

G R A C E SOUND OF

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

ISSUE 121—OCTOBER 2005

In This Issue

<i>Thoughts on the Book of Ecclesiastes—Part Eleven</i>	1
<i>A Christian Response to Muslim Terrorism Part 1—Early History of Islam</i>	1
<i>Today, If You Will Hear His Voice</i>	3
<i>Believers In Hell?</i>	5
<i>Hurricane Katrina—Some Lessons</i>	7

Thoughts on the Book of Ecclesiastes —Part Eleven John G. Reisinger

In Chapter 5, the writer, at first glance, seems to depart from his main thesis. A closer look, however, reveals that he is still writing from within his “meaningless, meaningless” philosophy. He retains his broad framework of the vanity of all of life and applies it to a particular area he has yet to address: worship. He exhorts his readers to continue to go to the house of God to worship, but cautions that to do so in a wrong manner or with a bad motive is worse than meaningless; it is actually sin.

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do

wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. (Eccl 5:1-3, NIV)

We previously have noted six points that could easily cause us to forsake our confidence in a wise sovereign God. The Seeker lamented (1) injustice in the halls of justice; (2) the inescapable fact that humans and beasts alike die; (3) that people are severely oppressed; (4) that people are motivated by rivalry; (5) that human

Ecclesiastes—Cont. on page 2

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO MUSLIM TERRORISM

Part 1—Early History of Islam

Clyde F. Autio

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father... (Matt 5:43-45 KJV)

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is

able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt 10:28 KJV)

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31&32 KJV)

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and

we by him. (1 Cor. 8:6 KJV)

Identification of the Problem

Must a free and open democratic government provide an impartial balance of respect for all religions? Is a war against Muslim terrorists another Crusade? How is it the same or different from the historic Crusades?

Today, we face many problems with no politically correct answers and some problems for which we cannot

Autio—Cont. on page 14

Ecclesiastes—Cont. from page 1

beings are separated from each other and from God because of sin; and (6) that popularity, even when deserved, is very short-lived. Do not these six observations indicate that God cannot possibly have a good plan and purpose for every person and everything? These realities seem to turn the theology of sovereignty on its ear. Why not be honest and just give up our faith? Unhappily, many have done just that. They have not done so outwardly, but they have inwardly. These people refrain from formal, theological atheism, but engage in a “practical atheism” that thinks and acts as though God is not really in control. Do not be seduced into either outright unbelief or pious religious hypocrisy. Continue to go to the house of God and worship God as he has revealed himself in his Word.

As we mentioned in our previous article, we are not to limit this exhortation to “going to church” for public worship. In the New Covenant era, God dwells in Christ; we meet with God in Christ. We must guard our steps whenever we meet with God: in any place and at all times. We cannot emphasize too strongly that we must always remember that we meet with God at the mercy seat. There is no other place where God will meet with sinners. We need frequently to remind ourselves that we wear a robe without seam or spot, hand-woven by our Older Brother. The words of the old hymn, “What can wash away my sin?/ Nothing but the blood of Jesus,” are our song, and we need to sing it to ourselves daily.

To guard our steps means first to approach God only through the righteousness of Christ, and second, to be conscious of what we are doing and saying. If ever we must choose our words carefully, it is when we speak to God. Carefulness refers not to grammar, to how long we speak, or even to content in one sense. Since

our words reflect our thoughts, carefulness begins by training ourselves to think God’s thoughts after him. Carefulness continues as we speak from our hearts and sincerely feel and mean exactly what we are saying. A simple “God be merciful to me a poor sinner” outstrips many of the “deep-voiced pastoral prayers” that would never use “you,” but only “thee” and “thou.”

When we do meet with God in the context of public corporate worship, we must remind ourselves of two important points. First, the only profitable hearing is what we remember and practice. No matter how delighted and thrilled we are with what we hear, if we do not remember it and put it into practice, we are worse off for hearing it. Our Lord has warned us, “Take heed how you hear.” We are too often ready to ask curious questions, but unready to listen to practical truths. I am reminded of Mark Twain’s response when asked, “How do you handle passages of Scripture that you do not understand?” Twain replied, “Oh, they don’t bother me one-tenth as much as the ones I do understand.”

Second, we can make our Father’s house a house of merchandise without anyone selling or buying a single thing. The most powerful truth ever preached goes right over the head of the man or woman who is thinking about tomorrow’s business deal. We would be horrified in a church service to see someone passing out sale’s slips and other people passing money in return, but is that any worse than doing the same thing mentally?

The Teacher continues his exhortation to carefulness by urging his readers to let their words be few. We must not misunderstand his instruction here. Charles Bridges makes excellent comments on verse two.

The few words here directed are words well-weighted — well chosen and ordered. They contrast strongly

Ecclesiastes—Cont. on page 4

Sound of Grace is a ministry of Grace Bible Fellowship of Maryland. It is published 10 times a year. The subscription price is \$10.00 per year. This is a paper unashamedly committed to the truth of God’s sovereign grace and New Covenant Theology. We invite all who love these same truths to pray for us and help us financially.

We do not take any paid advertising.

The use of an article by a particular person is not an endorsement of all that person believes, but it merely means that we thought that a particular article was worthy of printing.

Sound of Grace Board: John G. Reisinger, Moe Bergeron, Ken Keefer, Jacob Moseley, Bud Morrison, and Lloyd Scalyer.

Editor: John G. Reisinger; Phone: (717)960-9383; e-mail: 24jreisinger26@comcast.net.

Webmaster is Maurice Bergeron, webmaster@soundofgrace.com

General Manager: Jacob Moseley, info@newcovenantmedia.com

Send all orders and all subscriptions to: Sound of Grace, 5317 Wye Creek Drive, Frederick, MD 21703-6938 – Phone 1-800-376-4146 or 301-473-8781 Fax 240-206-0373

Address all editorial material and questions to: John G. Reisinger, Sound of Grace, 1313 Woodward Drive, Carlisle, PA 17013.

Visit the Sound of Grace Web Page at: <http://www.soundofgrace.org>

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked “NKJV” are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.

Contributions

Orders

VISA or MasterCard

If you wish to make a tax-deductible contribution to *Sound of Grace*, please mail a check to: *Sound of Grace*, 5317 Wye Creek Drive, Frederick, MD 21703-6938.

Please check the mailing label to find the expiration of your subscription. Please send payment if you want your subscription to continue—\$10.00 for ten issues. If you are unable to subscribe at this time, please call or drop a note in the mail and we will be glad to continue sending the *Sound of Grace* free of charge.

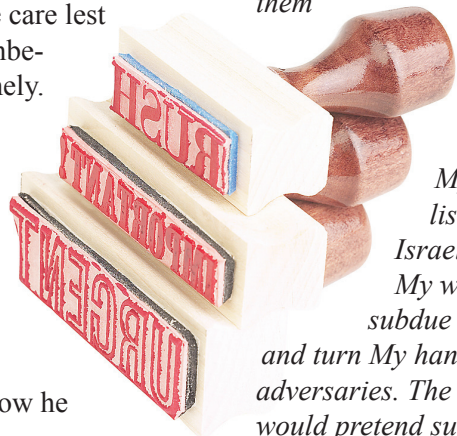
Today, If You Will Hear His Voice

Murray McLellan

Scripture quotations from the *New King James Version* unless otherwise indicated.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest." (Heb. 3:7-11)

The author of the letter to the Hebrews has been comparing Jesus to Moses, with the conclusion that Jesus is worthy of greater honor than Moses is. In the light of the superiority of Jesus, the author urges his readers to hold fast to their hope in Christ, rather than to turn back to the inferior and incomplete revelation that preceded Christ. The writer cites Psalm 95:7-11 to show that unbelieving Israel's hardness of heart prevented them from entering God's rest in the Promised Land. He uses typology to show how that incident corresponds to his readers' temptation to turn away from Christ and return to the Old Covenant. Few of us today are tempted to put ourselves under the Mosaic Covenant, but the warning to take care lest any one of us has an unbelieving heart is still timely. Unbelief may manifest itself in blatant rejection of what God has revealed about himself and ourselves, or in an external conformity that masks a subtle dissatisfaction with who God is and how he operates.



