From Uplook, 2001

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God’s Crowning Creation (February 2001)

From Uplook, February 2001. Editorial.

Cherchez la femme. Wherever there is signal blessing, you will always find the woman.

When Adam named the animal creation, it exposed to his own heart that he was missing something. The variety and scope of God’s astounding handiwork only accentuated his own need for a help suitable for him. Yet in order to provide that “help meet” the Lord did a remarkable thing. He did not make woman by an independent act. Instead He performed the first surgery, removing something from Adam’s own body. The piece He removed was a rib from the man’s breastplate, making his heart more vulnerable, more accessible. Never again would Adam be complete unless his bride was with him because she had some of his life within her.

The crowning glory of God’s fair creation was given three names. Adam called her Woman or “out of man” (Hebrew Isha to his Ish). This emphasized her MEANS OF LIFE. Though her life came from God, the Source of all life, it came through Adam. So it was to be that she would look to her husband as he was to look to God.

But her husband’s trustworthiness was linked to two acts on his part: to “leave” his own family to start another, and to “cleave” only to his wife—giving her the first place of loyalty of any earthly relationships.

At first look, it seems a tenuous arrangement for the woman. What if her husband fails her? Sarah is given as an example of that very case (1 Pet. 3:5-6). Abram failed his wife—but God did not fail her. Even when the husband abandons—whether physically, emotionally, or geographically—his wife, God will be a Father to the fatherless and a Husband to the husbandless.

When Abram failed Sarah in Egypt, the Lord came to her aid. Years later, He would bring plagues on Egypt to deliver perhaps two million Jews; on this occasion He brought plagues upon them to rescue one woman.

But Woman was not the only name given to God's fair creation. We read that God "called their name Adam, in the day that they were created" (Gen. 5:2). The word adam or adom is linked with several ideas. It is used for the color red and for the earth or dust from which man was made. The names of Esau and Edom find their roots in Adam. Of course we all find our roots in Adam. As Paul writes: "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven…and as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:47, 49). The first man and woman shared a common name because they shared a common nature, as do we all. This name of hers emphasized her UNITY OF LIFE with all the race that would come after her. There would be one happy exception. Called "the seed of the woman," He would partake of our humanity without being tainted by our sin. As Kinsman, His genealogy would stretch back to Adam (Lk. 3:38) but as Redeemer, He would be virgin born. In this special conception and birth would be found the fullest expression of the truth: "She shall be saved in childbearing" (1 Tim. 2:15).

Woman's third name was given to her by her husband after the Fall. It is a name rich with promise, emphasizing the CONTINUITY OF LIFE. By an act of faith he called her Chavah, or Eve, because, said Adam, "she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). But was she not the mother of the dying? God had just pronounced the curse, concluding with the words, "dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." Yet Adam saw in his wife a hope undiminished by the seemingly impossible plight of the human race.

This optimism is not unfounded. Our God is not the God of the dead but of the living. And down history's long corridor from then until now you will find the fragrant memories of a multitude of women whom the Lord has used to bring hope in the midst of despair, revival in the face of failure, joy to sweeten sorrow, and resolute confidence in God when the men are sinking under the load. Salute these intrepid women of faith as they pass before your gaze: the daughters of Zelophehad, Achsah, Hannah, Abigail, Rizpah, Huldah, Ruth, Esther, the women who loved Jesus (discussed in this issue), and on to Anne of Austria, Mary Slessor, Amy Carmichael and thousands more. I know a little about such women. I've lived with one for 28 years.

Job Openings (March 2001)

From Uplook, March 2001. Editorial.

What kind of person would even think of responding to an ad like this? Only the best.

Major investment firm seeks motivated individuals who are desiring “a good work.” 1 Such will be called on to make a major investment themselves.2 Previous education in St. Mary’s College 3 preferred, but rigorous on-the-job training provided. Must be prepared to work late hours on occasion, have personal plans rearranged at the last minute, and receive regular criticism, much of it unfounded. The pay scale at present is minimal (to say the least) but retirement benefits are out of this world.4

Applicants must have dual functioning tear ducts (in order to “weep with those that weep” 5), a firm but gentle voice, knees that bend often, and open ears. In addition, must know how to keep mouth shut regarding confidential matters.

This position requires the heart of a lion, the hide of a rhino, the vision of an eagle, and the agility of a mountain goat. Nevertheless applicant must be a real man to qualify.

Experience in military service for the king—the use of all available armor and developed skill in swordsmanship 6 —is essential. Also having raised family well is a must.7 Individual applying must be willing to open his home to others, thus showing a hospitable spirit,8 to open his heart in honest accountability to his fellow workmates,9 and to open his hand to those in need.

Anyone desiring this position must know how to use an alarm clock for early rising, how to use the Owner's Manual for his own direction and for teaching others,10 and how to use a shepherd's crook for guiding his charges. Must not be afraid of long hours, dark nights, wild storms, grievous wolves, or the devil himself, because he has learned to implicitly trust the Managing Director in all such conditions.

Job openings are available worldwide but transfers are rarely arranged. Most successful applicants live and die at their post. Should be prepared to be unnoticed by the world, unappreciated by those being served, misunderstood and regularly taken advantage of.

The company11 of those seeking to employ such applicants is composed of former blasphemers, adulterers, thieves, murderers and many other categories of such ne'er-do-wells. Those with which the applicant must work on a day-to-day basis can be amazingly like sheep in their behavior,12 calling the respondent to know how to find green pastures and still waters,13 how to steer clear of perverse men and hirelings,14 and how to feed, lead, and take heed to the people in his care.

