God. In fact, everything in redemptive history was working toward the glorious fulfillment of God’s promise in Christ. Everything was moving toward that “fullness of time” when “*God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*” (Gal. 4:4-5). In particular, events were moving toward the day of the cross, when man manifested what he was and God manifested what he was. The day of crucifixion was the day that the Lord had made. God made the day of salvation when he established the chief cornerstone from the stone that the builders rejected (see Psalm 118:22-24).

At Pentecost, Peter made it very clear that the event of the cross was the eternal purpose of God. “*Him,*

[Jesus of Nazareth] *being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it*” (Acts 2:23-24). God purposes and no one can thwart his plans or stay his hand. In fact, God providentially directs and uses even the evil plans of his enemies to work out his good pleasure—to their condemnation and his glory. The early church recognized this and rejoiced in it. We hear them pray in Acts 4:27-28, “*For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.*” They had meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

The Lamb of God, purposed to be slain from the foundation of the world, set his face like a flint and offered himself as the atonement for sin. In this, he magnified the God of incredible grace and wonder through the salvation of a people who would know and experience the wonder of that grace, and who forever would exist to the praise of the glory of that grace.

God reveals himself throughout his Word as both the one who established the plan and the one who sees it to its fulfillment.

But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. (Ps. 115:3)

‘... My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’ ... Indeed I have spoken it, I will also

bring it to pass. I have purposed it, I will also do it. (Isa. 46:10-11)

... [God] works all things according to the counsel of His will. (Eph. 1:11)

Somebody is in charge of the universe! God rules all that is going on. Though there are millions of billions of seemingly isolated circumstances, they do not function randomly. There is a design and a Designer, a purpose and a goal, and an intention in all of it.

How God takes the infinite number of circumstances, attitudes, and events that exist in both the natural and demonic world and pulls them all together to work out his will is beyond our comprehension. The limits of our own imaginations and the words of God himself confirm that God is beyond us:

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa. 55:9)

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is UNSEARCHABLE.” (Isa. 40:28, emphasis added)

Job tells us that the sum of what we are able to comprehend of God is but “*the mere edges of His ways*” (Job 26:14).

I love a God I cannot fully comprehend—who is far above me. That is a God worthy of my praise, my worship, and my trust. A god who is entirely understandable by human beings is intrinsically no bigger than those human beings are. Why should we worship someone who is just like us?

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and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. (Eccl. 3:1-8, NIV)

Everything depends on correct timing. The right thing at the wrong time may be worse than the wrong thing. Scripture commends those who ‘understand the times’ and act accordingly (see 1 Chron. 12:32). We cannot “understand the times” completely. Some things and times make little sense to us with our finite minds. We can however, learn enough to come to some understanding. *“I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all”* (Eccl. 9:11, NIV).

In all times and seasons, under all circumstances, the children of God are to be content and joyous:

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. (Eccl. 9:7-9, NIV)

This attitude is possible only if you agree with the Psalmist. *“My times [that means all of them] are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me”* (Ps. 31:15). The next verse, Psalm 31:16, is a ‘felt’ answer to that prayer: *“Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your un-failing love”* (NIV).

In Ecclesiastes 3:1, the writer announces that we are locked into times and seasons the same way that we were locked into nature in 1:4-7. *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”* In chapter 1, the teacher described the monotonous sameness of nature and our inability to change it. Chapter 3 is his presentation of the constant but unpredictable change from one extreme to another in nearly every area of life. Again, the changes are beyond our control or choice in any way.

Change is pleasant. Who would want all summertime and no fall or winter?

Change is essential. If we had all winter and no spring, we would have an abundance of flowers, but we would have no wheat. We would starve to death in a beautiful environment that smelled good.

Who could tolerate all planting and never a harvest? More positively, how about a life that is all laughter and never a tear? Before we say agree, we had better read Ecclesiastes 7:2-4.

Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. (NKJ)

If we are looking for ultimate

meaning, however, the back and forth extreme swings are no better than the endless circles of meaninglessness described in chapter one.

Derek Kidner, in his excellent book on Ecclesiastes, entitles chapter three, “The Tyranny of Time.” He says,

Perhaps tyranny is too strong a word for the gentle ebbs and flows described here, which carry us all our days from one kind of activity to its opposite, and back again. The description is pleasing, with its varieties of mood and action and its hints of different rhythms in our affairs. Rhythm itself appeals to us, for who would wish for perpetual spring—‘a time to plant’ but never to pick—or envy the sleepless business we met in the last chapter?

Yet in the context in the quest for finality, not only is a movement to and fro no better than the endless circling of chapter one, but it has disturbing implications all its own. One of them is that we dance to a tune, or many tunes, not of our own choosing; a second is that nothing we pursue has any permanence. We throw ourselves into some absorbing activity which offers us fulfillment, but how freely did we choose it? How soon shall we be doing the exact opposite? Perhaps our choices are no freer than our responses to winter and summer, childhood and old age, dictated by the march of time and of unbidden change.

Looked at in this way, the repetition of ‘a time . . . and a time’ begins to be oppressive. Whatever may be our skill and initiative, our real masters seem to be these inexorable seasons; not only those of the calendar, but that tide of events which moves us now to one kind of action which seems fitting, now to another which puts it all into reverse. Obviously, we have little to say in the situations which move us to

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is a time to keep, and a time to cast away. Yesterday’s useless junk sometimes becomes tomorrow’s priceless antique. Don’t you wish you had saved some of Grandma’s junk that you hauled off to the dump twenty years ago? In 1956, we had a public sale. We had to pay a man \$5.00 to haul away two bear-claw tables and an oak poster-bed that did not even garner a \$1.00 bid. They would both be worth over \$500.00 today. There was also an oak chest of drawers whose worth today I cannot even guess.

My wife and I are both pack rats. We keep saying that we are going to have two garage sales. She will go away for a weekend and I will sell all her stuff and then I will go away for a weekend and she will sell all my stuff. In my case it may take two weekends.

Verse 7a is a variation of verse 6: *A time to rend, and a time to sew.* I hate new clothes. I could wear the same clothes and keep patching them up until it was almost all different fabric on the garment. In the culture of the Seeker, people displayed sorrow and grief by tearing their clothing. A bride, however, would want to be married in a new dress, and would not consider leaving her father’s house without new linens. Jacob demonstrated his special affection for Joseph by giving his son a new coat. When Joseph’s brothers returned the coat to their father with a tale of Joseph’s death, Jacob tore his clothing and mourned (Gen. 37).

Verse 7b is a well-known and little-practiced truth. There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak. The classic complementary text is Proverbs 26:4-5.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his

own eyes. (NKJV)

The biggest difficulty in all of these couplets lies in knowing which part applies in a given situation. How do I know when to shut up and when to speak up? When is discretion the better part of valor? The people who advocate, “Always speak your mind” usually reveal how small their mind is. It is said, “Better to keep your mouth shut and have people think you are stupid, than to open your mouth and have them know for sure you are stupid.” We agree that what is cowardly at one time may be honorable and noble at another, but how do we know which action to take in a specific situation? Certainly, Matthew 7:6 applies here, *“... do not throw your pearls before swine ...”*

Verse 8a disconcerts some people who misunderstand the true nature of love: *A time to love, and a time to hate.* We must not hate individuals unless God’s glory is involved.

Verse 8b is a text for today. There is *“a time of war, and a time of peace.”* This assumes that some wars are justifiable. It is difficult for pacifists to deal with this verse. Their only argument is, “But that is in the Old Testament.” There is a time when war is legitimate and necessary, and there is a time when war is both unjust and insane. There is also a time for peace, but never a time for peace at any price. Times of war and times of peace affect our attitude and behavior. What is good at one time may be bad at another.

There are different views on appropriate approaches to chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. One view sees the writer feeling trapped by a sequence of times or events over which he has no control. He is forced to go through each experience without understanding why. In other words, the chapter is a beautiful, poetic way of saying, “All is meaningless.”

Another view is that the writer is a rigid believer in predestination. He is a fatalist who is mad because he cannot anticipate the events in this prearranged (without his consent) timetable. As a result, he cannot enjoy today. It is a blessing we cannot see and anticipate tomorrow. “If we could see beyond today, we often say, but God in love, a veil doth throw, across our way.”

The story is told of a Primitive Baptist who fell down the stairs. He picked himself up and said, “Well, I am glad that is over.” An Arminian would ask, “What did I do to deserve that?”

I believe the chapter teaches predestination, or else we would be driven to atheism and fatalism. It, however, is not saying, “What will be, will be, whether it was supposed to be or not.” It is not even saying, “What will be, will be, only because it was supposed to be.” The truth is, “What will be, will be, only because it is an essential piece in the great purposes of our great God.” In other words, (1) “Yes, everything happens because God purposed it to happen,” and (2) “Yes, it happens at the exact time that God ordained. Predestination, however, does not reflect the actions of a cruel, unfeeling tyrant, running the world as if it were an Ouija Board. No, no! The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ predestinated all things. Our wise, holy, gracious heavenly Father planned each event and every time for that particular event.

Genesis 21:1, 2 illustrates this point.

And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. (KJV, emphasis added)

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Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." (Gen. 22:9-11)

I am sure that Abraham was very glad to respond, "Here I am!"

The biblical account emphasizes the location as significant to God.

And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided." (Gen. 22:12-14)

To be continued.

Presented by Murray McLellan, an unworthy sinner upon whom the kindest of Kings has poured grace unimaginable. May it please God to use the preceding article to advance the faith and joy of his people. My foremost desire is to magnify and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Unto him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

It is my sincere desire that the presentation of these truths will advance your faith and joy in the glorious God of heaven and earth, and in his amazing salvation rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

MLM

Reisinger (Continued from page 10)

dancing —" was the experience of the man of God. Into Job's bosom was poured a portion "double for all his sorrows." The mouths of the returning captives were filled with laughter, and their tongues with singing (Psalm 136:1, 2).

Let God's afflicted ones mark the wisdom and grace of these appointments. He giveth both these *times* in their season. Yea—he maketh the one to spring out of the other. "Joy" is the harvest of the seed-time of tears. "I will make them rejoice"—so runs the promise—"from their sorrow." The sorrow may not "for the present" seem (Heb. 12:11) acceptable to us. But let it be accepted by us. As time rolls on, the special ends of the divine love in the sorrow will be displayed in beautiful arrangement. And that which in the beginning was accepted in dutiful acquiescence, will afterward become acceptable matter for adoring praise. The child of God will acknowledge—"It may be a dark dispensation. But I know it is a wise one. It brings God to me, and I am happy."

But far from us be that anomaly in religion—the gloomy religionist. Truly he is a stumbling block to the world, and a discouragement to the saint. He who lives, as if he were afraid of being happy—as if he doubted his right to be so—as if God begrudged him his happiness. With perverse ingenuity he believes the Gospel to be true for others, not for himself. 'Look up and be cheerful; honor God and his Gospel'—was the wise counsel given one of this class. Take the balances of the sanctuary. Compare the moment of the night-weeping with the eternity of the morning joy. The vicissitudes of weeping and joy will soon be overwhelmed in one unmingled eternity of joy. This is the only world where sickness, sorrow, and death can enter. And

the world of health and joy and life—without sin—without change—without tears (Rev. 21:4)—is near at hand. Oh! let it be in constant view—and him with it, who, 'when he overcome the sharpness of death, opened this kingdom to all believers.' (From: *Ecclesiastes*, by Charles Bridges, Banner of Truth, reprinted 1981).

Next, in verse 5a, we find *a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together*. We gather stones to build a house or a wall and we cast stones out of a field so we can plow it. We gather the stones out of our yard and use them to make a walk.

Verse 5b speaks of showing and withholding affection. There is *a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing*. In our culture, it is proper and fitting to dance and laugh at a wedding. The same action, even with the same people, would be improper at a funeral.

The next couplet (verse 6a) contrasts perseverance with knowing when to give up: *A time to get, and a time to lose*. If we have an incurable disease, there will come a time to stop running all over the world for a miracle cure. Some difficulties have no solutions; when faced with them, we just submit to God's sovereignty. Difficulties fall into two categories: problems, and facts of life. Many people never learn the difference between a problem and a fact of life. A problem has an answer and we do not give up until we find and apply the answer and solve the problem. A fact of life has no answer and requires we give up and submit to God's sovereign providence. To treat a problem as a fact of life is to be a coward. To treat a fact of life as a problem is to be a fool.

Verse 6b contrasts a pack rat with a wise and frugal saver. There

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CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

By Clyde Autio MAJGEN USAFR

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16, KJV)

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

Should citizenship be a primary topic for the ministry of the church?

Can a Christian ignore citizenship duties and fulfill the Great Commission?

The more I have studied and read about the Bible, the church, and the culture, the more I am convinced that Christian Citizenship should be at the very core of the preaching and ministry of the church and reflected in the lives of every member of the body of Christ. Merriam-Webster says the following about citizen and patriot:

citizen: 1: an inhabitant of a city or town 2: a person who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to its protection - citizenship n

patriot: one who loves his or her country - patriotic adj - patriotically adv - patriotism

Random House is a little more

expansive in their definition:

citizen: – 1. a native or nationalized member of a nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection. 2. an inhabitant of a city or town.

patriot: – a person who loves, supports and defends his or her country.

Most typically, when the words Christian, citizenship and patriot are used together, the conversation generally becomes very emotional, animated or antagonistic. Such a response can happen because the participants either do not want to have their lifestyle or culture controlled by some outside person or group's religious beliefs, have their political views controlled by biblical standards or they do not want to become involved in earthly issues.

However, are we not all a citizen of some neighborhood, community, state and nation? Do we not all expect some form of services and protections from those entities? Should we expect to receive benefits from our citizenship if we are not willing to contribute to and preserve those entities? If we do contribute and assist in the preservation of those entities, what should be the measure of our performance in doing those duties? Does Christ ever tell us that our focus should be so much upon our heavenly home that we should neglect our earthly home and duties?

In fact, Christ repeatedly tells us that our community, citizenship, duties far exceed those who are not called by Him to eventually share living in His Father's house. In Luke 10:29-37 Christ's response to the lawyer's question about who was his neighbor related the story

of the Good Samaritan. Certainly, from this story it was Christ's expectation that His people would always be prepared to reach out and provide for the needs of any person that happened to cross their path. And in Matthew 22:17-21 Christ instructed the crowd that they were to render unto Caesar that which was due him. Other passages from the epistles give us directions on how we should relate to the communities in which we live:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: (Romans 13:1-3, KJV)

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared (Titus 3:1-4, KJV)

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but

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Autio (Continued from page 5)

as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17, KJV)

As with many deliberations, the character and direction of the content is based upon the premise and presuppositions that establish the initial terms of reference. As an engineer, I tend to be more analytical and look for a variety of views to assist in gaining a better insight into the underlying goals and consequences of the issue at hand. In the case of citizenship and patriotism, I can find nothing that excludes Christians from those categories of responsibilities and much that tells me they should be absolutely the most active, and should strive to have an influential role. After all, shouldn't they be about the care of that which their professed Father created? They love to walk about saying how the book they read is the source of all truth and contains the totality of the wisdom of the ages. They also have a tendency to let everyone know that their Father is so powerful He can move mountains, bring down kingdoms, raise up legions of angels to fulfill His will and establish governments that will serve His desires. Yet, those same people seem to be helpless about solving the problems that confront them and are willing to yield to those who know nothing of their great God to formulate the laws that will govern the land, be the executor of those laws and ultimately sit in the seats of judgment over them. Those same Christians will chafe under what they believe to be a corrupt and ungodly government that is creating wicked laws and meting out unjust justice and refuse to intercede in the governmental process for the purpose of bringing about changes that will yield just laws, honest enforcement and honorable justice.

Yes, God is absolutely sovereign and has sovereign purposes concerning each human being. His purposes for Clyde Autio, born in the United States in 1931 are different from his purposes for Ivan born in Russia in 1931, Chang born in China in 1931, Muhammad born in Iraq in 1931 or for Mukaila born in Uganda in 1931. Just by our country of birth we have radically different talents, potentials and responsibilities. Yet, before God we stand accountable for how we lived our lives in the location God placed us and how we used the talents He made available to us as we served Him by visiting the sick, feeding the starving, clothing the naked and giving a cool drink to the thirsty. Christ mentioned these attending tasks as being our expression for serving Him.

Clyde had the opportunity to participate in the determination of the nature and character of the government where he lived. He also had complete freedom to worship the god he chose and how he would like to witness about that god. In his country, he had excellent educational opportunities and virtually unlimited prospects to secure a financially secure future. He did not know anyone who was starving to death or had to live with the fear that adequate health services would not be available. None of the others mentioned above born in 1931 had all of those blessings. Clyde had complete freedom to choose how he would use not only the talents that were derived from his personal attributes but also the talents inherent to his culture, station in life and national resources. For Clyde, the fulfillment of the great commission and the obedience of being a good Samaritan had far greater implications than for his foreign contemporaries. Yet, with all of his affluence and freedom from fears, his relationship to God was none the better and too frequently not as good as

was the relationship established by those same foreign counterparts. Why is that so? One answer might be that Clyde did not accept his citizenship duties with the same fervor as did Ivan, Chang, Muhammad or Mukaila.

It would seem that if the Bible is Truth, God is Sovereign and His principles for life are correct, we should be able to confirm the truth of the Bible in and from other sources. For example, the Bible speaks about our resurrected Saviour being the source of goodness, life, righteousness, love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, temperance and longsuffering. If that reference is true, we should be able to find evidence of those attributes in those people who are living their lives in accordance with the precepts given by the resurrected Lord. Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 15 that if there is no resurrected Christ all of our hope for the fruit of the spirit is vain because there is no god to fulfill an empty promise. Further, it would seem that the evidence one has of righteousness and holiness the more evident would be the resultant fruits of the spirit.

If God had not intended for us to have an impact on the world in which we live, why did He say that we should be salt and light? If He did not believe in the supremacy of His preferred lifestyle being evident in the church, why did He say the gates of hell could not prevail against it? In both of these cases, it seems that God has set forth a belief, if not a command, that His people were to live such that they would have a positive influence upon their surrounding world and that in any confrontation between His church and the powers and principalities of the Prince of the devils, His faithful church would prevail. But wait, is that happening, and if not why not? Are we able to make any kind of an analytical as-

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promise. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise would involve another Son whose birth would come about in a miraculous way—a Seed in whom were bound all the promises—a Seed in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Gen. 22:1-2)

It is important to notice that God does not ask Abraham to murder his son, but to offer him—to sacrifice him as a burnt offering. God is not commanding Abraham to commit a crime, but rather to execute due judgment. The wages of sin is death and God can justly require the death of any sinner at any time. The fact that God does not execute all of us, but suffers long with sinners, is because of his great mercy. God's request is a great test of Abraham's faith. Isaac is the son of promise; he is the miraculous gift of God, given to Abraham in his old age. Isaac was Abraham and Sarah's only son and the one through whom the promised Messiah would come. The promise of God and this commandment of God seem to be at odds, yet Abraham obeys.

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come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. (Ezekiel 33:6, KJV)

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. (Gen. 22:3-4)

Though Abraham did not understand, he trusted the God who had given him this son in a miraculous way. He trusted God's goodness, and thus, he obeyed the word of the Lord. Abraham knew that God deserves total trust. He did not try to figure out all that God was doing. Neither Abraham nor we who come after him have the ability to comprehend all of God's actions. However, like Abraham, we too are called to rest in God, even when we cannot see or understand what he is doing. Obedient faith reveals a genuine work of God.

Abraham's obedience took him to the place of which God had told him. When he was almost there, he lifted his eyes and saw the place in the distance. Before moving on to verse 5, I would like you to take note of the fact that along with faith and obedience, God makes a pointed reference to a particular spot. Why is it so important to God for Abraham to go to this particular mountain? I will comment on this shortly. For now, hold this question in your "memory bank."

In verse 5, we encounter more evidence of Abraham's faith in a supremely powerful and trustwor-

We do not serve God by serving God. We serve God by using His Truth, resources and blessings to heal the wounds and fulfill the needs of those He has placed around us. That means being the best citizen one can be by always having a burden to serve others and to save the lost. ☪

thy God.

And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." (Gen. 22:5, emphasis added)

In light of Hebrews 11:17-19, this is not a statement of deception; rather, it is evidence of faith. Abraham knows that whatever happens on the mountain, God is going to have to do something to get that son back. He is convinced that the promise of God cannot fail.

So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. (Gen. 22:6-8)

Abraham believes that the Lord will provide. He may have no clue as to how, but he knows God. He has confidence in God. As we shall see, Abraham's confidence is well founded. God does indeed provide.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And

McLellan (Continued on page 20)

"The law came, says Paul, as a harsh baby sitter to see to it that the children of Israel did not raid the refrigerator before the great party at which the Gentiles should also be present."

Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jew and Gentiles and Other Essays* - 1976 p. 20-21

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ing a man living first in the Old Covenant age and then in the New. Just like the case in our example, going from the Old Testament age into the New is a fairly homogeneous process. A change has occurred at the top, but little has actually changed for the “man on the street.” Men are saved the same way, the “church” of the Old Testament now becomes the “church” of the New Testament, and the laws under which we are to live are basically the same. We have a new and better Administrator of the covenant—Jesus—but it is fundamentally the same covenant.

Now, assume the same scenario as described above—except that, this time, when you awake, a 29 year old German citizen named Fritz Von Somethingoranother is President. What would you conclude? Well, it’s clear that what has transpired is far more than a mere change of administration! Our constitution (and we’re assuming it hasn’t been amended) requires the President to be at least 35 years of age and an American citizen. To discover that a 29 year old German is President means that a fundamental change in the government of the land has taken place. No longer could you just assume that it was “business as usual.” You’d know that you owed taxes to somebody (we always do!), but you could no longer assume that the IRS was even operable! The government in place when you fell asleep must have been replaced by another, and you would naturally assume that everything has changed, including even your citizenship. Apply this situation to the covenantal question, and you have the position of Dispensationalism. Note the discontinuity. The basic presumption is that all previous laws have been swept away and replaced by new ones.

Why is this so important?

What’s at stake here? A whole slew of issues arise from this! Is there only one way of salvation, so that an Old Testament saint was saved exactly as we (Covenant Theology); or, is there at least the possibility that we are saved in a different manner from those saints (Dispensationalism)? Are we part and parcel of the same people of God, Israel, that existed in the Old Testament age (Covenant Theology); or, are we a people completely distinct and separate from Israel (Dispensationalism)? Do the same laws – except those that are ceremonial, admittedly fulfilled in Christ—that governed Israel in the Old Testament age still rule us today (Covenant Theology); or, are we under an entirely new set of laws inaugurated by Christ (Dispensationalism)? All these things and more are affected by our answer.

Let’s Make a Model

To help you envision the differences between these two systems, let me suggest two models. Let’s use trains and train tracks to illustrate. The train represents a covenant, and those on board the train represent those under that covenant. The track represents the way of God’s devising that takes men from here to Heaven. The train runs through human history, and men board it along the way by entering into the covenant it represents. The engineer, who runs the train, depicts the administrator of the covenant.

Covenant Theology envisions but one train and one track carrying the one people of God in every age. At first, the train has an engineer named “Moses.” This train journeys through the Old Covenant age. It chugs along picking up the saints of that age, mainly Israelites, as it passes through the time in which they live. In due time, it comes to the juncture between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. At this

point, the train pulls into a station where Moses gets off, and a new engineer, “Jesus”, gets on. The train now presses onward in time, now picking up the saints, like us, of the New Testament age, mainly Gentiles. Note the continuity. There’s only one train—*i.e.* there’s only one people of God, though some get on board in the Old age, whereas others board in the New. There is only one track—*i.e.* there is only one route to glory. But there are two engineers—first Moses, then Jesus—who administer and supervise this process.

Dispensationalism, on the other hand, envisions two trains running on two separate tracks. One train represents the Old Covenant. Its passengers are the saints of the old age, mainly Israelites. It has an engineer named “Moses” who conducts this train to glory. The track is of a very narrow gauge and the ride is very difficult and bumpy. In fact, some riders actually fall off or get bumped off along the way! The other train represents the New Covenant. Its passengers are the saints of the new age, mainly Gentiles. It runs on a completely separate set of tracks with a much wider gauge. It’s easier to board and its ride is much smoother. The engineer, named “Jesus”, does a much better job than Moses of keeping his passengers on board the train and arriving at their destination with all intact. There is, however, one very unusual feature of this model: Only one train is operable at a time! As long as the train of Moses was moving through the Old Covenant age, the train of Jesus was at a standstill. Now, as the train of Jesus begins to move, the train of Moses is at a standstill and will remain so until Jesus’ train arrives in glory. Only then will Moses’ train begin to move again and complete its journey. Note the discontinuity. There are two trains on two tracks

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assessment of how effective God’s church is fulfilling its salt and light role and prevailing against the gates of hell?

By any of many measures, the impact of Christian principles on the American contemporary culture has significantly diminished over the past 228 years. One only has to quantify a few of those many measures to show that the church has lost the ability to control the marketplace of ideas, standards and conduct. Following are just a few of the current topics that provide a limited view of the 21st century cultural landscape that would not have been tolerated when America was founded:

The very open and public display of homosexuality with the advent of homosexual marriages.

The inability to persuade courts to either curb or control pornography.

The increasing frequency of successful court cases that deny the display of Christian symbols in public facilities.

The governmental protection of abortion as a means of birth control.

The high rate of divorces in both Christian and non-Christian families.

The dismissal of prayer at public gatherings.

Both an entertainment and a news media that are openly hostile to values associated with either the Bible or traditional American standards.

Since these cultural indicators are more representative of the presence of sin than of righteousness, one must conclude that the church has voluntarily retreated from establishing and maintaining the cul-

tural standards. Sin cannot overtake and displace righteousness. The dominance of sin can only occur because of the diminishment of righteousness. The initiative is always on the side of the source of energy. Dark cannot suppress light nor can cold suppress heat. Dark exists only in the absence of light and cold exists only in the absence of heat. Likewise sin can only exist in the absence of righteousness and God’s people are the custodians for righteousness.

What appears to have happened is that America’s pulpits have become too politically correct. The history of God’s chosen servants throughout the Bible and down to this day reveals that those who have been most faithful in presenting the gospel have also been the most persecuted or martyred. That was true of prophets in the Old Testament, Apostles in the New Testament and numerous saints in the last two thousand years. Their persecution was not so much for preaching the gospel as much as it was for directly confronting sin and sinners with a gospel message that condemned their lifestyle and bared their depraved souls. These ministries were confrontational, standing on their toes and going eye-ball to eye-ball.

Data storage has been both a blessing and a curse. It has allowed us to record all of Spurgeon’s notes, as well as thousands of other great sermons, but it has only allowed us to read and recite the words without the passion that gave the words life. Spurgeon’s greatness, as well as the other great pastors, was not just in the words but, more importantly, in his passion for lost souls that made those words leap from his tongue with a desire and passion to see the lost saved, the back-slider regained, and a flame lit in the cool-Christian.

Remembering Spurgeon’s

Autio (Continued on page 8)

Abortion

Recently I was listening to a TV panel discussion about religion and faith. One of the panel members was a Southern Baptist preacher. He was outstanding. A liberal preacher said, “We have no right to impose our beliefs and values on other people.” The Southern Baptist replied, “A woman imposes her values and beliefs on that baby in her womb, without that babies’ consent, when she takes its life.”

At another point a woman panelist said, “I personally would never have an abortion but I do not believe that I, or anyone else, especially the government, has the right to tell another woman that it is wrong for her to have an abortion.” Again, the Baptist preacher responded by saying, “Suppose we were living in the time of the civil war in America and you used the same argument. Would it have been acceptable for you to say, ‘I am personally opposed to slavery and do not own any slaves, but I believe it is very wrong to tell other people that it is wrong for them to have slaves.’”

I also remember being on an airplane sitting next to a feminist college teacher. The subject of abortion came up and she said, “I believe every woman has a right to do with her own body as she chooses and that includes abortion. I asked her, “Exactly what is this ‘whatever’ in a mother’s womb that you want the right to abort?” She immediately replied, “Well, I surely do not believe it is a baby.” I pressed her and asked, “But exactly what is it?” She finally replied, “It is a piece of plasma, that’s all.” I said, “OK, you are insisting on the right to abort a piece of plasma.” She agreed. I then asked, “Isn’t it true that you must literally **kill** that piece of plasma before you abort it because if it comes out of the womb alive, and then you kill it, you have committed murder?”

It does not really matter what you call that “whatever” that is aborted, the abortionist is demanding the right to kill it. We believe it is a real baby, a real human being, that is being killed.

Autio (Continued from page 7)

words, getting Paul's epistles doctrinally accurate and properly understanding the meaning of the law will not bring about revival nor keep a church warm. The pulpit has to come to the place where it believes that it has the only true answer to the problem of child abuse and not some lofty politician who knows nothing of God's Word. The pulpit has to be prepared to take the lead in setting the standards for the culture and not relenting on the chastisement of sin and sinners for politically correct reasons. The church has to decide that it knows more about the educational requirements for children to have a long and full life and not a group of educrats that know nothing about the long term consequences of immorality and theories that have no scientific basis or factual content.

The church has to decide that the true fulfillment of its ministry is to challenge the body to be the exemplars of citizenship by removing pornography from their neighborhoods, relegating homosexuality to the debased lifestyle that it is, refusing to tolerate the continued murdering of infants in the womb, stamping out all forms of child abuse and bringing about a government that understands the intent and purpose of America's founding fathers and documents. No longer should the church be content to sit by and waste the truth and wisdom God has placed in their hands to be the salt and light of the world by letting people ignorant of those truths and that wisdom dominate the cultural and governmental regimes.

God brought about a wonderful creation, put a being created in His image in charge, and provided his descendents with a perfect users manual on how to keep it going the way it was designed. And yet today that creation is in such disarray that

it reminds us of the following story: Recently a man walked into a very expensive motor home agency. While he was looking at several of the many multi-thousand dollar motor homes, he noticed a large wrecker pulling in a unit that had been terribly smashed. With much curiosity, he inquired as to the reason for so much damage. The salesman told him that the owner had just purchased one of the most deluxe versions and started on a trip. Once he got onto the interstate he decided he was going to have something to eat. He then put the machine onto cruise-control and went back to fix himself a snack. You can imagine the rest. That is analogous to the Body of Christ, His salt and light, leaving the driver's seat of the culture and letting those who know the least about truth, consequences and depravity free to determine the cultural values and standards.

One of the more noteworthy works of Samuel Miller, a Presbyterian clergyman, Princeton professor, author and a co-founder of the Presbyterian Princeton Theological Seminary, was his book, 'Thoughts on Public Prayer.' He revealed in that book that his pastoral duties included the oversight of education in his community. If today's schools were under the oversight of pastors and Christians what would be the influence on the quality of the student's education, their demeanor and citizenship standards? How many pastors and members of your churches do you know that are on local school boards? How many school boards does a Christian majority control? Why not? My 1992 public election race for the Xenia City School Board was successful because of the support of many fundamental Christians. It was not a pleasant race. I found that professors at Christian colleges, who also pastored churches, were not registered to vote; other Christians

would not place my yard signs on their property because of the local teacher's union opposition to my position on the method of teaching about morality issues; and the regional newspaper had identified me as a Christian that was not to be trusted.

A recent poll taken by George Barna's Barna Group reveals that only 18% of the adults want the Ten Commandments removed from public buildings, 13% of the adults want to remove "In God We Trust" from our coinage, 15% of the adults want to remove "One Nation Under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance and 59% of the adults want to have creationism taught in the government schools. Yet, with increasing frequency we are hearing of courts directing that long standing Ten Commandment objects, and other Christian artifacts, be removed from public facilities. How can such judicial decisions be so out of step with the public? Can it be the result of Christians not fulfilling even their most basic citizenship duty of voting for right thinking officials? Charles Colson reported in Break-Point, Number 040513 dated 13 May 2004, that only one-third of the Evangelicals would vote in 2004. Dr. James Dobson wrote in the Oct/Nov 2004 edition of Focus On The Family that only one-fourth of the Christians would vote. Can there be any clearer evidence that the church has failed to communicate to the body the importance of their civic duties? Has the body fulfilled the command from Moses to select good judges? *Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.* (Deuteronomy 16:18, KJV). Can the church escape God's judgment for not obeying His warning to be watchmen for the nation? *But if the watchman see the sword*

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THE CALL TO PREACH

Michael A McInnis

Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. Jeremiah 20:9

Men are by their very nature religious creatures. All societies, cultures, and nationalities have one or more "religions" that they keep. When the children of Israel left Egypt and its pagan gods and began their circuitous journey to the land of Canaan they encountered many different tribes and nations. Each one had its own gods and tradition of servitude and reverence for those deities. Then upon entering the Promised Land they were forced to do battle each step of the way with heathen cultures which owned and worshipped gods which were precious to them. The ONE true GOD was with HIS people and they ultimately triumphed and gained the land which HE had promised them. Throughout the history of the Israelites, recorded in the Old Testament, they were hindered in the worship of the true GOD by practices copied from those pagan cultures. They never completely learned that the way of the heathen was not acceptable in the sight of the LORD, but often sought to worship the ONE true GOD by using practices borrowed from those man-made religions.

Sadly, this behavior has been repeated in the life of the church throughout history even to the present day. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them"* (Acts 20:29-30). It was only

a few years before these things came to pass.

The simplicity of preaching the gospel and the lack of an organization with a hierarchy did not long appeal to the flesh. Even godly men were seduced by a desire to build "little kingdoms" of followers and to establish organizations with places of esteem for its "leaders" (see Mat.23:6; Luke 20:46; III John 1:9).

The "predominant churches" of our day bear little if any resemblance to the churches of the New Testament. Entertainment and "education" have for the most part supplanted true worship and HOLY GHOST enlightenment. This can be seen most clearly in the establishment of a class of men commonly called "the clergy." Ministry today is defined as a "profession" which one decides to enter. After fulfilling a certain course of study (some of it even includes the Bible) designed to equip oneself for the task at hand, a man (or woman) enters into "the ministry" just as one would enter any other worldly job. This all works out real well and keeps things running smoothly, and no doubt some good is accomplished in this endeavor. The only problem with it is that it goes contrary to that which is revealed in the scripture. Ministry is not a profession for a certain few but is the work which all of GOD's children are called to do for the benefit of the body of CHRIST. *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for (i.e.; unto) the work of the ministry, for (i.e.; unto) the edifying of the body of CHRIST"* (Eph 4:11-12). Not all of GOD's children are given teaching gifts but all of them are called to the ministry.

As we study the word of GOD, we find that those who are apostles,

prophets, teachers, etc. are so because of gifts and callings given them rather than something they learned somewhere or some position of esteem that has been bestowed on them. This is not something one looks at, at a job fair and says "Oh I think I'd like to try that." This calling cannot be escaped, as Jeremiah testified. Paul said the same thing, *"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"* (1 Cor 9:16). There is no honor attached to the one who preaches, only to the message which is preached. If a man can live without preaching then he does not have this calling that Paul speaks about. GOD lays this burden upon whom HE will and no man can silence that nor overturn it. *"And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?"* (Rom.10:14-15).

It is requisite upon all of GOD's people to fit themselves as best as they can to whatever task HE has called them to. But it is impossible that a man can by his own study or by the instruction of others prepare himself to preach the *unsearchable* riches of CHRIST. He can't even know where he ought to go except that the LORD sends him there. Phillip knew nothing of the Ethiopian eunuch's desire to understand the scripture, nor did he have any idea where he was. Yet the LORD sent him to the right place at the right time with the right message (see Luke 12:11-12; Acts 5:27-32). Was this a coincidence? So while it is necessary that those who are thus called should be serious students of the scripture (see Acts 6:4) they must also be given to prayer knowing that *"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain"* (Psalms 127:1). They also

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“legalism” or “antinomianism” have been hurled at each other by brethren whose actual day-in and day-out practice does not vary in the least. In fact, I have observed so-called “grace” men whose lives are lived far more strictly than those who are known as “law” men! This is not to belittle the importance of the question being debated. It is, however, to suggest that more thought and less rhetoric might well be in order. The relationship between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant forms one of the most difficult questions in all of theology. So said Jonathan Edwards, and, trust me, when Edwards says something is difficult, you can bet that it’s difficult. Many think they have it all figured out and are quick to tell us so. Yet easy, quick, and simplistic answers betray a shallowness of thinking. If you think the answer is easy, it’s most likely because you’ve not even understood the question!

Our thinking tends to be governed by extremes rather than by balance. That is, we like to think in terms of “*this or that*” rather than in terms of “*this and that*.” The controversy at hand shows that same tendency, with “law” and “grace” often viewed as opposite ends of the spectrum rather than as complimentary truths.

The Covenantal Question

The supposed conflict of “law” and “grace” actually flows out of the more fundamental question of how the New Testament saint is related to the Old Covenant. How are we, in this new age, to view the various laws and regulations given to God’s people in the previous age?

“Covenant Theology” is a theological position that attempts to answer this question. It does so by seeing one overarching covenantal

principle in force at all times, the so-called “Covenant of Grace.” This position sees little change between the two ages, emphasizing, instead, the continuity between them.

Another answer to this question is that given by *Dispensationalism*. This is the contrary theological position which emphasizes radical change from the old age to the new, and insists upon discontinuity as its predominate principle. The idea behind Dispensationalism is that God places each age, or “dispensation,” under unique standards or “tests.” Therefore, the “test” for this age may bear no resemblance whatsoever to that placed upon a previous day.

Notice that, in principle, Covenant Theology emphasizes continuity between the covenants, whereas Dispensationalism stresses discontinuity. This has given rise to the often quoted, though not quite accurate, notion that Covenant Theology holds that anything in force in the Old Covenant is still in force today, unless expressly abrogated; Dispensationalism, on the other hand, is said to hold that anything in force in the Old Covenant is automatically repealed in the New unless expressly reinstated. It should be pointed out in fairness that the leading thinkers in both camps would not state their positions in this manner and are moving away from these extremes. However, I think it’s fair to say that the perception stated above is still the one commonly embraced today by the man in the pew.

To give one practical example of the ramifications of such thinking, consider that most, if not all, Pedobaptists hold to Covenant Theology. Infant baptism is “proven” by a “necessary inference” drawn from this theological perspective—in spite of a paucity of direct evidence for it in the New Testament scrip-

tures. Covenant Theology reasons that if children of the elect were included in the Old Covenant, children of the elect must be considered as included in the New Covenant. If the attendant sign of the Old Covenant, circumcision, was applied to infants, then the sign of the New Covenant, baptism, should be applied to infants as well. The sign itself may have changed, but the principle governing those to whom the sign is to be applied is presumed to be the same.

A Change of Covenant or a Change of Administration?

One of the central questions we must face is this: Is the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant an actual change of covenants (the position of Dispensationalism) or merely a change in the administration of one, umbrella-like, all-encompassing covenant of grace (the position of Covenant Theology). To understand the difference, consider the following scenario.

Suppose, early in 1992, you pulled a “Rip Van Winkle” and fell into a lengthy sleep. You have only now just awakened. When you fell asleep, George H. Bush was President of the United States. Now you awaken to find that a man by the name of George W. Bush is President. What would you conclude? Well, you’d probably make the correct assumption that the elder Bush was no longer president and that his son had been elected sometime during the intervening years. You would also assume that, essentially, the laws of the land were the same—e.g. you’d still send in your taxes (and don’t forget those back taxes for the years you were asleep) to the IRS—but that these laws were now being administered by a new administration.

Relate this scenario to the covenantal question and you have the view of Covenant Theology regard-

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weep or laugh, mourn or dance; but our deliberate acts, too, may be time-conditioned more than we suppose. ‘Who would have imagined,’ we sometimes say, ‘that day would ever come when I would find myself doing such and such, and seeing it as my duty.’ So peace-loving nations prepare for war; or the shepherd takes the knife to the creature he has earlier nursed back to health. The collector disperses his hoard; friends part in bitter conflict; the need to speak out follows the need to be silent. Nothing that we do, it seems, is free from this relativity and this pressure—almost dictation—from the outside.

(*A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance, the Message of Ecclesiastes*, by Derek Kidner, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, p. 38).

Several things from this passage are important. First, change is not bad if God is in total control of all the changes. Second, the real problem for us is not that life refuses to keep still, but that we see such a very small sliver of its movements and we cannot see the big design. If we could see God’s great purpose to bless his people and to glorify himself in everything, our perspective would change. Kidner writes,

We are like a desperately near-sighted man, inching his way along some great tapestry or fresco in an attempt to take it all in. We see enough to recognize something of its great quality, but the grand design escapes us, for we can never stand back far enough to view it as its Creator does, whole and entire, from beginning to the end (Ibid, page 39).

In Ecclesiastes 3:2 -8, the writer uses fourteen couplets to describe a wide range of human activity and experience. He starts in verse 1 with a general fact: *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every pur-*

pose under the heaven.

The writer employs a common Hebrew couplet method. The couplets are meant to describe the two extremes, and by implication, everything in between them. Thus, when a couplet writer pens, “man and woman,” he means “everybody.” “Land and seas” indicates “everywhere.” From the “smallest to the greatest” expresses the two extremes and all that is in between them.

Verse 2a starts with the two most momentous and sure events of every person’s existence — life and death (and everything in between): *A time to be born, and a time to die.* There was a time, ordained by God, for you to be born. You were no accident. Maybe your parents did not plan your birth, but God did. There is a time, already fixed by God, for you to die. It is an ordained appointment that you will keep, and you will not be one minute late. Your very first event and your very last event, and everything in between those events, is under God’s sovereign control. God picked the day of your birth and the day of your death.

The next three couplets (verses 2b, and 3) show various destructive and constructive activities: A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up.

First, the writer mentions planting and harvesting. He could be talking about vegetables and crops. He also could be referring to planting and destroying nations. He may be speaking of ‘planting our roots’ in one place and at another time ‘uprooting’ and moving on.

Second, there is a time to kill and time to heal. He may be thinking in medical terms, but not necessarily just medical. There is a time to amputate a leg to save the per-

son’s life and there is a time to take the risk of not amputating. There is a time to shut off the machine and a time to keep it running. The writer also may be talking about healing or destroying a good or bad relationship. Likewise, we kill a bad business venture and at other times, we hang on and hope.

Third, there is a time to break down and time to build up. There is a time to tear down false hopes and conceit, but other times call for building confidence and self-esteem. There is a time to demolish an old house and start over, but other times we should repair the old one. It also can refer to times when God tears down nations, just as there are times when he builds up nations. This happened in biblical history when God raised up even ungodly nations to use them to fulfill his purpose to punish Israel. Additionally, the writer could be talking about building up or ending a relationship.

Walter Kaiser has an interesting note on this verse:

Having established that the terms of life are fixed for men as well as for the plant world, Solomon teaches that even those situations that seem to be in the hands of men and, therefore somewhat unpredictable—such as the condemnation of murderers by the state to the penalty of death—are likewise embraced in the plan of God. There is a time for executing murderers or destroying enemies in a just war (v.3). (Incidentally, such an action against murderers is favored in Scripture, not because men are sovereign or because society and the bereaved are some how benefited, but because man is so vastly important to God—he is made in the image of God [Gen 9:6]. To kill another person is to kill God in effigy. Thus, the only alternative that the state, God’s duly authorized agent

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in such a case, has is to show respect for God and for the value of the image of God in man by taking the murderer's life. Such a moral reason has not been antiquated by any subsequent revelation in the gospel. Can the character of God be offered at discount value in generations to come? *Ecclesiastes, Total Life*, by Walter Kaiser, Moody Press, pages 63, 64.

In verse 4, the author deals with human emotions: *A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.* Charles Bridges has some excellent comments on this text.

There is obviously a repetition with increasing emphasis. The *mourning* is the most poignant weeping. The dancing expresses not only the laughter of the lips, but exuberant excitement of the whole man. These are God's *times*. Beware of changing them. It is a fearful thing to respond with "joy and gladness" when the Lord of hosts calls for *weeping* and *mourning*.

Who has not found the *time to weep and mourn*? "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7; 14:1). And yet lesson after lesson is needed to make us know the world is a vale of tears. We look around to the right or to the left to avoid this or that trouble. Is not this looking out for some bye-path from the road, where we shall meet neither promises, comfort, nor guidance? Be content with thine appointed lot. The tears of the child of God have more the element of happiness than the *laughter* of the ungodly. The darkest side of the Canaan road is brighter than the light of a thousand worlds. Yet we may look for a change of seasons in God's best and fittest time. "Thou hast turned my *mourning* into

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The 21st Annual John Bunyan Conference

April 18-21, 2005

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Dr. James A Zaspel—Grace in Unanswered Prayer

	Monday April 18	Tuesday April 19	Wednesday April 20	Thursday April 21
8:00am		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9:15am		Henry	Bridges	Bridges
10:30am		Haykin	Morris	Bridges (10:15am)
12:00noon	Registration (12:30pm)	Lunch	Lunch	
2:30pm	Carson			
4:00pm	Reisinger (3:45pm)	Carson	Carson	
5:00pm	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
7:00pm	Zaspel	Haykin	Haykin	
8:15pm	Carson	Carson	Carson	

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We can identify the ways that God accomplishes his plan by sorting how he rules in the world into two categories: visible and invisible. Miracles are visual evidence of God at work, and providence is an invisible means through which God fulfills his purposes.

Miracles amaze us by drawing our attention to God and away from the everyday world. God has designed nature so that it runs along observable and predictable lines, but nature does not make its own laws. It is always subject to God's control. To accomplish his purposes, there are times when God interrupts the observable natural course of events. Several well-known biblical miracles occur in Genesis and Exodus:

- the flood
- the plagues in Egypt
- the parting of the Red Sea
- manna in the wilderness
- water from the rock

Providence lies behind miracles and is not observable, although the results of it often are discernable. Because it is an invisible means through which God works, many people do not think about it. God, in an unseen way, controls all things that happen in the universe. God oversees all, invisibly orchestrating all the seemingly natural occurrences. To me, it is even more amazing than miracles.

When I ponder God, providentially working out his purposes, I am amazed. When I think of billions of people, all pursuing their own agendas, and God overruling them all, I am awestruck. He restrains. He lets go. He oversees and controls it all.

Jesus reigns and will continue to do so until all his enemies are brought under his feet to serve as his footstool (1 Cor. 15:25 cf. Ps.

110:1). (Not all believe he is Lord, but one day all will know the truth ... and every knee will bow and every tongue confess the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord.) He is a king over molecules and mountains. He does all his good pleasure and no one thwarts his hand.

The lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord. (Prov. 16:33)

Not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father's will. (Matt. 10:29)

We have a limited understanding of control; we can comprehend it only from a creature's perspective. For us, absolute control means that those on the receiving end would be like puppets on a string or programmed computerized robots. This is the only way we can control. God, however, is not like a man. He can control all and, at the same time, allow people to make decisions and choices for which they are completely responsible. The consequences of those choices will not prevent God from accomplishing his glorious purposes. Thus, men do what they want to do—and all the while, they are overruled and are fitting into a grander scheme that is being worked out by an infinitely wise, holy and powerful God. The supreme biblical example of this is the Crucifixion.

As the Scripture unfolds from Genesis to Revelation, we discover that Jesus' work on the cross in particular is central to the Bible and to all of human history—a work first promised and then fulfilled in time. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden did not take God by surprise, nor did it cause him to alter his original plan. God always intended to send the Son to earth to rescue sinners, and his promises reflect that intention. In the rest of this article, we will trace the biblical development of that promise.

When God makes a promise,

nothing can change it. "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). The Lord stated in Isaiah 46:11b, "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I also will do it." What was God's expressed purpose? God made a promise to a man named Abram that through him, a Seed would come—a Redeemer—to conquer sin, Satan, death, and hell. The Seed would come to gather a people who forever would be a testimony to the incredible grace of God.

Some time after the original promise, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means 'father of a multitude,' as a testimony to the promise. God had come to Abram when Abram was still an idolater in the land of the Chaldeans, in Ur. This promise was one of pure grace from beginning to end. God set apart this pagan from Ur, and told him that he was going to bless him. God was going to bless Abraham in the promised Seed, in whom Abraham the sinner would be justified in the sight of God. Abraham would not be alone in this blessing. God also promised to make a great nation who would be God's special blessed people. It was God's own good pleasure to do so, for his own glory—to display his grace and goodness.

Throughout his life, Abraham repeatedly experienced the reality that God is true to his Word, no matter how strange that word seemed. Though his wife, Sarah, had been barren and well past her childbearing years, had she not, at the age of ninety, given miraculous birth to the promised son, Isaac? God manifested his glory as a promise-keeping God of awe-inspiring power. In Genesis 22, God repeats and clarifies his amazing

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John G. Reisinger	<i>When Should a Christian Leave a Church?</i>	14	\$3.50	\$2.50		
John G. Reisinger	<i>John Bunyan and the Sabbath</i>	12	\$3.00	\$2.00		
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Gary D. Long	<i>Biblical Law & Ethics: Absolute and Covenantal</i>	58	\$2.95	\$1.50		
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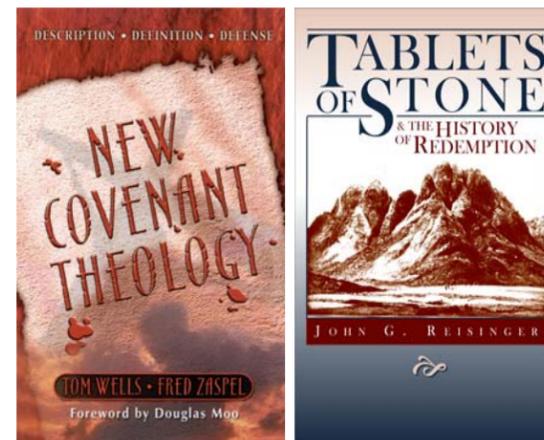
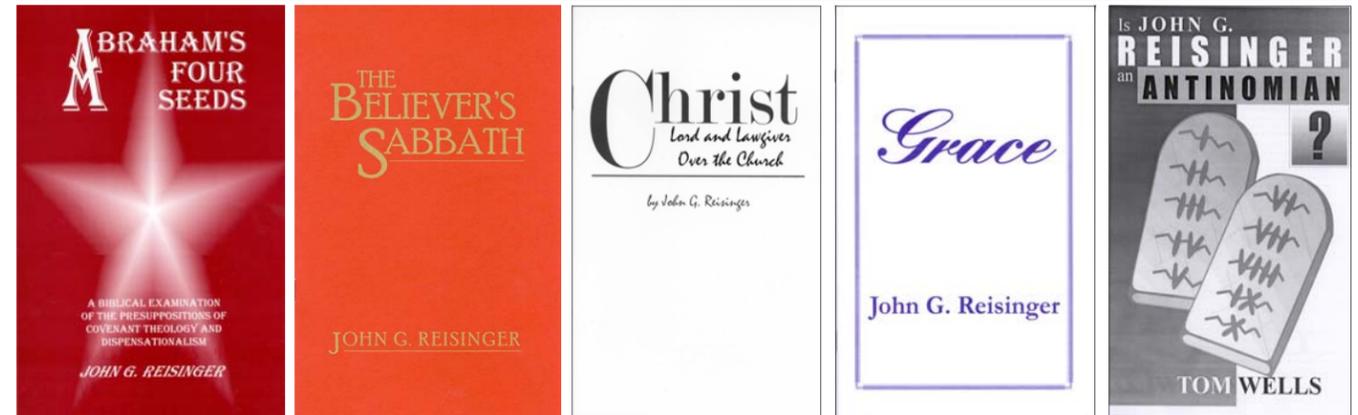
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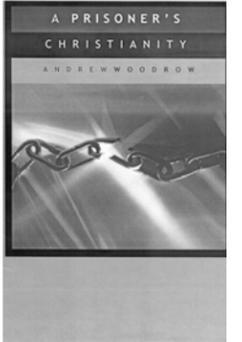
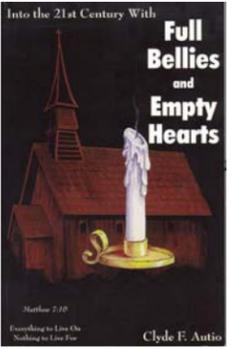
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