"Today" shows the urgency of his proclamation. If you turn from the truth, you are suppressing it. You are hardening your heart to it. If your conscience is sensitive now and you neglect this truth of the glorious Redeemer-King, will you turn to him when your heart is harder? Oh, the foolishness of unbelief. Israel, in the day of trial in the wilderness, had already been miraculously redeemed from slavery and bondage in Egypt. God had guided them through the revelation of his presence in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He had provided them with bread from heaven (manna), quail for meat, and water from a rock. Despite all that the Israelites had seen and experienced, their hearts had never delighted in God. God did not thrill them. Their own desires, lusts, and comforts consumed them. Thus they complained, dissatisfied with life. The entire time, they walked in rebellion to the very one who would have satisfied them. The Psalmist captured it very well when he penned the Lord's words in Psalm 81.

I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him,

but their fate would endure forever. He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock I WOULD HAVE SATISFIED YOU. (Ps. 81:10-16, emphasis added)

An unbelieving heart never has enough proof. The unbelieving Israelites tested and tried God and saw his works for forty years. The heart of natural man is dead to the things of God. The natural man does not want to believe, nor indeed can he. He hates the light, and loves the darkness; darkness has no communion with light. The unbeliever neither smells the sweet aroma of Christ that we smell, nor sees the glory that we see. He cannot taste the graciousness of the Lord; neither can he hear the Good Shepherd's voice. He cannot feel the love of God poured out in his heart; he is dead to spiritual things – cut off from the life of God. He needs a new heart – one that is spiritually alive.

The unbeliever is able to know that the Scripture says he is a sinner, but inside his heart, he just does not feel that he is as bad as the Bible proclaims him to be. The unbeliever can read the words of the Bible, but he does not hear the voice of God in them, thus he has no true communion with the Lord. The Word of God is bland to the unbeliever, and therefore, God's commandments are burdensome to his heart. The glory of Jesus Christ is veiled to the one with a dead heart, though such a one can understand facts about Christ. The fragrance of Christ's knowledge does not diffuse and fill his heart with worship and adoration for the majestic and victorious Redeemer. Do you smell and see and taste and hear and feel? Then praise God, who is rich in mercy, because

Ecclesiastes—Cont. from page 2

with the “vain repetition” of the heathen such as the frantic orgies of Baal — the Romish Paternosters — of the Pharisees’ long prayers — “thinking they shall be heard for their much speaking.” But God hears us not the sooner for many words; but much the sooner from earnest desire, to which let apt and sufficient words minister, be they few or many. The fewness of words is not the main concern; but whether they be words of the heart — ‘whether they be gold or lead’ — what life there is in them. For nothing is more unacceptable to God, than to hold on speaking, after we have left off praying. So long as the heart and the tongue flow together, never suppose your Lord will be weary of your many words.¹

An illustration may help us grasp the significance of these texts. Imagine a group of four men, planning to go to the Super Bowl in Florida. It is a two-hour drive from their homes. “We must leave no later than 9:00 AM. If someone is not here, we are leaving without him. We don’t want to miss the kick off.” During the two-hour drive, the entire conversation is about football. All four men know all the football players’ names and stats. “I hope so-and-so (the quarterback) is really on today,” says one man, and all agree. It would be hard to describe the anticipation and expectancy of these four men. During the game, they shout until they are almost too hoarse to talk. The seats are hard and there is occasional rain, but no one utters a word of complaint. The game goes into two overtimes, but no one grumbles about how long the game is taking. On the way home, the men re-hash the game at least five times. “I will never forget that amazing one-handed catch in the third quarter.” “You’re right. I believe that turned the whole game around.”

¹ Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes, A Geneva Series Commentary* (1961; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 102, 103.

Ten years later, if you asked these four men to describe one of their most memorable experiences, at least three would describe that football game. You would be amazed at how much and how accurately they could describe what happened at that game.

Now imagine those same four men, each with their wives, on the way to a church service. One man says to his wife, “Let’s stop and get a cup of coffee. We will only be a couple of minutes late for church.” During the service, one man goes to sleep and his wife keeps nudging him. One wife, sitting next to another wife, whispers, “Do you see that hideous dress that Mary is wearing?”

After the service, the four couples all go out to lunch together. The talk among the four men soon turns to the amazing football game they saw ten years ago. The women talk about clothes. The one time anyone mentions the church service is when someone comments that he or she thought the sermon was a little too long. No one would have ever imagined these people had just come from a meeting with the King of Kings! Of course it is quite possible they did not in reality meet with God. Attendance is not engagement. Far too often, we attend a church service out of habit or duty, without sufficient carefulness of thought.

I once heard Allen Redpath say, “I always go to the church an hour early on Sunday morning. One of the things I do is stand in the foyer and pray, ‘Oh, God, sanctify the conversation in this hallway before and after the service.’” Why is it that we anticipate with joy, become emotionally worked up, and remember and talk about a football game that took place ten years ago, but we dare not even whisper “amen” in a church service? How is it possible to meet with the King of

Kings for an hour or more and remain unaffected, and yet go wild over a football game?

In verse 3, the author compares the dumb and distorted words a fool may utter, even in the presence of God, with images of wild dreams. When our minds are occupied and controlled by business, pleasure, anxiety, and the like, our dreams may be wild and disorganized. Our subconscious feels and says things in dreams our conscious mind would not dare say aloud.

Dreams bypass our inhibitions. The words of a fool in the presence of God are just such a revelation of the fool’s heart.

The Seeker now introduces the subject of vows and warns against failure to keep a vow made to God. He is not condemning a person

for taking a vow. He is condemning rash vows that are not kept. He is applying the theme of carefulness specifically directed at words in verses 1-3 to the subject of a particular kind of words: vows. The broad theme ties verses 4-6 to verses 1-3.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger; “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? (Eccl. 5:4-6, NIV)

The subject of vows requires careful study. One of the issues involved



But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of GOD, even to them that believe on his name: John 1:12

As I was riding along the other day I passed a church house with one of those marquee type signs which are so popular. The sign really caught my eye because there spelled out in big letters was this message; "THERE WILL BE NO UNBELIEVERS IN HELL". I was immediately struck with several thoughts. I thought about the fact: that too many people today think it is cute to present the gospel with catchy phrases; that too many preachers portray the gospel as a series of sound bites, a step by step pattern for the flesh to follow; that often far too many of us speak without giving very much thought to what we are saying; that error is perpetuated by copy-cats who repeat clichés without investigation. But most of all the thing that struck me was the utter error that was set forth in those letters on that sign. Now I am fairly confident that I know what the signist was seeking to convey. He (or she) was trying to point out that when the wicked get to hell they will realize that God really is God, that he is no figment of their imagination. The scripture sets forth the same concept in James 2:19, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." Yet the scripture would nowhere describe the devils as "believers". The basic error of the sign stems from the mistaken concept that believing is something men have the ability to do if the situation gets right. Those who propose this idea are ignorant of the fact that men are *dead* in trespasses and sins and apart from a supernatural work of grace they will not believe (see Jn. 5:38-40; 6:36). The signist supposes that these people in hell have been changed by the knowledge they have, and would now embrace Christ if only given the opportunity, but men's hearts are not

BELIEVERS IN HELL?

Mike McInnis

changed by fear nor are they drawn to him by the skill and reason of men. Men by nature despise the way and person of Christ. A man may be temporarily affected in the flesh by persuasive arguments or dire circumstances but unless the Lord awakens him (a sinner) and gives him the gift of faith he will not believe though cast into the most awful situation one can imagine, even hell itself. The Bible describes believers as those who are in possession of something rather than those who consent to a few facts or agree to some principles. Here are a few contrasts between true believers and those men who inhabit the regions of darkness and hell.

Believers are those who possess eternal life given to them by GOD himself (see Jn. 1:13, I Jn. 5:13). They have passed (present tense) from death unto life (see Jn. 5:24). No one in hell has life; rather they are possessors of eternal death having received the just recompense of their reward (see Heb. 2:2; Eze. 18:4).

Believers possess the promise which is "given to them that believe" (see Gal. 3:22). We have the hope of his calling, the riches of glory, the working of his mighty power (see Eph. 1:18-19; Phil. 2:13). Those in hell have no hope, are in abject poverty and are appointed unto wrath by his power (see Eph. 4:18; Rom. 1:18; 9:22;



Prov. 16:4; Rev. 6:16).