Benefits include happy fellowship with like-minded workmates, the joy of a job well done, the smile of the Chief Superintendent upon your work, and ultimately, the approbation of "the Shepherd that died for the sake of the flock." Also promised are rich times in the Word, power in prayer, and being "workers together" with God. 15

This is a limited time offer. Soon this branch office of the company will be closed, moving all involved to Out-of-

this-World Headquarters, where such services will no longer be required.16 If willing and able, apply today.

Note: Even though you may not qualify under this demanding category, there are many other openings in supporting roles. In fact, there is room for every serious, hard-working person on the team.

Endnotes:

1. 1 Tim. 3:1 2. 1 Jn. 3:16 3. at the feet of Jesus 4. 1 Pet. 5:4 5. Rom. 12:15 6. Eph. 6:10-18 7. 1 Tim. 3:4 8. Titus 1:8 9. 1 Pet. 5:5 10. Acts 20:28 11. 1 Cor. 6:10-11, for eg. 12. See Isa. 53; Jn. 10 13. Ps. 23:2 14. Acts 20:30; Jn. 10:12-13 15. 2 Cor. 6:1 16. Rev. 7:16-17

The Headship of Christ (March 2001)

From Uplook, March 2001. Article.

One key aspect of elder rule is “holding the Head.”

Every true believer in the Lord Jesus has a deep appreciation for the Saviour’s death, burial, and resurrection. We value, too, His promised return; but what is our understanding of His present position and ministry in glory?

Seven pictures are given to us in the New Testament to describe Christ’s labors of love for His own between the time of His ascension and ours:

1. He is the Good Shepherd, tending the sheep of His pasture (Jn. 10);

2. He is the Captain of our Salvation, leading us to victory, whether in life or in death (Rom. 8:37; Heb. 2:10; 1 Cor. 15:57);

3. He is the True Vine, sustaining the branches and bearing fruit through them (Jn. 15);

4. He is the Chief Cornerstone, bringing security and an absolute standard of measurement to the building (1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:4-8);

5. He is our Great High Priest, interceding for His people and teaching us the holy art of worship (Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5-9);

6. He is the heavenly Bridegroom, preparing a place for us in the Father’s House while He prepares us for the place (Jn. 14:1-3; Eph. 5:25-27);

7. He is the Head of the Body, the Church, nurturing and directing His saints for their mutual benefit and for the glory of God (Col. 1:18). It is, perhaps, in this last figure that the vital intimacy of the relationship between Christ and the Church is most expressively presented. It is, as well, a critical attack area for the enemy.

The Headship of Christ is true for the whole Body, the Church universal. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:22-23: "(God) hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

The practical acknowledging of this Headship, however, is expressed in the local assembly of believers. In both the Corinthian and the Colossian epistles, Paul warns of the danger of losing touch with their risen Head. In commenting on the First Corinthian epistle, J. R. Caldwell says,

…I wish you to observe how very often the word 'Lord' occurs in this epistle. It is found about sixty-eight times…i.e., more than double the number of times it occurs in the Epistle to the Romans or any other epistle applied to Christ. There is a divine purpose in this…Paul, writing by the Spirit, thus insists upon the Lordship of Christ; for all the evil that then existed, and all the sectarianism that subsequently developed, sprang from the self-same root…the setting aside of the authority of the Lord Jesus, and allowing man (in his supposed wisdom, his pride and self-will) to usurp His place. He is the Head whom God has appointed to preside over the "household of faith.1

Earlier, in commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:5, “That in every thing ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge” Mr. Caldwell writes:

Mark it! “Enriched by Him.” Not enriched by this world’s endowments, or by the learning of the schools. All the wisdom of Athens and Corinth could not enrich the Church. They were enriched by the Man at God’s right hand…enriched as members of the body from the Head. Paul had labored among them and instructed them, but he does not say they were enriched by him…it was all from Christ the Head. Whatever we have of grace, knowledge, or utterance in the things of God, it has been got from Christ! We are very prone to look too much to man, and to promote him out of his true place. The most talented, gifted, or spiritual one who ministers in our midst is nothing more than the channel through which blessing flows to us from Christ.2

In writing to the Colossian believers, Paul warns: “Let no man beguile you of your reward…vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands have nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col. 2:18-19). The spiritual diagnoses at both Colosse and Corinth remind one of the St. Vitus’ Dance (Chorea), a disease whose symptoms include the erratic jerking of the limbs due to a lack of control from the brain. Both the divisions at Corinth and the doctrinal problems at Colosse flowed from the same source—a failure to “hold the Head.”

The most extreme illustration of this is Laodicea. Outside the Master stands, not as the rejected Saviour, but as the Lord ignored. The Laodiceans no longer come

to Him for their need to be met, for they imagine themselves to be spiritually prosperous. They are not listening for His voice, though He calls to any who will hear. The body twitches with spasmodic activity, but the Head is outside the door. The biblical solution is given: “I counsel thee to buy of Me…” “Be zealous, therefore, and repent.” “If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in…” (Rev. 3:18-20). We must recognize our need and His provision; we must turn from our self-satisfaction to Him; we must, by invitation, welcome Him back to His rightful place as Lord.

In Revelation 1, John sees the Lord standing in the middle of seven golden lampstands. Each lamp rests on its own base. Unlike the menorah which was Israelitish in character, each lamp of testimony is independent of the others, responsible only to the One in the midst. To each He speaks; from each He requires a response. The misunderstanding of this principle leads gatherings of God’s people into another serious problem concerning the Headship of Christ. By acknowledging a confederacy, or circle of fellowship, for whatever reason, through internal or external pressure, we are rendering to men what rightfully belongs to the Lord.

Let it be noted that when we speak of autonomous (self-governed) local churches it does not mean independent of the Head, but independent of outside interference, or confederacy.

A paper penned by F. F. Bruce, and read at a conference held in September of 1954 at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, England, includes the following:

Each city church in New Testament times appears to have been administratively independent of any other city

church, equally independent of any grouping of churches. To be sure, they were encouraged to practice the fullest fellowship with each other, and all were bound to submit to the authority of the Lord and His apostles. Some elements in the Jerusalem church would, no doubt, have liked to assert their authority over the Gentile churches of Antioch and elsewhere, but no apostolic countenance was given to any such metropolitan jurisdiction and nothing of the sort is implied in the account of the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15…This combination of the utmost Christian fellowship and mutual help with the administrative independence of the several local churches is not always easy to maintain, but it is a barrier against sectarianism (which is inevitably involved whenever a formal or even informal circle of local churches is recognized) and also against State control, which can be much more effectively exercised over a centrally organized federation of churches than over a multiplicity of independent congregations. (We need hardly say, of course, that the idea that the State, as such, has any voice in the affairs of the church is completely foreign to the New Testament.) 3

The danger is two-fold. There is the real possibility that an attempt, well-intentioned or not, will be made from within (as has happened so many times in history) to centralize and consolidate such autonomous gatherings of believers in order to “increase effectiveness” for some other specious reason. The gnarled roots of such unscriptural church government are deeply implanted in Church history, and not always through the selfish power struggles of men such as Diotrephes. A Syrian from Antioch, Ignatius (an “Apostolic Father”) was

apprehended by the Roman authorities in c.110 AD. On his way to Rome and ultimately to martyrdom, he wrote letters to various churches. Unity, he told them, was to be accomplished on the one hand by rooting out heresies relative to the person of Christ, and on the other hand by the subjection of the leaders in local congregations to a ruling bishop. As this trend continued, it was not long until the most influential bishop, in any locale, had gained authority over that region; and this, in turn, led ultimately to the rise of the papacy.

It is a difficult thing to have no official name as far as the world is concerned because it does not recognize the Name in which we meet. (This Name is not the particular right of any group of Christians but is the authority by which any gathering of believers may meet.) It is not easy to explain oneself in a day of tags and labels, taken by people of God, which declare to the world the shame of a fractious Christendom. It is not easy, but it is right to hold the Head and to stand for the truth of the “one body” (Eph. 4:4).

Another danger is from without. The State may find it helpful, whether for administration purposes or for oppression, to call on gatherings of believers to be officially registered. One of the older books in my library (dated 1702) is entitled: “The Case of the Regale concerning the Independency of the Church, upon any Power on Earth, In the Exercise of Her Purely Spiritual Power and Authority.” We ought to be grateful for the endeavors of such men as the book’s author to deliver us from the bondage of the State over the Church. Yet, sadly it is true that those who fought so valiantly to be

free from the yoke of governmental oppression made for themselves chains of ecclesiastical control.

Whether one finds it is either expedient or comfortable to make such attempts at centralized human government whether officially or casually, or submits to such endeavors, it cannot be fairly argued that this is the New Testament pattern.

In his book, The Church and the Churches, W. E. Vine confirms this:

The Apostles did not establish an earthly system, an organization of churches centralized in ecclesiastical headquarters. Such a policy is significantly absent both from their methods and from their doctrine…One will search in vain in the Acts and the Epistles for even an intimation of the establishment of such an institution… There is no such thing as external unity by way of federation, affiliation or amalgamation, either of churches in any given locality or of all the churches together.4

Circles of fellowship, central planning committees, mission boards, official lists and the like, may have rational bases and find acceptance with many. They may give one a feeling of significance in an increasingly impersonal world; but for those who endeavor to follow the blueprint of Scripture, holding the Head will be sufficient.

What are some practical applications of the Headship of Christ in the local assembly?

1. Care should be taken by the assembly in general and the elders in particular to acknowledge practically in their personal lives the Lordship of Christ every day. The

Headship of Christ is largely a corporate expression of the Lordship of Christ in our individual lives.

2. The elders are not primarily a decision-making body; they are to be a discerning body. They are not called upon to “make up their minds” but to discover the mind of God in all matters. No mention is made of organizational skills, or of business acumen in the qualifications of an elder. Such skills do not disqualify a man from oversight in the local church, but he must have more than mere natural ability. He must be able to compare “spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13).

3. There should be a conscious effort “…to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:31). May God bless the repairers of rifts in the local fellowship. “Is Christ divided?” Any schism in the body causes grief to the risen Head. The apostle Paul first learned this lesson on the Damascus turnpike, by the statement: “Why persecutest thou Me?” (Acts 9:4). Paul never forgot it. Neither should we.

4. The development and exercise of gift in the local gathering should be of paramount concern to all. It has pleased the Head to minister to the body through the body. His purpose was that we may, “grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15-16). J. R. Caldwell comments on this verse:

Satan has his eye upon this truth. He knows that the body can only be effectually edified as it receives

through the ministry of every member, and the effective working of every part that which is supplied for its nourishment from the Head.5

Mr. Caldwell goes on to speak of the almost univerally adopted method in Christendom of entrusting to one, or at the most a few, the whole burden of ministry. “Thus,” writes Mr. Caldwell, “the body is starved. Satan will not object to the Church being rich and increased with goods or with human learning and influence if only he can deprive the members of the body of their appropriate nourishment.”