Believers have received the word of God and possess a love of the truth, and it works effectively in them, i.e., their lives are altered by it. They are made new creatures being born again (see 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:23). Those in hell despise the word of God and have not received a love of the truth that they might be saved (see 2 Thess. 2:10-12). The fires of hell won't make a man who now hates the word of God, love it just because he is tormented. He may cry out for relief and lament his condition but he will have no desire for obedience (see Lk. 16:23-31).

Believers possess an admiration for the Lord Jesus. He is precious in their sight (see 2 Thes. 1:10; 1 Pet. 2:7). Those who inhabit hell have no love for him, for they are forced to worship with his foot on their neck (see 1 Pet. 2:8; Mt. 21:42-44; Rev. 15:4).

Believers possess living water and shall not thirst (be without water). They dwell in the light and darkness cannot swallow them (see Jn. 7:38, 12:46). Those in hell are dying of thirst, hungry, and in perpetual darkness (see Lk. 16:24; Mt. 25:30).

In order for a man to believe the gospel he must be born again. John said that those who believe in Christ Jesus were born not of blood (i.e., natural birth or family ties), nor of the will of the flesh (i.e., ability of man to choose); nor of the will of man (i.e., man as a group could not devise the means); but of God. The greatest and most undeserved gift on earth is to be given the gift of faith, (i.e. grace) that we might believe. Are you a believer?

Pause, my soul, Adore & Wonder,
Ask, O why such love to me?
Grace has put me in the number
Of the Saviour's family.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Thanks, eternal thanks, to Thee.

Taken from Rippon's collection.
#19

Ecclesiastes—Cont. from page 4

in vows is the question of what controls the conscience. We usually think of the exhortation to fulfill a vow as an absolute. It does not matter what the vow was, who made it, who and what was involved, or the possible consequences. Many people believe and teach that any and every vow to God is sacred and binding and must be fulfilled, regardless of the cost or consequences. The story of Jephthah is a classic example of a good man whose conscience forced him to carry out a rash vow. It was a vow he should have never made nor fulfilled. Here is the story:

And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD'S, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands. He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon. When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break." "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry." "You may go," he said.

And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite custom that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite. (Judges 11:30-40, NIV)

Teachers and preachers often use this passage to show what a great and godly believer Jephthah was. In reality, he was basically a good man with bad theology. He was godly in the sense that he was zealous for Israel to possess all the land that God had given them, and in the sense that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and enabled him to have victory in battle much as it did upon Samson. However, Jephthah also collected a loyal band of "worthless fellows," so it would seem that he was not too choosy about the moral character of his companions. He was canny, shrewd, and politically ambitious, as his exchange with the elders of Gilead indicates. Nor did he have any qualms about killing his fellow Israelites. He was a man much like other men, with a mixed character, whom God used to make his name famous. Our concern is with his wrongly trained conscience. The Word of God did not control his conscience, or he could never have done what he did. His conscience forced him to disobey a clear commandment of God in order to carry out a rash and impetuous vow. In Hebrews 11:32, the writer of the letter includes Jephthah as a man of faith, despite what he did to his daughter.

Let us look at what happened. Israel had forsaken the true and living God and had turned to the false gods of the nations around them. God, in turn, had forsaken them and for eighteen years had given them over to their enemies: the Philistines and the

Ammonites. The Israelites confessed their sin and repented, and sought Jephthah as their military leader against the Ammonites. Jephthah made a vow: if God gave him victory over the Ammonites, he would offer (sacrifice as a burnt offering) the first thing that came out of his house to meet him upon his return.

Jephthah may have made the vow carelessly, without thinking of the possibilities, or he may have felt that the situation was serious enough to warrant a calculated risk of human sacrifice. The Mosaic law, under which Jephthah lived, allowed for burnt offerings as the fulfillment of a vow, but the sacrificial victim was to come from the livestock of the herd or the flock (Lev. 21:18-20). A priest had to be involved in the ritual (Lev. 1:5-9). Additionally, the law of Moses forbade human sacrifice (Lev. 18:21). It was one of the detestable practices of the Canaanites that the children of Israel were to eschew (Deut. 18:9-10). Jephthah had no right to make that kind of a vow, and having made it, he had no right to perform it. His action neither glorified nor pleased God.

Two issues are involved. First, there is the legitimacy of the vow. Is a vow, regardless of its nature or consequences, inherently sacred and therefore essential to be performed? The answer is no. Numbers, chapter 30 offers examples of when a vow is not binding. If a vow were inherently sacred, no circumstances would be mitigating. Second, when is a vow, made in sincerity before God, wrong and therefore not to be carried out? Among other criteria, any vow that forces an individual deliberately to disobey the revealed will of God is always wrong. The question in Jephthah's case is this: Does the duty to carry out a vow carry more weight than the duty to refrain from performing a human sacrifice? Jephthah had

HURRICANE KATRINA—SOME LESSONS

JOHN G. REISINGER

1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Luke 13:1-5 (NIV)

It is hard to imagine a more sacrilegious act than that committed by Pilate against the Galileans. Our Lord made it clear that we dare not assume that God inflicted the tragedy of death on those particular individuals because they were more wicked than other people. I think this text rules out any possibility of anyone assuming to speak for God and explain why Katrina happened. All who have a grasp of the sovereignty of God will acknowledge that God is the author of all things, including the destruction of New Orleans. However, I think it is wrong to pretend that we know the mind of God in his providential actions. God tells us that he sends the disasters, but he does not tell us why. At no time, in no way, and in no sense is God obligated to explain his actions to you or me or anyone else. All we can know positively is that Romans 11:36 encompass all events such as hurricane Katrina.

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (KJV)

It does not matter what happens; we

must see God's hand in it.

*Amos 3:6 When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, **has not the LORD caused it?***

The major difference between the prophecy of Amos and us today is in the next verse.

*7 Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing **without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.*** (NIV)

I am not a prophet – as some well-known television preachers claim to be – who has received an inspired interpretation from the Lord as to why he chose to send a devastating hurricane to New Orleans. Despite the claim of some, God does not speak by verbally-inspired prophets today, as he did under the Old Covenant. If ever there was a time for the church and her representatives to exercise humility and restraint in their pronouncements, it is now.

My friend, Mike McInnis, wrote an excellent article on Jeremiah 12:5: *"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"* (KJV) It would seem to me that anyone who confesses any kind of belief in God would look at Katrina and say, "I am not about to contend against the God of Katrina. I am going to seek his grace and mercy." If you think Katrina is difficult to handle, what would you think if God really decided to let loose his wrath? Katrina would be a mere firecracker in God's arsenal. Sadly to say, Katrina does not seem to have humbled anyone. We are

already seeing cartoonists mocking God. Recently, I saw a cartoon that showed a picture of the devastation in New Orleans with the caption "Is this what they mean by Intelligent Design?"

We reply without hesitation, "Yes, Katrina was the careful design of a sovereign God to do exactly what he did, just as the death of Christ on the cross was the carefully planned and executed act of God. I have no clue as to why the Gulf Coast endured what others escaped, but I know two things for sure. (1) God designed and brought it to pass, and (2) in no sense does it mean or prove that the Gulf Coast and the people who live there are more sinful than the people who live in Ohio or Vermont.

The Book of Habakkuk teaches that we cannot divorce national tragedies from God and his sovereign purposes. Events with domestic consequences that occur in other nations throughout the world ultimately must involve God's purposes for our nation as well as for his church. God not only allowed the worst of wickedness to manifest itself in Israel; he also strengthened the Chaldeans sufficiently to allow them to invade and conquer Israel. When the true prophets in Israel saw the nation growing weaker and her enemies becoming stronger, they saw the handwriting on the wall. They were headed for judgment. When disasters hit without warning, they pleaded with their nation to repent.

If we view New Orleans as an isolated cesspool of iniquity, judged for its sin, we have missed the point. The Gulf Coast is only a microcosm of our nation. It a vivid example of our na-

Ecclesiastes—Cont. from page 6

no right to murder his daughter as an act of obedient faith in order to fulfill his vow. It does not matter how sincere Jephthah was or how deeply he believed it was his duty.

It should be obvious that any vow that is contrary to God's Word cannot bind a right conscience. A vow cannot make that right which is morally wrong. What is contrary to the law can never be a legitimate engagement to the Lawgiver.²

Jephthah is a classic illustration from the Old Testament of a man who loved God, but followed a misguided conscience. The New Testament provides us with Saul of Tarsus, who vowed to God to destroy the fledgling church, but later refused to continue to carry out that vow. A contemporary example might include a man who stands at his murdered wife's grave and vows to God that he will not rest until he has put to death the man, along with his entire family, who was responsible for his wife's death. Is he obligated to God to carry out that vow? A literal interpretation of Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 would say not only "yes," but also that God would honor the man's obedience to his vow. We must recognize the difference between obeying the Word of God and sincerely following our conscience.