This, of course, does not assume that every member is gifted in every way. There is diversity of gift, but there must be development of every gift in the assembly if the entire body of believers is to be built up.

Just as there is but one body, so there is only one Head. His right to our unswerving allegiance is undisputed. Let us then “hold the Head” in loyal devotion, remembering that it is the Head who holds us.

Endnotes:

1. Caldwell, J. R. The Charter of the Church, vol. 2 (Pickering & Inglis) p. 132

2. Caldwell, J. R. The Charter of the Church, vol. 1 (Pickering & Inglis) pp. 20-21

3. Ruoff, P. O., editor The New Testament Church in the Present Day (published privately) pp. 29-30

4. Vine, W. E. The Church and the Churches (John Ritchie) pp.10-11

5. Caldwell, J. R. The Charter of the Church, vol. 1 (Pickering & Inglis) p. 22

Not a Mere Place (April 2001)

From Uplook, April 2001. Editorial.

What is all the fuss about Jerusalem anyway? Is there a solution for this tortured city?

I'm staying with friends in a very Jewish neighborhood in South Florida. A tabloid, the Jewish Journal, was dropped at the door and I took the liberty of glancing at it. Along with ads for kosher catering, fund-raisers for various Jewish charities, and an assessment of safety levels for Americans travelling in Israel, I found an article by Stuart Schoffman which first appeared in the Jerusalem Report.

His op-ed piece offers a solution to the so-called "Jewish Problem," a few million Jews surrounded by Muslim states who wish they weren't there, to put it mildly. The solution—for Jews to abandon their claim to Israel—is not a new one, says Schoffman, and quotes an earlier source to prove it.

Israel Zangwell (1864-1926) was a friend of the father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl. Originally Zionism was a movement to find a home for Jews in any safe country. Options included Australia, Mexico, Uganda, even Mesopotamia! But many Jews hoped for the rebirth of Israel in Palestine. This division in the movement led to the founding by Zangwell of the Jewish Territorial Organization.

The JTO wanted to rescue Jews from the anti-Semitic climate in Europe, but NOT take them to Palestine. Zangwell was afraid that moving back to the historical land of Israel would also take Jews back to the Bible.

The following is taken from an essay titled “The Territorial Solution of the Jewish Problem”:

[Zionism] takes its vision and ideal from the past; Territorialism places them in the future. Zionism is not safe even from animal sacrifices.

Zangwell continues,

…Zion is not a mere place—and the evasion of all root questions in the interests of a sham unity will one day have to be paid for, and with heavy interest.

What was the payout he had in mind if the Jewish homeland was established in the ancient land promised to the patriarchs? That Jews who had “overthrown the Mosaic code” would “babble about the irreplaceability of Palestine.” He spoke of the Zionist’s Jerusalem as “a city of dreams…builded on celestial foundations by the popular imagination yearning for the Messiah.”

Zangwell, unlike millions of Jews today, made the obvious connection between the people, the land, Mosaic law, and the hope of a Messiah. He connected the dots and was highly uncomfortable with the picture he saw. No, Zion is not a mere place. And yes, it is a massive disconnect to have unbelieving Jews claim the Land on the basis of the Scriptures which they deny.

The apostle Paul “connected the dots” too in his epistle to the Galatians. What is the relationship between the law with its offerings and God’s way of salvation? Paul explains:

Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness…For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in

the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith (Gal. 3:6, 10-11).

And what is the relationship between the covenant promises and the Messiah? The apostle continues:

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Modern Israelis have a law whose demands they cannot righteously meet, a land whose promise they cannot rightfully claim, and a Lord whose claim upon them they do not recognize. Jeremiah asked the question: “Who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee?” (Jer. 15:5). The Lord Jesus did—

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem…how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! (Lk. 13:34).

When you pray for the peace of Jerusalem (and we should, see Psalm 122:6) you are really praying for the return of the Prince of Peace. The City of Peace will find its shalom in no other way. Come, Messiah!

The City of the Name (April 2001)

From Uplook, April 2001. Article.

And the names of the city

Almost all the great cities of the world share certain characteristics. For example, they often sit astride great waterways. New York has its Hudson; London, the Thames; Paris has the Seine; and Cairo, the Nile. But what of Jerusalem? What did the Psalmist mean when he wrote: “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High” (Ps. 46:4)? Was he thinking prophetically, looking forward to the day when waters will issue “out from under the threshold of the house” of the Lord (Ezek. 47:1)? Or was he anticipating the spiritual refreshment enjoyed by those who trust in the Lord (see John 7:38)?

The great cities of earth boast large populations with tens of millions. Not so Jerusalem; her population barely exceeds 500,000.

Most are recognized as political hubs, but the nations refuse to call Jerusalem Israel’s capital.

What, then, makes Jerusalem not only a great city but the greatest city in the history of the world? God Himself explains: “…Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen…to put My name there” (1 Ki. 11:36). Nowhere else on the planet did the God of the universe take up residence in a house made by men. Nowhere else did He make a city “holy” (Isa. 52:1), placing on it His own Name—“…the city of God” (Ps. 46:4).

We first read of the settlement as Salem in the days of Abraham and Salem's remarkable king, Melchizedek. Two thousand years later, also in Jerusalem, the true King of Righteousness/King of Peace would also offer bread and wine, not to those returning from a battle but just before He would leave that room to single-handedly face history's greatest battle at Calvary.

The name Yerushalayim is reputed to mean "founded peaceful" with its dual form alluding to the hills on which it was originally built. But how little peace has the city known since its founding. As Charles Gulston writes: "It has been said that if blood were indelible, Old Jerusalem would be red, all red. The words, weighed against the stark facts of history, appall in their degree of accuracy" (Jerusalem, the Tragedy and the Triumph, p. 23).

Later the city would bear the name of its Canaanite inhabitants—Jebus or Jebusi (Josh. 18:28). It would remain a Jebusite stronghold until finally David took it through the artifice of Joab (2 Sam. 5:6-10), becoming Israel's capital.

A name from Scripture in use today—because it was given to the southwestern hill of the city—is Zion. Isaiah 60:14 declares: "…they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel." The word comes from a root meaning "conspicuous." It is used to translate the words "sign" or "waymark." So Zion stands out not only on its plateau at a 2,550 foot elevation; it stands out in the spectacular purposes of God.

The other names given to the City of the Name are rarely used now but how they enrich the Sacred Record. Ezekiel calls it Jehovah Shammah: "…the name of the

city from that day shall be, The Lord is there" (Ezek. 48:35). And so He shall! "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Isaiah calls her Ariel (meaning "Lion of God") (29:1), and with her tawny color she looks like a lion crouching in the hills. But she is the home on earth of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" who in the end shall prevail. Then of this city it shall be said: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee" (Isa. 62:4).

One Thing (August 2001)

From Uplook, August 2001. Editorial.

What happens when your closet gets crammed with things that shouldn't be there?

Life is simple at the start. Breathe. Eat. Sleep. Cry. Leave the rest to your caregivers. But life doesn't stay that way for long. It seems that the headlong rush of the twenty-first century especially lends itself to increasing complication. But the apostle Paul obviously saw the problem coming in the first century: "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtility, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Paul described his own lifestyle as decisively different from the spirit of his age (and obviously from ours) in these words: "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our [manner of life] in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12).

Sometimes the complications of life are the will of God for us. Obviously the life of a reclusive hermit with no electric power or running water has a simplicity of sorts. No emails asking for spiritual advice. No late-night calls from people needing help. He is never required to expend himself for others. But it is not the life to which the believer has been called. It is certainly not the lifestyle of Paul who reminds us that we were "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10).

Yet there obviously is a simplifying of our lives that is necessary, a kind of spiritual spring cleaning, where on a

regular basis we look at the accumulated stuff we have gathered—responsibilities, activities, ministries, relationships—and ask if these things ought to be hanging there, taking up space in the closets of our lives.

The apostle calls it “proving.” He writes: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). “But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Gal. 6:4). “Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:10). “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

Such a process of dragging a thing out of its place in the often crammed storeroom of our hearts, of holding it up to the searching gaze of our Lord, will often show us that while it may be a good thing, it is not God’s good will for us. It may be His will for someone you know, someone you need to encourage, Deborah-like, to take up that task instead of you.

Such a process, although often wrenching to conscientious servants who don’t like to be “quitters,” often can restore a sense of focus and balance and well-being to the life.

The Greek word for simplicity is sometimes translated “singleness,” as in the verse: “Servants, obey in all things…not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God” (Col. 3:22). This is beautifully expressed by linking five “one thing” scriptures. The Lord addressed the rich young ruler this way: “One thing thou lackest…come, take up the cross,

and follow Me" (Mk. 10:21). The man born blind had it right when he said: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (Jn. 9:25). And we ought to heed the Master's assessment: "One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Lk. 10:42). David understood that when he wrote: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple" (Ps. 27:4). And Paul, giving a snapshot of his whole Christian life, declares: "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). So are there five things? No, just one. All five verses remind us that an undistracted eye for the Lord is the secret of the life that counts for God.

We have been going through some proving, some heart searching, at Gospel Folio Press and Uplook Ministries. This issue will seek to explain what is happening as a result. Our heartfelt thanks for your prayers at this time.

A New Chapter at GFP/Uplook (August 2001)

From Uplook, August 2001. Article.

An open letter to our friends.

EBENEZER: It has been my inestimable privilege to labor for the last twelve years in a century-old printshop on a little hillside in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It has been an honor to work with some of the most diligent, frugal, and Christ-loving servants you could find. The Day shall declare it. The work by these unknown, unnamed laborers has often been accomplished on a shoestring, in the wee hours of the morning, with a skeleton crew. Their service has been given ungrudgingly, unsparingly, and in the joy of knowing that "little is much when God is in it." It is a tradition of love, loyalty, and labor for the best of Masters that reaches back to 1926 when Bill Pell first set up a hand press in his mother's parlor. There have been many changes but that commitment to the Lord, His Word, His people, and His work has thankfully been preserved by His grace and through the prayers of many supporters of this ministry.

You know it is not always an easy thing to discern the mind of God for a life, let alone a ministry like this. As a board and as workers here, we often discussed what the Lord was doing among His people, what the needs were as we saw them, what we might be able to do to help.

THE WORK GROWS: As the years went by, we revamped many of the publications and added other ministries to the original literature publishing work—audio tapes, the

“Rise Up” conferences, the website, and the distribution of selected Christian resources.

Other ministries went on as well. Thousands of letters, phone calls, and emails have been answered—people contacting us with Bible questions or spiritual problems; elders wondering about a preacher for their conference or an assessment of a ministry they might like to support; parents looking for a good assembly their child might attend while at college or while working in London or Paris; a call for a misplaced email address for a missionary; hunting down an out-of-print book or the verse of a hymn; free tracts for a gospel outreach. The requests (which we have been happy to answer) have been as varied as they are numerous. My co-laborers have done the lion’s share of the work. And until this letter, these ministries were unmentioned and unreported on any balance sheet but the Lord’s.