Look more closely at the New Testament illustration of this principle. In Acts 24:16, Paul stated that his goal in life was "to strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." In Acts 23:1, he testified that he had attained that goal, even as a Pharisee. "Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, 'My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.'" Saul of Tarsus, in good conscience, could severely persecute Christians. In fact, that is exactly what he did.

"I too was convinced that I

ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them." (Acts 26:9-11, NIV)

Saul, like Jephthah, honestly believed in his conscience that he was obeying GOD, when in reality he was openly disobeying God's revealed will! History is full of records of godly men and women, sincerely obeying consciences trained by a wrong theology, performing acts contrary to God's revealed will. Calvin engineered the death of Servetus, and John Cotton whipped and imprisoned Baptists and Quakers in New England: these are just two examples of godly men performing ungodly deeds out of sincere obedience to a theology of sacralism—a wrong view of church and state—that is incompatible with New Testament teaching.

The Christian community needs a good book on conscience, law, and Christian liberty. We must have a clear understanding of the difference between an *absolute*, which has no exceptions, not even one, and a *principle* that is almost always unchanging, but does have an occasional exception. Exceptions do not destroy a principle; they merely prove you are dealing with a principle and not an absolute. An exception to an absolute either destroys the absolute or proves it was not an absolute in the first place. The only thing that can determine an absolute from a principle is the clear Word

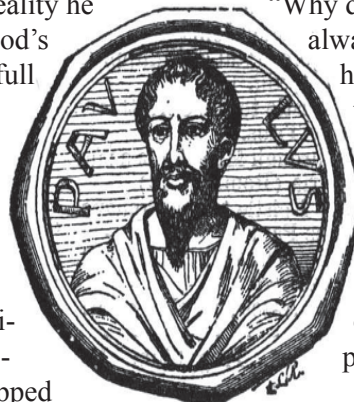
of God.

A sincere belief in the rightness of an action does not guarantee that the action is right in the eyes of God. Sincere men and women who made vows to their God have committed many of the world's greatest atrocities. The radical Muslim terrorists of our generation are a classic example. They are dedicated to what they believe is right, with a passion that knows no boundaries. Yet their course of action is controlled by a religion of hate. They can, and do, commit the worst of crimes and think they are doing what pleases God. Someone has rightly asked,

"Why does the God of terrorists always tell his devotees to hate and kill, and never to love and forgive?" As long as men and women continue to take vows before God to destroy all who disagree with them, our world will know no peace or security.

Although there are many dangers that accompany vows, a vow is not inherently negative. We must consider the teacher's exhortation in its context. We should not be careless with any of the words we direct to God, and that includes vows. A carefully considered vow can be positive and helpful, depending on its nature and purpose. I remember hearing A.W. Tozer preach a sermon entitled "Five vows every Christian should take and keep." The one that impressed me the most was this; "I vow to never again call anything 'mine,' but to view everything as having been loaned to me by God and for which I am eternally responsible."

In our next article, the Seeker moves from the vanity of careless words to the vanity of wealth.



Katrinás—Cont. from page 7

tion as a whole. Our Lord's question is still the same, "Do you think those people in New Orleans were more wicked than others? If you do, you have a telephone pole stuck in your eye." Whatever God's purpose was in Katrina, he did not direct it alone at the Gulf Coast. Katrina's effects go far beyond the Gulf Coast.

I am convinced that God judges sin, in the sense of judicial punishment, only in hell or on the cross. God's judgment against sin, in a penal sense, is not meted out every day according to a carefully kept scorecard. It is an observable fact that the ungodly often prosper during their entire lifetime, and the godly sometimes endure hardships. Someone noted that Katrina struck two days before a yearly parade by a homosexual crowd was to take place. This, in the mind of that someone, was the reason for the disaster. Someone else observed that the French Quarter, the center for homosexual activity, escaped the flood with very little damage. It all depends on how you keep score. Scripture clearly attests that the wicked are not necessarily punished in this lifetime. You need only read Psalm 73 and see that Asaph wrestled with this issue.

I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. I claim no inspired interpretation as to the why and wherefore of Katrina and the devastation she caused. However, I do claim that the Bible gives us some clear principles to help us understand how to think and act in times like this. Let me lay out a few things of which I am sure.

A sovereign God ultimately judges national behavior as well as personal behavior. The question is, "How does he do it?" Once, he sent a universal flood, but he has promised not to repeat that form of judgment. Destroying a city with a flood and destroying nearly all of humankind in a forty-day flood are not equivalent acts.

Likewise, God sent some amazing plagues on Egypt for the express purpose of showing his wrath and his power. Romans 9 is very explicit not only that God was indeed the author of those disasters experienced by the Egyptians, but part of the reason was to manifest his power to *both* the Egyptians and the Israelites. Regardless of how we spin it, God was speaking and working in the Gulf Coast last week. It does not appear that very many people were listening. Nobody seems to have received the latter part of Christ's message – "Do not judge those people; you repent of your own sin."

If you were God and you decided to judge America for her sin, exactly what would you do? In other words, how does God punish nations? Can we learn anything from the scriptural record of God's dealing with Israel and his dealings with different nations throughout history? I think we can.

One of the first evidences of God's judgment on a nation is a withdrawing of the preaching of the truth. Amos 8:11-12 is an amazing prophecy. It describes our national situation today in living color. God has allowed, more and more, the silencing of voices that proclaim his truth and has allowed a false and God-dishonoring form of the gospel to sweep the land. We live in days similar to those described by the prophet Amos.

11 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land - not a famine of food or a thirst for water; but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. 12 Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching

for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. (NIV)

We live in a time of almost total spiritual famine. Leaders, both religious and secular, laud our age as having the courage to throw off all vestiges of our Christian heritage, embrace secularism, and become politically correct. Here and now is all there is, so *go for it with a gusto*. We are a spiritually-starved society with plenty to live on physically, but nothing to live for spiritually. For a few days the Gulf Coast experienced a physical famine. Its effects were terrible and gut wrenching to behold. The week before that, however, there was evidence up and down Bourbon Street of another kind of famine. Spiritually dead men and women were mocking the Bread and Water of life. They kept



eating and drinking the world's garbage, even as their spiritual mouths became dryer and dryer, and their stomachs vainly tried to digest food that does not satisfy. The pictures of men and women, standing in toxic water that could kill them if they drank it, illustrate the position of men and women in

the midst of sinful and shameful behavior that only will destroy their soul. The situation there was no different from what takes place in nearly every city and hamlet in America: a liberated society, reveling in its freedom from the restraints of God and religion.

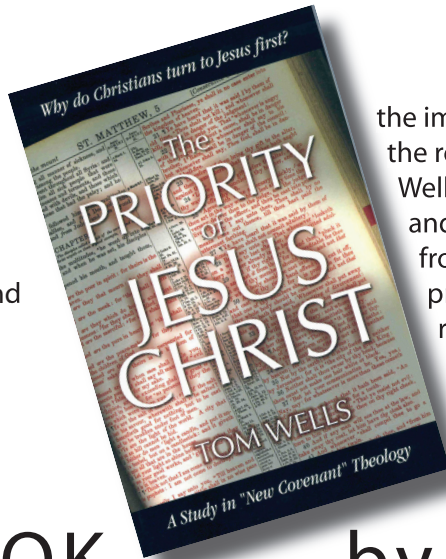
Life has lost all meaning and purpose because we have lost God as Creator. As Hosea noted, the cream of our young women and young men are asking, "What is truth? Where do I find reality?" Our universities, instead of being the source of truth, are instead hotbeds of outspoken rebellion

Katrina—Cont. on page 13

The Priority of Jesus Christ

A Study in "New Covenant" Theology

The Priority of Jesus Christ presents a program in this, the messianic age, that belongs to God as Father, Son, and approach to theology and life. Drawing on the author demonstrates the theological and of Jesus Christ as God's final and fullest



the importance and implications of recognizing the revelation of God and his redemptive work. Wells addresses concerns about the honor and Holy Spirit in light of a christocentric from both the Old and New Testaments, the practical necessity of living life in the light revelation of himself.