SOME CONCERNS: As the ministry expanded, some Christians became concerned that we were doing too many things. That Uplook Ministries might become a sort of ex officio assembly headquarters is a legitimate concern, and I for one like decentralization. It has been the strength of assembly testimony worldwide, this balance between local church autonomy and inter-assembly fellowship. It may be that what the Lord is presently doing with this ministry is to keep that from happening.

There was also the concern some expressed about expenditures, which is also reasonable. Not that we were accused of having lavish offices or padded retirement packages. Anyone who has visited our humble little premises wouldn’t believe that. But we

struggled between the business and ministry sides of the operation—meeting the demands of having proper equipment, paying fair wages, etc., along with providing the free services being offered.

NECESSARY CHANGES: Our masthead used to include the statement that Uplook was published as the Lord provided. But sometimes we have published even if the money was not there. We published it on a free-will basis because many of these magazines go to prisoners, widows, students, and Christians in developing countries. Thirty percent of our Uplook subscribers have never sent us support. We're not complaining; but it is a fact that the financial burden is borne by a few, some of whom have given sacrificially with gifts large and small. It is now our unswerving policy to publish the magazine only when the money is in the bank to pay for its production and mailing. That is the reason no May–July issues of the magazine were published. We apologize for any inconvenience this causes those wishing timely reporting of their conferences and other news (although news is posted on the Uplook website).

We have also felt for some time that a clear distinction needs to be made between the ministry and business sides of the operation. For this reason, among others, we feel the Lord wants us to separate the two, although there will be continuing cooperation between us. Beginning August 1, Lord willing, Gospel Folio Press, the business side (publication and distribution of quality Christian resources) will operate from Port Colborne, Ontario. Orders will be shipped from Canada to Canadian customers, from the US to American and international customers. The toll-free order line, 800-952-2382, will remain with GFP.

Uplook Ministries will continue in Grand Rapids. This, Lord willing, will include the magazine, the conference ministry (for this coming conference in Indianapolis at least), and perhaps the web ministry. We will look to Him to direct us as to other possible activities. We will still be reached at 616-456-9166.

As of May 30, we closed our print shop. We thank the Lord for our faithful press department over the years, especially Tim Johnson and David Pell (see p. 6). Now all work will be done by outside printers.

Several of our staff will be finding other employment. We appreciate your prayers for them. There will be two part-time employees left at Uplook in the short term, serving out their time until their approaching retirement. All others helping with Uplook Ministries from now on will be volunteers or work will be contracted as funds are available. It is evident the Lord does not want salaried employees handling the editorial, counselling, and information services which we have provided in the past. We will still maintain retirement benefits for several former long-term employees.

LOOKING TO GOD: We know what we have done will be assessed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Whatever has been pleasing to Him, to God be the glory. Whatever has not, we wish to do it differently from now on. Much of what has been done in the past, many of you have told us, has been used by the Lord for the encouragement of His people and the advancement of the gospel. We are grateful that He would use it like that. But there is so much land still to be possessed! So we carry on. We are not discouraged, primarily because God's Great Servant "shall not fail nor be discouraged" (Isa. 42:4). In no way

has the Lord failed us. It is our testimony with Joshua: “…not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning [us]; all are come to pass…” (Josh. 23:14).

The future for every believer (and, we believe, for this ministry) is bright because of the presence and promises of God. The Lord is pruning us here, but we believe that’s a good thing. For some time we have been asking the Lord to own this ministry, to lay His hand upon it in a fresh way. We believe He is doing that. May the Lord help us, of all people, to have the uplook and believe that this is the answer to our prayers. If this is indeed the Lord ordering our steps, then let us “delight in His way.”

By His grace

A World of Difference (September 2001)

From Uplook, September 2001. Editorial.

What can one person do? What difference does it make?

It is a fact that rock—hard, lifeless rock—can become soil that is rich and fertile and workable. So rich that the world's hungry can be fed from its tableland. So pliable that a child can let the soil run through his fingers. How does it happen? What forces are brought to bear against such unyielding material?

A raindrop will do it. Or a snowflake. A seedling wafted by a breeze from a nearby tree. Or the tendrils of a wildflower whose fate it is to hug the inhospitable surface of some granite face.

Is it true? Can such little things make a world of difference? Pedologists, the uptown name given to soil scientists, speak about the physical disintegration and chemical decomposition of rock. Sometimes water droplets penetrate a rock surface and then freeze within, expanding and physically breaking the rock. At other times the water dissolves minerals in the rock.

Wind, snow, ice, lichens, tree roots, and scores of other almost imperceptible forces slowly turn rock into soil. In a similar way, our often flinty hearts yield to the gentle influence of little things. Have you not found this to be true in your life? A little kindness shown; a little word of correction, instruction, comfort, or encouragement; a little word of prayer in a moment of crisis; a little verse of Scripture applied by the Spirit to our need; a snatch

of a meaningful hymn—and what could have been a hardening experience actually softens us.

I remember words and deeds like that in my life. The gentle hand of Dave Sylvester on my shoulder after a baptism and his even gentler words, “What hinders you from being baptized?” The soft and kindly voice of Les Dockstader (a one-time bare-fisted boxer before God softened him through the gospel) who took me aside after a Lord’s Supper in which my voice had not been heard: “Who was sitting on your knee this morning?” Or the words of a dear sister who stood by, watching an older brother straighten me out after I had preached. “Listen to that brother,” she said, “it will be a great help to you if you learn to take correction. But I want you to know that you were an encouragement to me tonight.”

Of course we know that, under pressure, soil can turn into rock as well. Sedimentary rock once provided a place where life could be sustained, could flourish. But under such pressure as would squeeze the life out of it, the soil became rock. So, too, the hard things of life can make us hard. Beaten down by circumstances, we can find our souls becoming lifeless and unfeeling. Is there hope when we look within only to find a barren wasteland where once a flourishing garden grew? We feel like we fit the Lord’s description of leviathan: “His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone” (Job 41:24). Is there any hope for us?

The Lord promised Israel that He would restore the wilderness land He had given them: “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1). But He said He could also do something with their desert-hearts: “A new heart also will I give you…I will take away the stony

heart…and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26).

What a world of difference the Lord can make in others' lives through us! What power for blessing (or bane) we have in our words and deeds. "A word fitly spoken" is as healthful as an apple, as valuable as gold, and a beautiful as a fine painting (Prov. 25:11). An unknown author has written this reminder to us all:

What will it matter in a little while
That for a day we met and gave a word,
A touch, a smile upon the way?
What will it matter whether hearts were brave,
And lives were true, that you gave me
The sympathy I craved, as I gave you?
These trifles, can it be
They make or mar a human life?
Are souls as lightly waved as rushes
Are by storm or strife? Yes! Yes!
A look the failing heart may break,
Or make it whole;
And just a word said for love's sweet sake
May save a soul.

Mosaic with a Billion Pieces (October 2001)

From Uplook, October 2001. Editorial.

The land called India, with the immensity of its need, cries out for our hearts.

As of May 11, 2000 the population of India officially reached one billion—not one billion statistics but one billion souls for whom Christ died. I cannot take it in. It doesn't compute. I read the numbers but what do they mean? Augustine of Hippo wrote, "We must not despise the science of numbers. That science is of eminent service to the careful interpreter." But how would he interpret these numbers?

Approximately 340 million Indians are under the age of 15. Ten thousand children a day die of starvation (while millions of shrines receive their daily food). Child prostitution is rampant—in Bombay alone there are over 100,000 prostitutes, most of them minors. There are 3.2 million lepers, 10 million blind (one quarter of the world total), 60 million deaf. While one of the largest countries in the world with an area of 1,269,219 square miles (3,287,263 sq. km.), by any standard large areas of India are now overpopulated. From a population of just under 300 million in 1900, it increases at about 1800 per hour! The second edition of The World Christian Encyclopedia, just released, describes conditions:

India's huge and growing population magnifies every human need and problem into Himalaya-like proportions. With a growth rate of 1.8% annually, the people added to the country every year equal the

population of Australia. India's carrying capacity has been estimated at no more than 300 million, so that, in effect, over 600 million are not being properly fed, clothed, or housed.…Illiteracy is estimated at 48% nationally, but in certain areas…it is as high as 87%. Life expectancy is 64 years but a variety of diseases ravage the impoverished villagers, cutting their productive years to no more than 40. Per capita income is $240 but there are hordes of unemployed in the cities who eke out their daily lives on less than 10 cents a day. The daily calorie supply is 2,229, but the average diet is so deficient in vital nutrients and proteins that it can be described as only little better than fasting.…Nearly 41% of the urban population and 51% of the rural population live below the poverty level. This means that the majority of Indians live in unrelieved misery all their lives (p. 361).

These conditions exist in spite of one of the best systems of higher education in the world, a flourishing industrial base (10th largest in the world), and a reasonably good infrastructure. And the worst of it is this: That after these millions "live in unrelieved misery all their lives" for most of them a hopeless eternity awaits.

How do you grasp the thought of India? These one billion people live in a land that is home to sixteen major languages and hundreds of minor ones, thousands of ethnic groups, and scores of religions. It would seem to me that India, like any other country, must be understood one person at a time. Statistics may expose the enormity of the challenge, but each soul, in God's book, is worth more than the whole world. Then where do we begin?

We can plead for India: We need to be informed about the land, the workers, the challenges. We need to pray large prayers to our mighty and generous God. How He loves boldness in faith mixed with a passion for souls. William Carey wrote just before arriving in India in 1793: “A large field opens on every side, and millions tormented by ignorance, superstition, and idolatry plead with every heart that loves God. Oh, that many laborers may be thrust into the vineyard, and the Gentiles come to the knowledge of the Truth!”

We can give for India: No doubt there are beggars and charlatans aplenty who will try to tap into Western Christian giving. And we must be wary of doing damage with our money. But that doesn’t mean there are no viable ways to invest in the work of God in India. If done wisely, our resources can be multiplied a hundredfold due to the low cost of goods and services there.

If nothing else, we should weep for India. May God help our often over-indulgent, self-absorbed, easily-distracted Western hearts to beat a little more like His heart of whom it was written: “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion…because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Mt. 9:36).

Three Burdens, One Back (November 2001)

From Uplook, November 2001. Editorial.

How much is one person expected to carry anyway?

The human body has a weight of its own, with muscles and organs, skin, nerves and blood vessels carefully wrapped around its skeletal frame. But the body is designed to carry more than itself.

So it is with the soul. We have room in our hearts and minds for others, for their joys and sorrows, their blessings and burdens. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). Paul cites Timothy as an illustration of this: “I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state” (v. 20).

When we “weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15), a portion of their sorrow is shouldered by our hearts and some of the tears that they would have to weep now flow from our eyes, making their burden a little lighter. We may think we cannot carry more than our own load, but if we have a heart to help, the Lord will increase our carrying capacity. They say you can tell a lot about a man if, when the burden is heavy, he asks the Lord for a lighter load or a stronger back.