A NEW BOOK by TOM WELLS

Ordering information is on page 11

SUBSCRIBE TO SOUND OF GRACE—\$10.00 FOR TEN ISSUES

My check (payable to Sound of Grace) is enclosed.

Charge to my: VISA MasterCard Expires ____/____

Account Number: ____/____/____/____

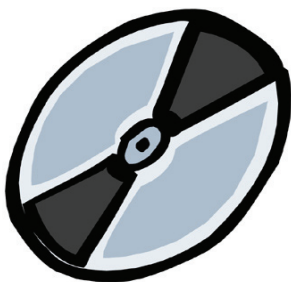
Signature: _____

Name: _____

Street address: _____

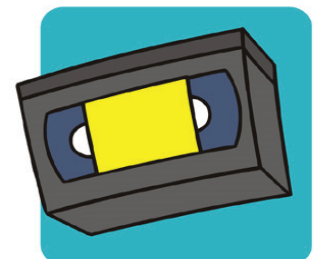
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Subscription Form



All of the Sound of Grace audio and video is now available on CDs and DVDs in addition to the cassette and VHS tapes. If you would like a **free** catalog of all the available materials, please call or write.

DVDs and CDs



Resources from New Covenant Media

TITLE	LIST	SALE	QUANTITY	COST
<i>Abraham's Four Seeds</i> —Reisinger	\$10.95	\$8.75	_____	_____
<i>The Believer's Sabbath</i> —Reisinger	\$3.75	\$3.00	_____	_____
<i>Chosen in Eternity</i> —Reisinger	\$5.50	\$4.50	_____	_____
<i>Christ, Lord and Lawgiver Over the Church</i> —Reisinger	\$2.50	\$2.00	_____	_____
<i>The Doctrine of Baptism</i> —Sasser	\$3.50	\$2.80	_____	_____
<i>Full Bellies and Empty Hearts</i> —Autio	\$14.99	\$12.00	_____	_____
<i>Grace</i> —Reisinger	\$4.75	\$3.80	_____	_____
<i>Is John G. Reisinger an Antinomian?</i> —Wells	\$4.25	\$3.40	_____	_____
<i>Jonathan Edwards on Biblical Hermeneutics and the "Covenant of Grace"</i> —Gilliland	\$3.95	\$3.15	_____	_____
<i>Limited Atonement</i> —Reisinger	\$7.00	\$5.60	_____	_____
<i>The New Birth</i> — Reisinger	\$5.50	\$4.50	_____	_____
<i>New Covenant Theology</i> —Wells & Zaspel	\$19.95	\$15.95	_____	_____
<i>The Obedience of Christ</i> —Van Court	\$2.50	\$2.00	_____	_____
<i>Our Sovereign God</i> — Reisinger	\$4.45	\$3.55	_____	_____
<i>Perseverance of the Saints</i> — Reisinger	\$6.00	\$4.80	_____	_____
<i>The Priority of Jesus Christ</i>—Wells *NEW*	\$11.95	\$9.55	_____	_____
<i>A Prisoner's Christianity</i> —Woodrow	\$9.50	\$7.60	_____	_____
<i>Tablets of Stone</i> — Reisinger	\$10.95	\$8.75	_____	_____
<i>The Sovereignty of God and Prayer</i> —Reisinger	\$5.75	\$4.60	_____	_____
<i>The Sovereignty of God in Providence</i> — Reisinger	\$4.45	\$3.55	_____	_____
<i>Total Depravity</i> — Reisinger	\$5.00	\$4.00	_____	_____
<i>What is the Christian Faith?</i> — Reisinger	\$2.50	\$2.00	_____	_____

			Total Price	
See Rate Chart below			Shipping	
Postage & Handling Rates United States		Canadian orders—Visa or MasterCard only—please.	Total Order	

Up to \$20.00	\$3.50
\$20.01—\$50.00	\$5.00
\$50.01 and Up	10%
Postage & Handling Rates Canada—VISA or MasterCard	
Up to \$35.00	\$5.00
\$35.01 and UP	15%
Postage & Handling Rates Overseas—VISA or MasterCard	
Please Call or Email for rates	

Ship to: _____
 Street address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Country: _____

My check (payable to New Covenant Media) is enclosed
 Charge to my: VISA MasterCard

Expires _____/_____/_____
 Account Number: _____/_____/_____/_____
 Signature: _____

McLellan—Cont. from page 3

of his great love with which he loved us. Even when we were dead in trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved!

God is not to be trifled with. *“They always go astray in their heart.”* God does not see as man sees; man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. God is angry with pretenders, who honor him with their mouths when their hearts are far from him. The unbelieving Israelites never entered into God’s rest. They never experienced the joy of knowing and trusting him. Their only expectation is fiery judgment – God’s wrath.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. (Rom. 1:18)

The rest for these Israelites was Canaan. It was there where the toil of slavery and wandering would end. This is a picture of the greater salvation rest the believer now finds in Jesus Christ.

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. (Heb. 3:12)

Let the illustration of Israel’s unbelief in the wilderness be your warning. God has not changed. This warning call could sound in any assembled group of professing believers. Perhaps someone has an evil heart of unbelief. Jesus continually warned his disciples – Judas being one of the twelve. The writer of Hebrews faithfully proclaims a warning against unbelief and sin. This watchman faithfully blows the trumpet and warns the people.

[T]hen whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. (Ezek. 33:4)

Those who have had greater opportunity and greater exposure to the truth bear greater accountability (Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 12:46-48). This one’s punishment will be more severe. The root of all sin is unbelief. That is why

we who are the called must fight the fight of faith. We battle against unbelief every time we are tempted to sin. Let us not play around with sin. Let us believe what God says about it. Let us look to the reward of faithful obedience, which is far better. God is faithful. His Word is true. Believe him.

To depart from the living God is to depart from life. He is the source and sustainer of life. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights”* (James 1:17). Will you forsake the fountain of living waters to drink from broken and rusted cisterns (Jer. 2:13)? Any efforts of our own, any works we claim as worthy of reward, are cisterns we have hewn for ourselves, and are an insult to Jesus Christ, who is God’s provision for our need. We must cease from our own works as the means by which we please God, whether we are working for forgiveness of sin or working to earn favor with God. Christ is the only means by which we please God, and we must rest in his finished work.

“As for God, His way is perfect.”

God’s wisdom cannot err.

God’s holiness cannot sin.

God’s love cannot be cruel.

God’s immutability cannot change.

God’s eternity cannot end.

The perfection of God is a source of sweetest consolation to us, in our feebleness and foolishness.

If He were not Omniscient, we might suffer and He not know.

If He were not Omnipresent,

we might cry and He not hear.

If He were not Omnipotent, we might perish and He be unable to help.

If He were not good, He would not care for us, or might crush us.

**“He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just.”
Deut. 32:4**

Though the Lord is exalted, yet He has regard unto the humble. He has not de-

spised the affliction of His afflicted children, nor hid His face from them.

I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me. Put my tears into Your bottle.

(Newman Hall, “Leaves of Healing from the Garden of Grief” 1891)

Grace Gems!

A treasury of experimental Christianity

Katrinás—Cont. from page 9

to truth. When the prophet says, “Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD,” he meant that a time would come when Israel would have no prophets to bring a word from God. We who live in America experience a strikingly similar environment: some of us may have to drive fifty or one-hundred miles to find a warm-hearted, gospel-preaching church. On the way, we may pass hundreds of “places of worship” that have enthroned every size, shape, and color of false god and self-exalting worship. Can we legitimately level the prophetic warning of Jeremiah 6:11-16 against most, if not all, of them? How many God-honoring churches do you have in your town? Are not the youth on Spring Break sprees and stoned-out parties who ask “Who am I” and “Where is it really at” evidence of the judgment of God on a nation that has jettisoned him and his truth?

11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days. 12 And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD. 13 For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. 14 They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. 15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at

the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. 16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Jeremiah 6:11-16. (KJV)

The message of false religion does not heal the true hurt of people. We can, and it appears we will, repair the major problems created by Katrina. We can get food, water and clothing to those with nothing. We can build houses and supply other necessities. Given enough time and sufficient funds, we can bring a good deal of healing to the Gulf Coast. However, if we do not see and acknowledge the hand of God, then physical healing, as good and essential as it is, will be only superficial. To heal the situation physically, without learning anything spiritually, will harden our nation further in its rebellion. The false prophet and his message of “peace, peace” when there really is no peace, aggravates the problem. When God allows the false prophets to preach, and does not give their hearers discernment to see through their lies, God is judicially blinding those people and preparing them for judgment.

A deliberate blindness to reality was certainly one of the problems in the Gulf Coast. For years, meteorologists and weathermen have repeatedly warned that New Orleans is in the path of sure disaster. The warnings went unheeded. There were several days of clear and urgent warnings just prior to the hurricane; many of these went unheeded. The people who said “peace, peace” were in reality the worst of enemies. Is this not the same with the final judgment of God? God can, and will, judge all men and all nations. You can laugh at me, mock me, ridicule and caricature me, but it is still “appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment” (Heb.

9:27). No one in the Gulf Coast can say, “I was not warned,” nor will anyone be able to say on judgment day, “I was not warned.” Some of the most frightening and sobering words in Scripture are “God gave them up” in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28 and “so they are without excuse” in Romans 1:20. When God gives an individual or a nation over to be controlled by nothing but their own heart, that person, or nation, is reprobate and beyond hope.

This truth is not merely an “Old Testament” doctrine. Hear the great Apostle speak in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (KJV)

Do we really believe that? Does God judicially blind a sin-loving society to the place it will consciously sell the truth in order to believe and live a lie? Read Romans chapter one! Does God send strong delusions and cause men to follow corrupt leaders? Look at the text. If you will not believe God’s truth, then he will fix it so you believe myths and lies. This is awesome, but true.

God does not restrict the deceivers of a wicked society to ungodly university professors who corrupt the minds of our youth or to unbelieving preachers with their false gospel. He also allows corrupt political leaders to become powerful exponents of godlessness. The attitude of people and their leaders toward the authority of God and his Word is one of the greatest barometers of a society’s, and an individual’s, true state before God.

Katrina—Cont. on page 18

Autio—Cont. from page 1

even agree on approaches for seeking acceptable responses. Much of the basis for the problems lies in our own willful departure from life's faith and practice, as prescribed by both the Bible and America's founding fathers. While there is no question that the Bible holds supremacy over our lives, we have been blessed and have prospered for most of our history as a nation because we have followed a code of conduct and practice that men who revered God and his written Word set forth during our formative years. For the early years of our nation, the pulpits were alive with the proclamation of God's truth and admonitions about godly conduct. The majority of the population believed that it was necessary to protect one's integrity and reputation and to promote honesty in business and statesmanship in politics. Those days have disappeared and today we face a post-Christian period that largely denies those honored traits that served us so well. As the nation turns away from godly character and God's prescription for life, the proliferation of boundless problems and clueless responses becomes the norm.

Today's 'world-class' problems include the destruction of marriage and family through the rise of homosexual demands and rights, the loss of national identity and common language through massive illegal immigration, and the menace of economic chaos from illegal business practices. We face the danger of infectious viruses of pandemic proportions, the proliferation of judicial tyranny, and finally, but not the last nor the least, the threat from Muslim terrorists. The roots of many of these problems lie within our own cul-

ture and its lack of biblically derived moral and ethical conduct.

The absence of Christian virtues in our national conduct has brought about a proliferation of immoral lifestyle practices that have led to political support for homosexual rights, illegitimate births, and uncontrolled abortions. This absence results in dangerously high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, some, such as HIV, with very dire consequences. These issues present massive social and cultural problems with significant financial and personal tragedy costs. The same loss of Christian virtues has led to a super-abundance of greed and disrespect for the laws regarding immigration and honorable business practices. Corrupt hiring practices by businesses more concerned about money than principled conduct sustain illegal immigration. The same unprincipled conduct forms the core of the personal greed evident in many of the nation's corporate leaders.

Widespread disregard for the nation's immigration laws elevates the threat of highly contagious diseases entering the country. Loss of statesmanship allows for a coalition between those in the legislative branch of our government and their

judicial partners to effect ungodly and unhealthy social changes through unconstitutional fiats when they cannot achieve their desired changes through constitutional methods.

We can make the case for loss of Christian virtue as the nucleus of many of our problems. The same case is more difficult to make for the cause of the most serious threat to our nation, culture, religion and families. The Muslim-led program of terrorism poses the greatest potential threat this nation has ever faced. Some would say that our ostentatious and promiscuous life style generates the enmity that drives the Muslim terrorists. Certainly, that argument carries some merit and were those factors less strongly communicated in both our domestic and exported media and lives, we would have a stronger argument for refuting it. In addition, the gross misconduct of a small percentage of individuals who lost a sense of civility and of shame caused the bad reputation given to United States personnel for their personal conduct and prisoner treatment. Nevertheless, the history of Islam, Muslim terrorism, and Christian response needs to be aired and discussed.

Our Christian response must be-



gin with acknowledging that God is still on his throne. Many discussions, directed both toward Christians and within Christian circles, ignore the fact that through all of this turmoil God retains his supreme sovereignty and absolute control of his providential conduct. We have to frame all of this with the same model that we use to discuss 'all things' that have, are, and will come about as God methodically restores his creation through the redemptive blessings of his Son. We must be prepared to challenge those who declare that if God is who he says he is, and is a God of love, then terrible things like 9/11 would not have happened. We need to declare to those scoffers that the evil we witness is the result of the very thing we cherish the most, our own free will, and not a lack of God's supremacy.

There is a divine reason behind God's premise and promise that we should not fear. He is on the throne and will permit, or not permit, any and 'all things' that affect our lives. Our security has never been greater: regardless of tomorrow's events, nothing can tamper with that security. We must remember that we achieve our security, not through our faith or our actions, but through the One in whom we place our faith.

We freely talk about loving our enemies when they are at arm's length and do not pose any great danger to our immediate family or circumstances; we must also reveal our confidence in the sovereignty of God by being able to love the enemy that is close and deadly. After all, is it not God's responsibility to determine how close and deadly our enemies will be? We must respond with godly love and compassion toward all sinners, including individual Muslims, and allow God to determine the impact of our response upon the soul of those individuals.

Having said that, it is still important that we intelligently consider

the character of the threat, as Christ reminded us in Luke 14:31 (KJV), *Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?* While there is no direct reference in the Bible about our need to know our enemy, God repeatedly reminds us about the wiles of the devil, the consequences of sin, how to relate to the world, that we should defeat sin by living righteously, and not to be unequally yoked with the unrighteous. Both the Old and New Testaments contain admonitions to fulfill our God-given responsibility to defend our families, homes, communities, nation, and the faith that undergirds our very beings.

In a paper of this length, it is impossible to cover adequately the entire history of the Muslim religion, along with the tenets of its beliefs and its record of warfare. My goal is to provide a framework and enough information to encourage readers to pursue the subject more deeply on their own. The subject is not only complex; it is controversial and protected by the notion of political correctness. Within the past several years, there has been a large proliferation of books, on both sides of the issues, trying to reveal various truths about the religion. I will cite some of those books and I urge each reader to use other resources, such as encyclopedias, the internet, and libraries to acquire sufficient knowledge about this movement to respond intelligently to the questions it raises. What political issues should Christians support? Should a Christian be an encourager to our military personnel? How should Christians vote for various candidates and respond to community initiatives in support of the many military or aid programs? The information that is most important is that which has a direct bearing on our understanding of the threat and what the possible threat projections

might be.

Of greatest importance is the need for national unity in this fight. Currently, political and ideological lines divide the country, enhancing or advancing the agendas of those who put their aspirations and goals ahead of the nation's well-being. Sufficient understanding of the threat reveals that we are all in the same boat and the boat is taking on water. Refusing to bail the water on your end will not keep that end afloat. The entire boat—with everyone aboard—will either float or sink. There is sufficient evidence regarding the Muslim terrorist movement to understand that it is as insidious, virulent, and infectious as any disease known to man. It is the citizens' responsibility to demand that their leaders stop the grandstanding and political correctness that has captivated most of the media and has generated a feeling that stopping the terrorist movement is optional.

The focus of the radical Muslim movement is not the United States, but the world. It is impossible to identify four ongoing-armed clashes in the world that do not involve Muslims. In this century alone, they have attacked Christians and moderate Muslims alike on every continent except Antarctica. Those who have written the most on this subject find it difficult to find a demarcation between the moderate, peaceful Muslim and the radical, terror-bent Muslim. Both peaceful and terrorist Muslims come from all economic strata, may be married or single, may be citizens or immigrants, and may have the same country of origin. The visibility of radical Muslim activity and overt expressions of domination vary with the percentage of Muslims in the general population.