The Word of God delineates these burdens that every conscientious believer must face.

Our Own Burden Which We Must Bear

“Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:4-5). The Christian life is described as an arduous race to be run, a weed- and rock-infested field to be cultivated, a ferocious battle to be fought, but never as a picnic or a party. Notice the link in these verses between a man’s work, burden, and rejoicing. As the poet described it: “Be strong! We are not here to play, to dream, to drift, We have hard work to do, and loads to lift. Shun not the struggle—face it; ’tis God’s gift” (M. D. Babcock).

While it is true that the Lord called us out of the world to be part of this new society called the Church, it is also true that He has equipped every believer so that, even alone, one has the resources to carry on. The indwelling Spirit, the eternal life of God, the intercessory work of our Great High Priest, prayer access, the panoply of the Lord—these are a few of the amazing resources every Christian has with which to “bear his own burden.” God wants workers, not shirkers.

Others’ Burdens We Should Bear

“Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). It’s a tough world out there; I don’t have to tell you that. A little visiting in the homes of God’s people, a little compassion, a little willingness to be a burden-bearer, and you soon discover that every family has its heartaches. Behind many a smile lurk deep shadows in the soul. The One who “bore the burden to Calvary” introduced this moral law into His realm: when I, like the Good Samaritan, find a wounded life set upon by thieves who would steal from him his joy,

peace and security, I must not look the other way. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” is the most often quoted statement in the New Testament, and for good reason. The One called a Samaritan (who did not deny it, Jn. 8:48-49) crossed not a road but the universe to find us where we lay and effect our rescue. “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak” (Rom. 15:1).

When a Burden Seems Too Heavy to Bear

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee” (Ps. 55:22). The marginal reading for “burden” is “what He has assigned you.” You may recall the story of the boy who was standing with his arms outstretched to receive firewood from his father. A friend standing by commented, “Isn’t that enough, son?”

“My father knows when I have enough,” he replied.

He does indeed. “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” (1 Cor. 10:13) but will provide for those occasions when you feel overwhelmed “a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” Peter, who cried out in a crisis, “Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” later wrote, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.” No one ever cared for you like Jesus.

Incarnate Love (December 2001-January 2002)

From Uplook, December 2001-January 2002. Editorial.

The journey between the worlds.

Do you think we could sum up the message of the Old Testament in just three words? If so, I think they would be: Jesus is coming! You can see it on almost every page.

THE PATRIARCHS PONDERED IT. Job longed for a daysman between God and men "…that might lay His hand upon us both" (Job 9:33); in so doing he anticipated the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim. 2:5). Said the Saviour in divine retrospect, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad" (Jn. 8:56). And what did Jacob behold at Peniel when he confessed, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:30)? Was it anything like what Paul described as "…the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6)? Moses saw God's glory from the cleft of the rock at Sinai when the Lord said to him, "I will…cover thee with My hand while I pass by: and I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen" (Ex. 33:22-23). But how did that compare with what he saw on Transfiguration Mountain?

THE TYPES AND SHADOWS ANTICIPATED IT. Like a thousand fingers, they pointed beyond a distant horizon; like a myriad of eyes, they peered through the mists of the uncertain years; like a chorus of voices, they called out into the long night, "He is coming!"

Surely God would not merely mock His people with a Moses who could lead his people out, but could not lead them in; with a Joshua who led them in but could not give them rest; with a David who gave them rest from their enemies, but could not win the battle for the citadel of his own heart. There must be Someone greater than Moses the Lawgiver, better than Joshua the Captain, more dependable than David the Prince. Indeed there was, and He was on the way.

He would answer to the serpent on the pole, the lion who prevails, the lamb on the altar, the sparrow alone on the housetop, and the hind chased to the death by the dogs. He would be the light in the darkness, the fountain in the wilderness, the covert in the storm, and the corn of wheat that became through death a harvest so great that only heaven's granary could hold it. Root and Branch, Lamb and Shepherd, Star and Sun, Cornerstone and Headstone, Servant and Sovereign, Babe and Father of Eternity—Jesus had to come!

THE PROPHETS SEARCHED FOR IT (see 1 Pet. 1:10-11). He is Isaiah's Sufferer (53:3), Jeremiah's Balm of Gilead (8:22), Ezekiel's Plant of Renown (34:29), Daniel's Ancient of Days (7:9-11), Hosea's Dew (14:5), Haggai's Desire of all Nations (2:7), Zechariah's Shepherd and Malachi's Sun of Righteousness (4:2) among hundreds of others. If you have eyes to see it, you can watch the white light of divine truth refracted into a rainbow of exquisite types, messianic psalms, and prophetic portraits.

But if the Old Testament is described by the statement, Jesus is coming! the New Testament surely is

encompassed in the triad of statements, Jesus did come! and Jesus is come! and Jesus is coming again!

He came the first time not only to fulfill the prophetic scriptures, however. Here in His own words He clarifies the reasons for the mission: “For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (Jn. 6:38). “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Mt. 5:17). “…I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (Jn. 12:47). “…the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). “…I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mk. 2:17). “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Mt. 10:34).

As can be seen, the complexity and number of the issues to be resolved could only be accomplished by one solitary Figure, and He, thankfully, was willing to do it. The cost of this campaign was so astronomical that the Owner of everything became poor in the process. The journey He took in coming “down from heaven” had never been traversed before. He came—for you and me.

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