The Beginnings of Islam

The Muslim religion, or Islam, had its formal beginnings in the seventh century. In A.D. 610, a forty-year-old

Autio—Cont. from page 15

trader named Muhammad emerged from a six-month period of meditating in a cave on Mount Hira, three miles north of Mecca, in the Hejaz region of today's Saudi Arabia. At that time, his people worshipped shrines and idols, professing the belief that some of their idols dated back to Adam and Eve. Other objects of worship were believed to stem from Abraham. Exposure to Jewish monotheism caused Muhammad to view his people's religion as inferior, as they worshipped both male and female idols and a different idol for each day of the year.

Records indicate that Muhammad's professed belief in one god was in response to his appreciation for the authenticity of the religious practices of the Jews and the Christians. Many of his foundational beliefs mirrored those religions, but fell short of the complete truth found in their respective religious writings. Muhammad foresaw the need to have all of the same trimmings: prayer books, prophets, and spiritual beings. Because of the disparity at that time of the Jewish and the Christian religious writings, the first Islamic documents contained many misinterpretations and lacked the continuity and consistency of content that would have led to a deeper and more productive worship experience. The majority of later writings reflected the thoughts and beliefs of other prophets and followers, and contributed to the lack of continuity and consistency. His movement started slowly, and met with the enmity of those he condemned for their idol worship.

Early on, the movement used caravan raiding and warfare to further their goals. By the time of his death at age 60, around A.D. 632, most of Arabia practiced the religion of Islam. Muhammad's followers invaded Jerusalem in 634, and by 641, Islam dominated Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. In the next one hundred years, Islam spread into Spain and to the East into India. By

this time, it embraced more territory than did the Roman Empire. In 732, at the Battle of Tours in France, Charles Martel halted the Muslim encroachment into Europe.

Historical documentation of Islam's method of growth and success dispels the current notion that Islam and Christianity have much in common. In fact, just the opposite is true. Islam progressed rapidly through the persecution, torture, and death of its opponents. Christianity grew and prospered through the persecution, torture, and death of its martyred adherents. Furthermore, the writings of Islam reveal a different view of God from that in the Holy Scriptures. In the Bible, we find a God who sent his Son to die for the sins of his people and to establish a loving relationship through a redemption made possible only by the propitiation of his Son. Christianity rests upon a peace that transcends this world and is the goal of its practitioners. All of these concepts are absent from Islam. Nor does the Islam religion subscribe to a triune God. Those who make comparisons of similarity do so either out of ignorance or fear of generating hostile feelings through suggested bigotry, or just do not care about distinctions and prefer the politically correct path.

During the first two centuries of its existence, the Muslim religion grew at the fastest rate of any religion in history. Regional conditions during the seventh century account for much of its rapid growth. At that time, the Roman Empire was collapsing and the Constantinople Empire was trying to retain its influence in the East. The average person was suffering under the burden of oppressive taxes. Islam approached these people with promises that conversion would remove their taxes and with threats that failure to convert would result in immediate torture and death. That is not a very difficult choice—given such a choice, many today would quickly change po-

litical parties.

During this period, Europe launched numerous Crusades against the Muslims because of their evil treatment of people and their destruction throughout the Byzantine region and Christian North Africa. The first Crusade occurred during the last years of the eleventh century. The second took place about fifty years later, during the middle of the twelfth century. This was followed by the third Crusade about forty years later, and a fourth about ten years later, around 1201. The fifth Crusade began in 1218, followed by a number of lesser or more regional, crusades. All of these were the response of the European Christian crusader states to the encroachment and militancy of Islam. Not until the end of the fifteenth century, at the 1492 battle of Granada, did Spain manage to expel Islam. Thomas F. Madden's excellent book, *A Concise History of the Crusades* provides a detailed history of the Crusades. The Spanish expulsion of Islam, known by the Muslims as the First Great Jihad, concluded the early growth period of Islam.

Muslim advancement continued throughout the region surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. The Ottoman Empire emerged as one of the major triumphs of Muslim expansion in that area. This Muslim movement started in the region of Anatolia during the fourteenth century, following the breakdown of the empire of the Seljuk Turks. Through the success of numerous leaders, and at the expense of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Turks took control of other Turkish states and expanded their empire. Following the capture of Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire became the greatest surviving empire in Europe. The Ottoman Empire lasted from the early sixteenth century until the early twentieth century.

A biblically informed Christian response to this history suggests that

God's sovereign providence over the events of the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries created the circumstances that led to the 'discovery' of the New World. Prior to that time, cities such as Venice and Genoa served as the western end of the trade route to the Orient. That route went east from those locales, either overland through Asia Minor or by water through the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. The three-hundred year Muslim expansion north from Africa eventually denied the Europeans use of the established Oriental trade routes. Economic loss from the cessation of Oriental commerce played a major role in the institution of the aforementioned Crusades. One might wonder if the timing of the Crusades had more to do with economic factors than with rescuing terrorized people and liberating the historic religious icons of Europe's professed Christianity.

Initially, Europeans viewed the conquest of the Muslims as the means to reconnect and secure the traditional routes for trade to the Orient. Eventually, these efforts failed. The disruption of distribution routes for the oriental trade through Europe also had a considerable impact on entire cultures. Many of the goods traveled along rivers, bordered by communities and fortress castles for protecting the routes. Today, one may cruise the Rhine River for an excellent view of numerous castles and learn about the castles and the robber barons. The absence of the Oriental trade challenged all of these social constructs. Not only did the trade barrier stop importation of treasured Oriental goods; it restricted income from the Oriental market for

Europe's trade goods.

European merchants sought alternative routes by going overland through Russia and China or by sailing south along the coast of the African continent and around to the shores of India. These merchants, who controlled the economy, were from the ruling class or had a tight control on those who tried to rule. Merchants had helped finance the Crusades; now they were financing the exploration of alternative trade routes. While the northern Europeans searched for routes through Russia or around Africa, growing sentiment among the southern Europeans led them to sail west looking for routes.

In 1451, Christopher Columbus arrived in Genoa. After a 1476 naval battle destroyed his ship, he swam to Portugal and joined his brother, Bartholomew, in Lisbon. Columbus's memoirs reveal that he had great trust in the Bible and regularly sought God's wisdom. During this time, he studied several biblical references, the most significant being Proverbs 8:27; *When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:* (KJV), that convinced him the world was round. He believed that God explained to him that only if the earth was round could a compass be set upon the face of the depth. He also believed that God had called him to a mission that required him to leave his occupation as a cartographer with his brother and seek a route to India. For this, he became an object of scorn from those who already had laughed at him for believing that the world was round. During this time, Columbus produced writings

that included a book of prophecies and plans for a sailing venture to the west.

Columbus approached King John II of Portugal for a sailing vessel. The king's advisors rejected his proposal as being absurd. Columbus then sent his brother to King Henry VII of England. Henry's advisors rejected the proposal as outrageous. Finally, Columbus approached King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. Their court advisors were more lenient than Portugal's or England's were, but they still judged the plan questionable. After several years of despair, Columbus obtained funding enough to scrape together crews for his ships. Christopher Columbus sailed from Palos Spain on 3 August 1492; his crew sighted New World land on 12 October 1492.

Even in the Dark Ages, God had a plan for the United States. He allowed the Muslims to disrupt the economic prosperity of Europe, which prompted the Europeans to seek new trade routes and territories. He also gave a man who believed the Scriptures the confidence to trust his Word and to venture into the unknown. That unknown became the opening of the settlement of the New World by Christians who were instrumental in establishing a new nation with new ideas that rested upon God's truth. What a marvelous display of God's providence and sovereignty in the role of nations. Today, the same sovereign God is permitting Muslims to terrorize that new nation. Ω

An article on hurricane Katrina by Clyde F. Autio is available on the Sound of Grace website:
<http://www.soundofgrace.com/v12/121/katrina121ca.swf>

"[W]hen the good and the wicked suffer alike, the identity of their sufferings does not mean that there is no difference between them. ... The fire which makes gold shine makes chaff smoke; the same flail breaks up the straw, and clears the grain; and oil is not mistaken for lees because both are forced out by the same press. ... what matters is the nature of the sufferer, not the nature of the sufferings. Stir a cesspit, and a foul stench arises; stir a perfume, and a delightful fragrance ascends. But the movement is identical."

Aurelius Augustin, The City of God, Book 1, Chapter 8.

Katrinās—Cont. from page 13

It is tragic when religious leaders teach lies instead of truth. It is wicked when our court system protects sin instead of condemning it. It is hopeless when sin is not punished but instead is encouraged and rewarded. It is a total rejection of God and his truth when the perverse becomes the normal and the normal becomes the perverse. In such a society, the godly become the perverted bigots and the devotees of bizarre sexual practices become the sincere “open-minded” adult and normal people. This situation is described in Romans one. However, the final step is the conscious and deliberate exchanging of the truth for a lie in order to live in open rebellion with a pacified conscience. Isaiah could have written headlines for the American philosophy of life. When the words of Isaiah 5:20-23 describe a society, and they certainly describe ours, that society is ripe for God’s judgment.

20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. 22 Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, 23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. (NIV)

Trading of good for evil is a conscious choice of deliberate rebellion. This is not a situation where someone was hoodwinked. This is willful rejection of God and his truth.

Regardless of whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, I think most honest people believe that under Bill Clinton’s leadership, the morality of sex took on a new and different public meaning. However, I must add in the same breath that I deliberately used the word *public*. Bill Clinton did not change America’s attitude toward

morality, he merely brought to the surface what our society believed, accepted, and in many cases practiced. The great tragedy is not what President Clinton did personally, but that most Americans said, “So what? Who cares? That is his business.” This was not only the failure of a man, but the failure of a nation.

Hurricane Katrina is only one small link in a long chain. She provides one more piece in a picture that seems to get clearer every year. She is another chapter of an unfolding story that does not have a happy ending for our nation.

If I were asked to list what I believe are the most significant events in the last fifty years, I would put two things on the list. One would be the Roe v. Wade abortion decision. It would go on the list, not because I am so opposed to abortion, which I am, but because of the grounds upon which that decision was made. The Supreme Court ruled that the ethics and morality of Judeo/Christian standards had no more authority and carried no more weight in our pluralistic society than a witch doctor in the middle of Africa. With one single decision, they consciously and deliberately rejected both the authority of Scripture and our history. They decreed that secular humanism was the official religion of the United States, and openly rejected God and his Word. They enthroned man to be his own god.

The second event I would list as having great significance was the turning upside down of the so-called “separation of Church and state.” Freedom of religion has been turned into freedom *from* religion. There is a conscious and vehement attempt to remove God from all public recognition. Romans, chapter one describes the downhill slide of an individual or a nation who exchanges the truth of God for lie. Romans 1:28 is the last stop on the way to total reprobation

— a situation from which there is no return.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; (KJV)

When Paul says, “... they did not like to retain God in their knowledge...,” he means they wanted any concept of God out of their *system* of knowledge as well as out of their minds. Not only did they want not to acknowledge God, they also wanted to ignore him completely. They did not even want to think about God, let alone worship him. Our nation has made “no God for us” the official position of the government and the court system. A nation expresses in its government-controlled school curriculum what it believes is vital and important for a child to know and believe in order to be a good and useful citizen. Our government, by law and by the decisions of the Supreme Court, has decreed that they can teach a child everything he or she needs to know to be the kind of person they want their citizens to be without a single reference to God! Our government and the Supreme Court have officially adopted the godless philosophy of Romans 1:28. They have openly stated they will not allow God into our public system of education.

This action seems ironically hypocritical when we look at any piece of American money, whether it is a coin or a paper bill, and discover that the phrase “In God we trust” is printed or engraved on every one of them. Fundamentalist Christians did not put that phrase on our money; our government printed and minted that money with that phrase on each piece. Our government wanted to make a public statement concerning America’s belief in God. *They wanted the citizens to know that money was not as important as faith in God.* Now here is the awful irony. Our government has changed its

mind. It no longer wants its citizens to believe in God. Our government and the Supreme Court want to take God out of our system of knowledge. The hypocrisy becomes blatant when our government and the Supreme Court try to tell us that their present position is really what our founding fathers intended.

Here is the dilemma. "In God we trust" is stamped and printed on our official government money. However, if a teacher in any public school displays a piece of government money and says, "Today we will study what that phrase means and why our government choose to put it on every piece of our money," that teacher risks dismissal! That is the kind of spiritually schizophrenic society our young people are growing up in. It is no wonder why they ask, "What is truth? What is real and what is fantasy?"

It is amazing, as well as amusing, to realize that the only people who are taking Katrina seriously as "An act of God" are the insurance companies. If you look at most insurance policies, you will see a list of "acts of God" that are not covered in the policy. I never realized how religious insurance companies were until I first read that. Since then, I have come to the conclusion that insurance companies are probably among the most God-fearing companies in the world. They are even Calvinistic in their belief in the sovereignty of God. I wonder how long it will be before the ACLU, or someone else, will challenge in court the "religious convictions" of the insurance companies' belief in a God who sovereignly acts in destroying property. Is it not amazing that the only time we allow God in the courtroom is when an insurance company blames him for some tragedy! Isn't it ironic that only insurance companies are so ready to invoke the idea that God was responsible for Katrina.

My purpose in this article has been to show several things. First, Jesus

will not allow us to consider this a judgment of God on the Gulf Coast because they were especially sinful. *We all deserve judgment.*

Second, Katrina was one more example how of spiritually bankrupt we are as a nation. One of the things that struck me was the media saying, "And this is happening in America." Is there some reason that America should be exempt from God's judgment? I certainly do not know what it would be. Are there many reasons that America should be judged? Someone has said, "If God does not soon judge America, he will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorra."

What frightens me as I look at the horrible devastation on the Gulf Coast is the realization of how easy it is for God to reduce humanity's vain hope in itself to utter despair. When I look at our position and influence around the world, I am frightened. When I see ungodly nations gaining strength even as ours is losing strength, I am frightened. Israel could cry out to God to fulfill his promises.

When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. Deut 20:1 (KJV)

Unhappily, we cannot say that today, since God is not our god. In fact, if one of our Army generals would say, or pray, those words in public, officials would likely reprimand or possibly relieve him of his duties. We cannot evoke the God of our forefathers who delivered and kept us through those first early years in the New



World. We have publicly repudiated that God, and rewritten history to eliminate any remembrance of him and his acts of mercy towards us.

The prophets of Israel had a basis for calling a nation to hope and faith. They were covenantally committed to God as their God. We today have no valid hope or basis for faith except in our military

strength. We trust in chariots and horses: we call them smart bombs and undetectable aircraft. We export the slickest equipment to make war and the hottest jazz to dull the senses, but we will not and legally dare not, either trust in the name of Lord or export his message of hope and peace through faith and repentance.

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. Psalm 20:7 (KJV)

Our society does not call upon us to remember the name of the Lord; they force us to deny publicly that God ever existed in the first place.

In the light of our world today, Hurricane Katrina causes me to have great concern for the future of our nation. In no way does that mean that America is "God's special country and therefore under his protection." God's sovereign purposes may well include the swift destruction of America. We long ago ceased to be a country committed to the true and living God. God does not, in any sense, need America in order to fulfill his purposes.

“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows”.
Luke 12:4-7 ESV

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 45
FREDERICK, MD 21701

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY REGIONAL SEMINAR IN TENNESSEE

What: A seminar on NCT designed for pastors, teachers, prospective seminary students, and other individuals interested in NCT. The seminar will begin at 1:00 P.M. on Thursday and end at noon on Saturday. The seminar topics include teaching of NCT's understanding of the Bible based upon contextual exegesis of redemptive history. Special emphasis will be placed upon questioning the systems of Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. There is no registration fee. For further administrative information see the contacts below.

Where: Franklin, TN, October 13-15, 2005. Taught by Dr. Gary D. Long, Pastor William S. Sasser and Pastor Dean Olive. The Seminar will be held at Grace Church located at 4055 Arno Road, Franklin, TN. Contact: Pastor Sasser at Lkpsj@aol.com or (615) 791-1575.

For a seminar in your area contact Gary D. Long at glongpti@hotmail.com.

Check your label for expiration.
Please renew your subscription promptly.

SOUND OF GRACE
5317 WYE CREEK DRIVE
FREDERICK, MARYLAND 21703-6938

FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED