From Uplook, 2004

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Thy Kingdom Come! (January 2004)

From Uplook, January 2004. Editorial.

The subject of the Lord's return is often thought to be a geriatric hope, enjoyed only by those whose life work is complete. It is assumed that such senior saints have nothing left to live for down here; they've seen it all. Heaven is next on the agenda. Those who still have a spring in their step, with plans for marriage, family, career, ministry—in short, the exciting adventures that await us on the pre-Rapture planet—find the words, "O Lord, how long?" to be somewhat premature. And it surely isn't wrong for us to have a desire to "finish the work" given to us on earth, as our Saviour did (Jn. 17:4). To the inquiry, "Wouldn't you like to go to heaven right now?" one believer responded, "Not at the moment. I'll be there forever; I have things to do for the Lord before I leave."

This ambivalence is seen in Paul's honest confession to the Philippian saints: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (1:23-24).

And it isn't just the work to be done among Christians that holds us here. We see the same tension in the response to the "burden of Dumah": "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night…" (Isa. 21:11-12). If the eternal morning, the Day without a sunset, were the certain hope of every earthly resident, the Rapture would be unmingled joy. But who of us does not have loved ones who still linger in the shadows? For

them a night approaches whose “blackness of darkness” (Jude 1:13) will be eternally unbroken by a single shaft of light. We long for them to have one more day, one more opportunity.

If you feel this way, your Father feels the same (though infinitely more!). The trumpet remains unsounded; the archangel withholds his command; the Son waits seated as the Day of Grace continues. Why? Because “The Lord is…not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

And yet our longsuffering Lord would teach us to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10). We well might ask the plaintive query posed in David’s day: “Why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?” (2 Sam. 19:10). For surely everything is out of place, and will be, until He sets it right.

The devil is out of place; stalking about, seeking whom he may devour, he ought to be bound and cast out. Israel is out of place; the tail of the nations, they ought to be the head. The Church is out of place; a heavenly people, they ought to be with their Bride—no longer tempted, persecuted and scattered on earth. And what of Christ Himself? The “desire of all nations”is a curse word among men. This earth is His inheritance; He ought to be reigning over it, with “the earth…filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

He shall reign here on earth, make no mistake about it. Though the wait has been long, He will not be late. We who have been “…delivered…from the power of darkness, and…translated us into the kingdom of His

dear Son” (Col. 1:13) in that day shall see our presently-maligned Redeemer vindicated before the whole universe.

And thus we continue to pray: “Thy kingdom come!”

Are We in the Kingdom? (January 2004)

From Uplook, January 2004. Article.

The short answer—no and yes.

If the question means are we presently in that kingdom period commonly called the millennium, the answer is "No." And for some very good reasons:

1. There can be no millennium until Christ comes again. Even if you don't believe in the Rapture of the Church first (and I certainly do), how can you believe in a kingdom on earth without the King? This kingdom will not fall into the Saviour's lap; He must come as a mighty warrior and wrestle it from the grip of the "strong man." This is described for us in Revelation 19. Then will come that glorious day of which Paul spoke to Timothy: "…our Lord Jesus Christ: who in His times He shall show who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:14-15).

2. There can be no millennium until Antichrist is defeated and Satan is bound. Regarding Antichrist, note these words: "And then shall that Wicked [one] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8).

And when is Satan bound? While the argument can be made that some of the book of Revelation is not in chronological order, it should be clear that the events of Revelation 20 follow hard on those in chapter 19. Chapter 19 brings before us the coming of Christ who

“shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (v. 15). And how does chapter 20 begin? “Then” an angel from heaven “…laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years” (v. 2).

3. But there can also be no millennium until Gentile world power is broken and the true nation of Israel is restored, not simply to Jerusalem but to Jehovah. Both these events will require the return of Christ.

Daniel revealed “that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces” (Dan. 2:34). It is the return of Christ that will bring to an end “the times of the Gentiles”(Lk. 21:24). And it will also be the second coming of Israel’s once-rejected Messiah that will cause a nation to be born in a day (Isa. 66:8). At last the little remnant of Jews who have rejected the wooing of the Anti-messiah will understand. “…They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10), says the Lord, and cry, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).

4. Of course there can be no millennium until the saints who have died are raised and we are given new bodies. How could the saints long passed away “reign with Him” without His coming to raise them first? This was the fear of the Thessalonians, calmed by Paul’s triumphant words in 1 Thessalonians 4. It will be during the millennium that those faithful in this life will hear their Lord say: “Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have

thou authority over ten cities" (Lk. 19:17). But before we can be brought into such responsibility, we "…shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we…groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body"(see Rom. 8:21-24). These new bodies will be necessary for the new responsibilities of our new sphere.

I am a Canadian. I do not presently live there, but it is my birthplace and my citizenship is there. So it is with the kingdom into which we are offered "an abundant entrance." 2 Peter 1:11

The Lord Jesus is never called the King of the Church; we, as His Bride, are to be co-regents with Him. However the New Testament does teach that we in the Church have willingly submitted to the One who is King. As such, God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). A queen should be a good example of the way subjects ought to behave. She has a higher motive than law that calls forth her submission; she loves the king. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). Again we cry, "Thy kingdom come!"

The Cause (March 2004)

From Uplook, March 2004. Editorial.

We need some Davids to rally the troops.

It was a stalemate. The older sons of Jesse, along with the rest of Saul's army, had been "dismayed, and greatly afraid"(1 Sam. 17:11) at the brazen boast of the Philistine champion. And little wonder, for Goliath was an imposing mountain of a man. Common sense made it clear that no one on the Israelite side of the valley was a match for him. The Jews cowered in their tents.

The Wadi Elah drains the water from the hills on the west flank of Bethlehem, David's hometown. Twisting its way through the Shephela or foothills that form a buffer between the Judean highlands and the Plain of Philistia, the Elah valley linked the Judean towns of Bethlehem and Socoh (Shochoh) with Gath and the Mediterranean coast. It was near Socoh that the two armies had found the rolling hills an ideal grandstand to view the contest. But the camp of Israel found no one willing or able to silence the Philistine's defiance of them and their God.

Enter David. He had been sent with fresh provender for his big brothers, for it had been forty days that Goliath had taunted in the valley and Israel had trembled in their tents. Arriving just as the troops gathered for the next round, "as the host was going forth to the fight" (v. 20), David discovered that it was a mere war of words. He heard Goliath's blasphemous challenge and, turning to some bystanders, asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (v. 26).

This was too much for big brother Eliab, who had overheard. Furious, he spat out the words: “Why did you come down here?…I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle” (v. 28, NKJV). David might have responded, “What battle? Who’s fighting, Eliab?” Instead, he asked: “Is there not a cause?” There was indeed—just as there is today. And yet again the people of God seem to be hiding in their tents, quivering at the thought of those big men out there who defy the living God and His people. Where are the young champions who will risk life and limb for this cause? Who will set aside Saul’s vaunted armor and go into battle instead “…in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel” (v. 45)?

At time of writing the Democratic caucuses are in full swing. I saw a couple interviewed who had gone to Iowa to knock on doors in -5 degree weather. They had driven 1300 wintery miles from Massachusetts. At their own expense. And it was their wedding anniversary! They had joined three thousand other volunteers to do whatever they could to help the cause they held dear. When asked if they thought their sacrifice made any difference, the husband replied, “If we each can change the minds of two voters, that will make the difference.”

Would we travel at our own expense in winter across the continent, setting aside personal plans and comforts to confront people with the only candidate who qualifies as Saviour? Would we think it worthwhile if only two responded? What was it that drove David—and will drive us—into the line of fire? It is the two-fold secret that “the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give [the enemy] into our hands” (v. 47). The Lord’s presence is

guaranteed and victory is assured to those willing to prove God in the great conflict for the souls of men.

Is there not a cause? What would happen if each believer in the coming year would see just two people come to Christ? Each assembly would treblein size. We would regain the gospel offensive. The enemy would be on the run. And the world would “report that God is truly among you” (1 Cor. 14:25).

Q & A: Who Wrote Hebrews? (March 2004)

From Uplook, March 2004. Article.

The question has been debated for centuries. So is it even worth asking: Who was it that first felt the blowing of the Spirit's inspirational wind across his spirit and so eloquently contemplated the surpassing glories of the New Covenant and its blessed Mediator?

I know the answer—and so do you. It could not be more obvious because it is found in the first sentence of the book. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son…" (Heb. 1:1-2). That is the definitive answer. However He worked and whomever He used, ultimately "God spake all these words" (Ex. 20:1).

Of course the question is appropriate to ask. The God who has spoken chose to do it through holy men, utilizing them not as secretaries to whom He dictated word for word, but by supernaturally illuminating them. Each chosen instrument had a distinct writing style, vocabulary, life experience and personality which often shows itself in his writing, making the Bible at the same time a collaborative work yet wholly the pure Word of God.

Suggestions are legion as to the human authorship of the book: Timothy or Barnabas (a back-handed appeal to Pauline influence); Apollos ("mighty in the scriptures," Acts 18:24); Priscilla (a female candidate who, with her

husband, instructed Apollos); Clement or one of the "second generation" of believers. God alone knows.

Of course, the all-time favorite is Paul himself. Objections are heard that the style is different from his other writings, but so it should be. One would expect a different treatment when he is writing as "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" (Rom. 15:16) or to his "brethren, [his] kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). Yet William Kelly, a renowned Greek scholar, saw no stylistic difficulty in attributing the book to Pauline authorship:

The epistle to the Hebrews differs in some important respects from all the other epistles of Paul, so much so that many have questioned whether it be the writing of the Apostle Paul…Of this my mind has no doubt. I believe that Paul, and no other, was the author, and that it bears the strongest intrinsic traits of his doctrine (Introductory Lectures, p. 3).

Kelly goes on to discuss the logical reasons for the differing style.

Why Paul?

Let me give five reasons.

1. Because Paul was the most highly qualified author of such a letter. As he would write: "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more"(Phil. 3:4), being expert in the Jewish language and idiom, law and ceremony—"taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3).

2. Peter tells us that Paul had written an epistle to the Hebrews (2 Pet. 3:15-16; with 1 Pet. 1:1 to see to whom

Peter refers when he says “you”) and links it with “all his epistles” which he then includes with “the rest of the Scriptures.” Certainly Hebrews contains “things hard to be understood” (see Heb. 5:11-14, for example).

3. “Grace be with you all. Amen,”concludes the epistle (13:25), Paul’s trademark seal of authenticity, as he would himself say: “The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (2 Thess. 3:17-18; see the warning re pseudo-Pauline letters, 2 Thess. 2:2).

4. Hebrews is the third link in a chain of divine commentary on Habakkuk 2:4. Paul wrote the other two (Rom. 1:17, where he emphasizes “the just”; Gal. 3:11, with stress on “shall live”). It makes good sense that he wrote the third also—Hebrews 10:38—where the theme is “by faith.” Dare I apply “a threefold cord is not quickly broken”?

5. Practically, it makes sense that Paul should mask his authorship from yet undecided Jews who might otherwise prejudge the case. And doctrinally, a book presenting the superiority of God’s Son above all others could hardly begin with the word “Paul”! Instead it’s lofty theme blazes from the first sentence: “God…hath…spoken unto us by His Son…the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person…when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down…being made so much better…as He hath…obtained a more excellent name than they” (1:1-3).

Digging In: Archeology & the Book (March 2004)

From Uplook, March 2004. Article.

We read in 2 Sam. 5:8, “David said on that day, Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites…he shall be chief and captain.” The town of Jebus straddled the highland road through the heart of Israel. David wanted Jebus for his capital; it was “the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place His name there” (Deut. 16:11).

It was so strongly fortified, however, that the Jebusites boasted it could be held by their lame and blind. But the soon-to-be-renamed Jerusalem had one weak spot in its defense—the water source outside the city wall. The Gihon spring (only fresh water supply to the city) had been disguised, the water redirected back under the hill, and a shaft dropped from an underground walkway so the people could draw water safely in time of siege (see diagram). But Joab found its hidden entry, “went up first, and became chief” (1 Chron. 11:6).

Debate has swirled about Warren’s Shaft—named for the British engineer who discovered it in 1867—as to whether it is the water shaft of David’s day or not. In recent years, Biblical minimalists have even denied that the shaft was ever used to draw water. But recently that has changed. Archeologist Avraham Faust presents his case in an article in the Sep/Oct 2003 Biblical Archeology Review. Although he denies it was in use in David’s time, the article is still worth the read. Who know? They may change their minds again. After all,

there are only so many ways through solid rock to the water. In any case, the serpentine tunnel attached to it that links the spring to the Pool of Siloam is verifiably Hezekiah's tunnel, an engineering marvel if ever there was one.

Only 100 Years?

Even though people have been digging around the hill for thousands of years, the archeological world celebrated the centennial of excavation work at Megiddo just this past April. Digging began there in 1903 by Gotlieb Schumacher, somewhat disdainfully described by Biblical Archeology Review (BAR) magazine as "a religious Christian whose excavations at Megiddo were motivated by a yearning to prove the veracity of the Bible." Tut-tut.

Some discussion broke out at the festivities over the reference to Megiddo in the book of Revelation, citing it's link to Zechariah 12, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem…In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon" (vv. 9, 11). So, editorializes BAR, "while the apocalyptic battle was prophesied to occur in Jerusalem, its location has become attached to Tel Megiddo via the reference to 'Megiddon.'"

Ironically, the news item goes on to tell us that a letter was read from Lord Allenby of Megiddo, whose grand-uncle, Field Marshall Edmund Allenby, first led British troops to take Jerusalem from the Turks and then routed the rest of the enemy at Megiddo. Sound familiar? Seems that is how the Last Battle will play out, just

across the valley from Nazareth when the final line of Isaiah 61:1-2 will come to pass—“the day of vengeance of our God.”

When Edmund Allenby, a believer, was given the title “Lord of Megiddo” he was reported to have said that he expected to be back to Megiddo, but on that occasion he wouldn’t be the Commander.

Apologetics (March 2004)

From Uplook, March 2004. Article.

What role does it have in witnessing?

Apologia, the Greek word that is the root of Apologetics, does not in this case imply an admission of guilt or regret but a desire to make clear one's belief or position (Webster). In gospel work it is the utilizing of explanation along with proclamation in an effort to "convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9), that is, those who disagree.

Yet the apostle Paul appears at first to reject the use of the apologetic approach to evangelism:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom…For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified…And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom…that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (see 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

However, this cannot be a blanket rejection of a wise and reasoned approach to biblical truth because we read that he "reasoned" with both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 18:4).

Now it may be argued that he only reasoned "out of the scriptures" (17:2). Certainly this was his primary source and authority, but we know that he also referred to literary sources (17:28), commonly accepted moral standards (24:25), and personal experience (26:4-23). Of course one of the most effective lines of argument used

by early Christians was fulfilled Messianic prophecies (2:17-28). And we know the Lord Jesus used current events (Lk. 13:1-4) and homespun stories (parables) to deliver His message.

No one involved in witnessing should be so foolish as to think that a lost soul can be convinced to follow Christ merely by intellectual arguments. Nor should we despise the clear, simple proclamation of the gospel from the Word. But the New Testament has many examples of the wise use of other evidence—textual, prophetic, experiential, logical, and historical to name a few—to call people to "reason together, saith the Lord" in a sincere effort to show them that "though [their] sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa. 1:18). Let us then be "ready always to give an answer…a reason of the hope" within us (1 Pet. 3:15).

We are pleased to introduce to you Christian Evidences Ministries, a web-based ministry, whose main purpose is to provide reasons for believing the Bible. Make no mistake about it, the Christian Faith stands or falls on the reliability of the Bible. Thankfully, much evidence exists which demonstrates the Scriptures are a thoroughly trustworthy source of truth. Much of this information has been collected and displayed with college or high-school students in view. However, everyone will find the material very useful.

To organize this ever-growing array of apologetics-related material, they have developed a framework using the acronym M-A-P-S:

Manuscript Evidence: Proof of the Bible's Authenticity
Archeological Evidence: Proof of the Bible's Historicity

Prophetic Evidence: Proof of the Bible's Accuracy
Scientific Evidence: Proof of the Bible's Reliability

Visit Christian Evidences' web-site www.christianevidences.org to learn how this framework can be useful in fulfilling our responsibility to give a reason for what we believe.

If you ever had the desire to be like "Indiana Jones" and search for the artifacts of history, then this is the site for you. Did you know that between the paws of the Great Sphinx, there is evidence of the Passover as described in Exodus 12? Did you know that recent discoveries about "Neanderthal" man are setting evolutionary thought on its ear, and at the same time proves ancient man lived to the ages as described in Genesis 5? Did you know that Paul's writings anticipated aspects of Einstein's theory of relativity twenty centuries earlier? If not, then this is the site for you. After visiting this site we think you'll agree–evidence for the Bible is overwhelming!

Nike (April-May 2004)

From Uplook, April-May 2004. Editorial.

Swoosh. The world renowned shoemaker didn't get it quite right.

It was in 1957 that University of Oregon track coach Bill Bowerman met a middle distance runner named Phil Knight. After graduating with an MBA from Stamford, Knight began importing athletic shoes from Japan, selling them out of the trunk of his car. His first shipment of 200 pairs arrived in 1963. The next year Bowerman and Knight each contributed $500 and formed a partnership in what would become Nike Inc., named after the Greek goddess of victory. They paid an art student $35 for the famous swoosh design that became their logo. It was Bowerman's experiments with "rubber spikes" that changed the athletic shoe industry and the design of running shoes. He did this by pouring rubber into his wife's waffle iron! The corporation is now valued in the billions and is famous for its "Just Do It" slogan.

In fact nike (actually pronounced nee'-kay) is a Bible word. Its cognates nikao and nikos are variously translated conquer, overcome, prevail, and get the victory.

In Matthew 12:19-20, we have a wonderful promise from Isaiah's first Servant Song (ch. 42) applied to our Lord. Interestingly, rather than Just Do It, it tells us seven things that the Lord Jesus will not do: "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and

smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory (nikos).”

And how would this victory be won? O the glorious triumph of our Lord’s total defeat of our enemy! It is so thrilling that Paul uses the word not once but three times in quick succession: “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (nikos). O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory (nikos)?…But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory (nikos) through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54-55, 57).

John does him one better, using the word four time in two verses. Again the victory spoken about is ours, but as Paul states, ours through Christ. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh (nikao) the world: and this is the victory (nike) that overcometh (nikao) the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh (nikao) the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 Jn. 5:4-5). Again Phil Knight’s Just Do It slogan falls short of the secret of true victory. It is not in the doing of personal effort but in the believing, placing our undivided loyalty in Jesus as the Son of God, that brings us into victory.

John takes us in the Revelation on a tour of things to come. In heaven he sees the true victors from the darkest chapter in the history of Planet Earth. They are not the successes featured in Nike ads. There is no mention of their footwear. But we aretold where they stand. Having been through the fire and the water, John writes of them: “And I saw as it were a sea of glass

mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory (nikao)…" (Rev. 15:2). They, like the saints from other ages have discovered that the secret of true victory is found by making safe passage with the Victor Himself. He who passed through the billows of wrath at Calvary, who gave Himself as the ultimate Burnt Offering, has promised those who follow Him, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2). This is victory indeed!

Jephthah’s Vow for Victory (April-May 2004)

From Uplook, April-May 2004. Bible study.

The main outline of the story in Judges 10–11 is clear. After the death of the judge Jair, once again the Israelites had turned to idolatry of a most virulent kind. The Lord thus lifted His protective care from them and the Ammonites threatened to attack Israel from across the Jordan. When Israel appealed to God, He said He had no interest in being called upon only in their times of distress. “Go and cry unto the gods which you have chosen”(10:14), He responded. Undeterred, Israel turned to Jephthah, the illegitimate son of a harlot, for help. Having been previously “thrust out”by his brothers, he seems to have joined up with some unsavory fellows of the “wild east” in the heights of Gilead.

Though he at first refused for the same reason God had done (“Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father’s house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?,” 11:7), he later relented. And why? Because they promised that, if victorious, he would be their “head.” Unlike the other judges who appear content to do their work for God and pass from the scene, it seems Jephthah had grander plans to become the head of a ruling family. But such dreams of a dynasty came to nothing. The judge before Jephthah had 30 sons! The judge after had 30 sons and 30 daughters! But poor Jephthah had only one daughter. On her hung all his hope of a ruling family. But it was not to be. When the Ammonites attacked (after failed peace

negotiations), Jephthah vowed that, if the Lord gave him victory, “whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering” (11:31). To his grief, it was his only child. That much of the story is clear.

Now the question: did he really sacrifice his daughter in a macabre attempt to pay off God for His assistance? If so, it was in direct violation of the law’s prohibition (Deut. 18:9), Abraham’s offering of Isaac notwithstanding. That was “commanded but never intended”—to prove Abraham’s fealty to God. The answer to Micah 6:7, “Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” should be obvious.

Notice that Jephthah’s daughter does not ask for a two-month reprieve to bewail her death but her virginity (Jud. 11:37). And verse 39 explains: “her father…did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man.”The RV margin suggests the vow to read, “whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me…shall surely be the Lord’s, or I will offer it up for a burnt offering” (vv. 30-31). And the same version gives “celebrate” for “lament” in verse 40, and the marginal reading as “talk with,” suggesting that each year the young women met with his daughter to acknowledge her heroic act of submission. Those who suggest such could not be an admirable act might read 1 Corinthians 7:38 again.

How Are We Really Doing? (June 2004)

From Uplook, June 2004. Editorial.

It's the Number 1 question I'm asked wherever I travel in the North America.

The subject I am about to address in this editorial is, I believe, so vital that I have allowed myself the luxury of FIVE pages, something I've never done before. I trust that you will find it helpful.

The title of this editorial is a question I am often asked as I travel from place to place, visiting those seeking to meet—with varying degrees of success—as New Testament assemblies. How are New Testament assemblies doing? Are they dying out? What do you see happening in your travels? Let me remind us all of three important considerations:

1. North America is not the whole world. I beg the pardon of our readers in countries other than the U.S. and Canada. Perhaps it is true everywhere that we think in terms of our own country as our world. But it is important that we have a vision as big as the one in the Word. When people in North America or parts of the U.K. ask me, "Is this the Laodicean age?" I respond, "Not in China. Not in North India. Not in Korea. Not in Kenya."

We must remember—if we take the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 not only as real churches but as periods in church history—that the last FOUR churches are promised the coming of the Lord. Thyatira is offered

“the morning star” (2:28). Sardis is warned, “If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief…” (3:3); it seems their theology has robbed them of the blessed hope of His imminent return. Philadelphia hears the Saviour’s promise: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (3:11). Laodicea’s overcomers are told that Christ is right at the door, and they are promised a place on the very throne of the Lord! One thing this means: there will not only be Laodicean-type churches at the time of His coming, but those like Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia as well.

2. New Testament assemblies are not the whole church. How I thank the Lord for the great privilege of being associated with those gatherings of believers who—though in much weakness—seek to obey the Lord in “all things whatsoever” He commanded; who believe that the example of the New Testament Church is not only descriptive but prescriptive. But the groups of believers you may know are only a small portion of “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph. 3:15). Multitudes of faithful believers—some perhaps with less light but more heat—live for Him beyond your horizon. We hold to the truth of the one Body, which Paul lays out for us in Ephesians 4. There is the organic “unity of the Spirit,”an established fact based on the historic baptism at Pentecost. There is also the “unity of the faith”to which, Paul writes, we are coming. It is a long process, but it shall happen. Lord, haste the day!

May God help those who follow this New Testament design to be known for humility rather than pride, for an appreciation of these truths rather than for mere

traditionalism, and for a biblical vision for the future rather than walking backwards through life.

While we cherish “the memory of the just” who have gone before, I often sense a disconnect between our appreciation of those gospel pioneers and a willingness to follow their path.

It was a path of uncompromising separation from the world. (I don’t mean the hard legalists who mimicked their lifestyle but without their love for the Lord.) The pioneers, though they were well known in their communities (not confusing separation with isolation), would not have been caught dead in a movie theater or taking a social drink. Of course we feel we are more sophisticated now, having overcome such narrow-minded thinking. But those saints thought narrow-mindedness was a good thing—just the kind of thinking for those on the narrow road to glory. With so many of God’s people careening into the ditch these days, we might want to reconsider a narrower focus for our road Home.

It was also a path of simple living. They chose to curtail their wants and pour their resources into the Lord’s work. They thought the Lord meant it when He talked about not laying up treasures on earth. They took seriously the command not to buy expensive clothes. They found their satisfaction in the other world. And those of us who knew them saw that they did not miss anything worth having. They lived the verse: “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6).

It was a path of evangelistic fervor. They would be astounded at our paltry seed sowing. You expect a crop from that? they might ask. They gave out millions of

tracts; started radio broadcasts; opened orphanages; thrust out hundreds of missionaries; had gospel efforts in school rooms, jails, portable halls, tents, and on street corners. They never stopped evangelizing. They pulled up roots and moved to other places to break ground for new “works” as they called them, because that’s exactly what it took. They saw hundreds of assemblies started in only a few decades. It wasn’t by accident. They laid down their lives for the Cause. To slip into a church pew where the others didn’t care to remember the Lord each week wasn’t an option. If there was no group in town that followed the principles and practices of the New Testament as they understood them, they, with God’s help, started one! Who will follow in their train?

3. None of us has the whole story. That’s why we must “judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come…” (1 Cor. 4:5). The Lord is going to pull off the biggest rescue mission in history. Have you read the end of Psalm 22 lately? “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord’s: and He is the governor among the nations”(Ps. 22:27-28). Christ said the gates of hell would not prevail. I believe Him. Will many be lost? Sadly, yes. But will many millions more be saved than we know about? Absolutely. At present every Christian believes “He is altogether lovely.” In that Day they will also believe that “He hath done all things well.”

We often make the wrong—and discouraging—assumption that Elijah made. If I don’t hear of something going on, nothing must be going on. You’re the only one left, Elijah? Give or take 7,000! And that 7,000 didn’t include Elisha, or Naboth, or Micaiah, or

the school of the prophets, or the woman at Shunem, or…. We greatly under-estimate the job God is doing.

Some General Observations

Having said all that, how would I answer the question posed at the beginning? How are those New Testament assemblies that we know about in North America doing?

This is only one man's opinion; I represent no faction or school of thought. Some areas of the country I have never visited. Any who have read Uplook for some time know that I take a more conservative position than some; others would find me less so. But in spite of these limitations, some might find help, especially for your prayer time, in the following observations.

1. Some good work is being done but it is often not known, even to local believers. I sometimes inform saints of good things happening under their noses. Why? Because I ask people everywhere I go for news of encouraging works they know about. Compared to fast-moving gossip, good news drags its feet for some reason. Help get the good word out.

2. Opportunities abound on every hand. I hear some people bemoan our shrinking liberties, but we still have tremendous freedom. We should hardly know where to begin: hospitals, home Bible studies, local cable TV, college campuses. God still opens doors which no man can shut. But are we prepared to go through them when He gives us the opportunity?

3. Many regions have a good crop of young people. The big challenge? Each generation has its assets and liabilities. This generation, seeing the uncertainty of life in general, seems unwilling to make long-term

commitments. Help for a weekend? They're glad to throw themselves into it. Take a Sunday School class for life or commit to some mission field for the rest of their days? Just the thought makes many claustrophobic. They must get over it if they want to be used by the Lord in a significant way. "We shall reap ifwe faint not." Endurance works experience and experience results in hope, the process that brings fruit (Rom. 5:3-5).

And if you think you're still young at 35, let me pop the balloon. Half of your threescore-and-ten is gone. By age 35, men like T. E. Wilson and David Long were returning to their field of labor from their thirdfive-year furlough! They were already veterans. We need to pray this generation into commitment, to preach them the message given to Joshua: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee" (Josh. 1:9). When Bobby Wright, a missionary to Japan, would visit Ireland, he would sidle up to a young man and ask, "Where are you home on furlough from?" Good question.

4. Many are at odds about the way forward. There is still a strong movement to introduce major (some of us believe anti-biblical) changes into assembly life. There is an insistent call to the vulnerable to make arrangements with a capable brother to be their teaching elder. No one should dispute the importance, or the scripturalness, of men who follow gospel pioneers to shepherd the new lambs until they see elders raised up among them. This was the way Paul and Timothy worked. But that's very different to the idea of ensconcing a man in a position as "full-time worker" or "teaching elder" in a mature assembly. Hire one if you like (the word "hire"is not my word but the common misapplication of a two-fold

illustration in 1 Timothy 5:18—the Lord's servant is to not to be a hireling any more than he is an ox!), but I will tell you what will happen if you do. Those in fellowship before the brother is installed will manage to keep a sliver of distinction between "clergyman" and "pastor-teacher." But the majority who begin attending afterward will gather to the man and his ministry. How do I know? Because we have Church history as our witness, and have seen it happen in our time as well.

But some are a lot farther down that road. A recent job posting in Thinking Ahead magazine, the organ of Vision Ministries, states that one responsibility of the desired "Pastor of Worship Arts and Administration" is to "develop and implement moving worship experiences which complement the teaching-preaching." Is it not the ministry of the Holy Spirit to stir our hearts to worship? Be careful, brethren! This sounds dangerously like "strange fire" to me.

Brothers and sisters, we are at a crossroads. Those who recommend such retooling of assemblies may have insightful questions to ask about our present condition. But I'm afraid I don't like the answers being proffered. What is it that we need today? Where is the path ahead?

This will require courage. It will not be easy. Much ground has been lost. And we will have to be honest about our responsibility. Some elders have been AWOL. Many assemblies have given up on the gospel. With few being saved, assemblies become ingrown clubs where blessing, then vision, then hope, is lost. Rather than having the comprehensive teaching of the "whole counsel of God,"we can settle for ill-prepared sermonettes, then in desperation send our youth to be

institutionalized to learn the Bible. Though much good may be accomplished in attending these schools, malleable young people often learn things there that they should not have learned, and would not, if taught at home in biblical on-the-job training.

What Makes the Difference? Hope in the God of Hope

Those assemblies that are healthy, happy and effective seem to have common characteristics: a deep appreciation for spiritual worship; a sincere love for one another, spending quality time in each others' homes; an appetite for the pure Word of God, and for living it out; a heart for the lost, expressed in regular outreach in the community and in good works; and godly elders who model the same Christianity they teach by their daily lives.

What about those who are not doing well? There is no reason to despair. Our God can turn dust into men, curses into blessing, and sinners into saints. He likesto work in hopeless cases; it's His specialty. If your assembly is composed of "foolish…weak…base… despised…and…nothing"things, well, that's just the kind He's looking for (see 1 Cor. 1:27-29).

However, these foolish, weak, base, and despised people need the other side of the equation as well. So firmly convinced are we of our own foolishness that we must cling unreservedly to God's all-wise plan in His Word. Who can imagine thinking that we could improve on it by changing anything He has revealed. And weak? We know the only way we can make it is to lean hard on the One who said that His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Since we know we are base and despised, we seek no earthly glory, no improved corporate image for a "movement." We would rather fill heaven than fill big buildings. We want people only to think well of Christ. "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (see v. 29).

Deeply discouraged assemblies need first a rebirth of hope. You believe the Lord can change things; do you also believe He wants todo it starting with you, and starting today? He is standing at your door and is on call at this moment, ready to do a God-sized thing for you.

Then there needs to be a rebirth of vision. Vision is not creative imagination; it is seeing things as God sees them. It is a heart willing to be part of the solution and asking to be instructed by the Spirit on the next thing to do. It's not cleverness we need—it's commitment.

So there also needs to be a rebirth of consecration—all that I am and have on the altar for this great work. If we are going to rise to the challenge of our day it will cost many of us our lives, careers and bank accounts (Acts 15:25; 1 Jn. 3:16). Jesus thought it was worth that.

Make no mistake, the project is pricey. Have you wondered how George Müller was able to give to the Lord's work the equivalent of $25 million in today's money? I'll tell you. Like the first century saints, the believers who rediscovered the imminent return of Christ proved they believed it. They sold off excess things. One assembly took three days to auction their tapestries, silver and paintings. Many downsized their homes. Doctors and dentists often gave up practices to serve overseas. Lawyers like J. N. Darby became itinerant evangelists. Thousands were saved. Orphans were rescued by the hundreds. New publishing houses

sprang up and books packed with truth were virtually given away. Assembly writers dominated Christian publishing for decades. None of this was cheap. Fortunes were put at the disposal of the despised Nazarene.

Of course there is no need to liquidate if we plan on maintaining the status quo. The few pioneer evangelists we have left in North America seem to be able to scrimp by on a pittance. Special missionary projects can be funded by proceeds from the sale of buildings no longer needed by defunct assemblies. But this is bleak, defeatist talk. That's enough of that!

A Call to Arms (and Knees)

I would like to put a three-fold challenge to the people of God for prayerful consideration.

1. Young people (use any definition you like), take a good hard look at what this life can offer you. Then look at those dear Christians who have put it all on the line for the Master. Sing with reality, "Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss…my glory all the cross." See your assembly as the family business, though it may have fallen on hard times. God has put you there "for such a time as this." Take a bigger challenge than Lee Iacocca's in turning around Chrysler Corp. By God's grace, determine to do what it takes, to give what it requires, to be content only with the smile of heaven. In order for that to happen, "run, that you may obtain"(1 Cor. 9:24), not shadow boxing, but making every blow count for God (v. 26). If older ones, Saul-like, sit under a tree when the enemy is on the prowl, find another young person to go with you, Jonathan-like, and show the Philistines "a thing"or two (see 1 Sam. 14:12). Every

generation needs their own war stories. There's only one way to get them.

2. It's only anecdotal, but I would think one-quarter of the assemblies I know are doing well; another quarter are on life support; the other half are in the middle somewhere. What if, without interfering with their autonomy, each healthy assembly would "twin" with a nearby weak one. I mean by that for the elders to contact the brethren there, invite them for dinner and a time of prayer. Express your interest in helping where you can. Ask them to send an email each week before your midweek prayer time so your assembly can uphold theirs before the Lord regularly. Perhaps you could help with their expenses. Or fix up their building. Or have monthly fellowship times together, alternating locations. Or take your young folks there for door knocking or kid's clubs. If every healthy assembly was used by the Lord to help a struggling assembly back onto its feet, what a huge boost that would be for the work at large! This is not as radical as it may seem. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to think about the Jerusalem assembly in this way, considering this now struggling assembly as worthy of their sacrificial help (2 Cor. 8:14).

3. Finally, may those who not only care about their local assembly, but feel the "care of the churches" think about visiting together—not in an official way, nor to present some new model for church growth, but simply as concerned brethren—to seek the Lord's face for His counsel, to think in fresh but biblical ways, and to strengthen our hands for "this good work" (Neh. 2:18) that we may more effectively serve our generation, as faithful believers now in glory served theirs.

PS Surely a special reward awaits those who read it all!

Taking Aim at the Future (June 2004)

From Uplook, June 2004. Article.

What we hope to do with the magazine in the months ahead.

We all have limited time and resources to accomplish the will of God for us. This is especially true of preparing young people in our assemblies. From their early teens, when they should become active participants in assembly life, until many of them move elsewhere for education or employment, it is a few short years. Do we have a plan to establish them in the faith?

I don't mean that it must be formally laid out as a college degree might be. But do we at least have an idea as to general areas where we should be preparing them for the future?

We intend over the next several months to introduce some topics to stimulate our thinking and provide suggestions about developing skills necessary for maturing young believers.

In a recent article in Precious Seed magazine, I wrote the following (excerpted):

"As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth" (Ps. 127:4). Every arrow, like every life, has a point. But the arrow must be prepared, then hidden for a time in the quiver. At the right moment it is selected, aimed, and released, speeding its way to the target.

We surely must think about the target. What are the spiritual skills we would like young disciples to acquire

and how will we teach them these things? Here are a few suggestions.

1. To be servants. Most churches in Christendom have paid servants or ministers, and are designed for people who want to be served. But the original design was that everyone was to be a minister. The Lord wants to maximize the sacrifice in order to maximize the blessing. Teaching our young people by example how to be servants is one of the greatest thing we do for them.

2. To be stewards. Every young believer must learn how to handle the Lord's possessions. Their bodies are not their own, but temples of God's Spirit. Their material possessions are borrowed and will have to be accounted for: "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10). Their time is also a sacred trust.

3. To be witnesses. The pictures of evangelism—farming, fishing, and fighting—are high risk endeavors. We need to teach young believers the essentials of the gospel, the critical role of prayer and the Spirit's guidance, and the skills necessary to win souls for Christ. The New Testament does not treat evangelism as a hobby, nor should we.

4. To be students. Diligence in studying the Word should be taught, not learned hit-or-miss. Teaching a young believer to rightly divide the Word is of lifelong benefit to himself and to others, protecting from error, preserving from sin, and equipping for service.

5. To be warriors. This is vital in a day when many believers are falling in battle. One must learn how to put on the armor, to wield the Spirit's sword, and do battle on our knees in prayer.

6. To be fruit-bearers. This will involve time alone with the Lord, being wholehearted in our obedience to Him, and allowing the heavenly Gardener to prune us all that we might bear “much fruit” and that our fruit “might remain.”

This issue focuses on learning to be worshippers. Subsequent issues, Lord willing, will look at other important courses of study needed to equip young saints so they are “thoroughly furnished unto all good works”(2 Tim. 3:17).

Hymns & Spiritual Songs (June 2004)

From Uplook, June 2004. Article.

The debate is heating up over music in the assembly.

The first picture that comes to mind when we hear the word “singing” would usually be a happy one. But more and more, differing views about music in assembly life are turning friendly discussions into heated dissension—even unhappy divisions. This is especially disconcerting since “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19) is listed as the first evidence of being filled with the Spirit! What is happening?

For centuries, the musical heritage of a civilization was shared by all ages, passed down from father to son. The Hebrew songs, sung in a style that can still be heard in the streets of Israel today, were lisped by her little children, whispered by her mothers at their bedsides, and sung triumphantly by her armies as they marched into battle.

However, in the last century, culture has been turned on its head. Perhaps youth have always longed for the day when they could make significant changes to the way things were done, but now they no longer need wait. They have short-circuited the system and hijacked their cultures. Music styles of the young now drive society.

At the same time, Christian music, influenced by musicians like Keith Green, became a mixed marriage—the world’s hard-driving sounds linked with Christian lyrics. The argument went: music is composed of black notes; these notes are neither good nor evil; therefore

any type of music may be harnessed to Christian words to be a legitimate form of the expression of faith. Sometimes they included Luther's use of beer hall tunes for his hymns, an argument which has been disproved. But the "black dot" argument is just as suspect. Are pornographic photos also merely an arrangement of dots? We need better reasoning than that for the vehicles of our worship.

Only the uninformed would give blanket approval to all hymn lyrics. "The darkness shall turn to dawning" is a prime example of less-than-biblical lyrics, ideal for amillennialists. Likewise, we hope none would blindly reject, or accept, every contemporary chorus—like the one pleading that the Lord "take not"His Spirit from us; it seems only suitable for its Charismatic composers who do not believe in eternal security.

Most hymns and some choruses can be an appropriate and helpful part of corporate worship. But I would mention three areas of concern. First, since psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are for "speaking to yourselves" (Eph. 5:19), they are intended to warm our hearts so that we might express worship to the Lord in our own words. One could logically conclude, then, that the number of hymns would diminish as the meeting progressed, and more worship would be given in verbal expressions of thanksgiving, rather than borrowed from others.

Second, we should want appropriate words. Many choruses are "spiritual songs," subjective rather than objective, and intended to minister to the singers rather than to bring worship to the Lord. If our worship is to be

a sweet-savor burnt offering—all for Him—we will leave all such subjective lyrics for other times.

Third, there is a trend toward accompaniment at the Lord's Supper. Some may feel this enhances the singing and cite Old Testament use of instruments, but note: OT worship was of a primitive form, largely external and designed to artificially stimulate multitudes of Israelites who were only associated by natural birth and, Saul-like, needed outside stimulation to move their inward beings. David needed no such help; he had the song within.

Also, there were no instruments ever in the sanctuary. You might make a case for instrumental use on other occasions, but at the Lord's Supper we, unlike Israel, go inside the veil, where all distractions and additions must be left outside. I agree that some acapella attempts may barely qualify for making "a joyful sound" but the solution to poor singing is not to disguise it with instruments. We need to take some fellowship time to learn to sing the hymns properly so our objective, unadorned, biblically accurate, spiritual worship may ascend to Him.

Stirring the Stew (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Editorial.

Some passages of Scripture—and some preachers—give the impression that Christians should actually give up everything they own. But is that true? What Christians should do is give up ownership of everything they have. Therein lies a subtle but crucial difference. Paul would describe it in this cryptic paradox: “as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:10). He does not say we should be poor (although we acknowledge that some of our brothers and sisters are poor in material things). Instead Paul writes, “as poor”; we are to act as if we are poor—to be frugal with what we spend on ourselves, but lavish in the resources we invest in the great work of God, so that we are “making many rich.”Likewise he does not say that we have nothing, but that our lifestyle expresses the reality that every penny we have to use is not ours but His who bought us by His own blood. How can you be a steward if you have nothing to stew with?

This issue of Uplook includes articles on the four basic areas of Christian stewardship—our time, talents, things and truth. These form a comprehensive whole. One or two of them will not accomplish the massive task set before the Church. For example, investing large amounts of money without sacrificing men will not do it. Every assembly should be willing to give up the best servants they have to a wider ministry if the Spirit so directs. Can you imagine what it cost the Antioch assembly to loose Paul and Barnabas from local church involvement so they could fulfill the work to which He

had called them? But how much poorer we all would be without the teaching and examples that these men provided. Antioch seemed to be a good-sized assembly, but think of the two smaller works in Lystra and Derbe willing to release Timothy (perhaps their brightest and most hopeful protégé). Nor will it be a viable project if we send out servants without supplies. The servant should not be unwilling to "make tents" at times, but assemblies will be held to account for not faithfully supporting those whom they send, both with prayers and provisions. Some brethren seem to be working with a 1960s financial framework, feeling themselves to be quite generous when the gift barely covers travel costs. Of course these servants are looking to the Lord and are not expecting to be "paid for services rendered," nor do they want to be burdensome to small or struggling groups to whom they minister. But in my experience there seems to be a direct relationship between material generosity on the part of believers and their spiritual enrichment by the Lord, who is no man's debtor.

In addition, we should remember those who have not crossed oceans but are missionaries nonetheless, pioneer evangelists who remain virtually unknown to many North American assemblies. We should not expect them to spend time circulating among established assemblies in order to "become known" (hint, hint) so the Christians would be "exercised" about them (nudge, nudge). Of course it is the Lord who meets their needs and we know He can use ravens on occasion when His people are insensitive to the need, but His preferred method is to utilize the Lord's people so they also are enriched in the process.

Yet sacrificing such able servants, and supporting them, will still come to nothing if the truth committed to us as a sacred trust (2 Tim. 2:2) is squandered. To let these truths “slip” (Heb. 2:1) or “dribble away” has been a danger since the first century, but never more so than in this age of doctrinal illiteracy and pragmatic compromise, when tolerance—even in divine things—is held as a virtue. God help us to speak the truth in love but never to forget that we are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1).

Please Read This First! (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

How important it is to begin by aligning ourselves under God.

This issue is the result of a deep exercise that seems to have been growing simultaneously in the hearts of many North American believers. It cannot be stressed enough that if this burden is going to bear fruit for God (rather than being a mere topic of discussion), it must not be a stimulus to rely on the arm of flesh. Although Nehemiah responded to the need by moving to Jerusalem, assessing the project during his lonely night ride, calling the people to rise up and build, answering the criticisms (sure to surface whenever anything is attempted for God), and making suggestions as to how the work could most effectively progress, the following should also be noted:

• the first and essential step was made in the sanctuary: “I sat down and wept, and mourned…and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (Neh. 1:4). Nothing will happen without this.

• this praying encompassed worship, intercession, supplication, confession and a claiming of the promises of Scripture (see vv. 5-10).

• Nehemiah’s supplication concluded with his making himself available for the service of the Lord, whatever that might cost (v. 11)—including, obviously, a leave of absence from his employment for a time.

Once the necessary repair work was assessed and the people rallied to the work, it is obvious that there was constant contact with Headquarters. God was welcome to change any plans that His servants in good faith had made. In this the books of Nehemiah and Acts agree. The apostles planned and acted, first praying that the Lord would direct their steps. And He did exactly that. When they "assayed to go into Bithynia" (Acts 16:7), the Spirit's redirection was most welcome. This conscious and constant aligning of themselves under the eye of God was key to their success. Nehemiah wrote when the work was finished in a mere fifty-two days: "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God" (6:16). In a similar way, Mark reminds us that "they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them…" (16:20). Luke states: "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved"(2:47, NKJV); "And the hand of the Lord was with them" (11:21).

However, it should not be thought that we need a second call to do the work of preaching the gospel to every creature. God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). To this end, Paul—who was only in Athens to rendezvous with his fellow workers—felt constrained to declare: "God…now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Since the Church has received a "general call" to evangelize the world, why are some waiting for an "effectual call" to be personally involved in this great work? When 100 believers converged on

Little Rock, AR, for a concerted gospel effort, some observers asked, “Why Little Rock?” To which we would politely respond, “Why not Little Rock, brother?” Surely every village, town and city was included in the Saviour’s great appeal to go with the gospel to every soul.

This does not negate what has previously been said. On occasion, the Lord will redirect our efforts. This we welcome. Who would not want to know that “a great door and effectual” had been opened to us, though “there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9)? How our hearts would thrill to hear the Lord of the vineyard tell us, as He told Paul concerning Corinth, “I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:10). Yet barring specific directives, we should do as the early believers did, “everywhere preaching the Word” (8:4).

It is our heart-felt desire that the following observations from Scripture and (hopefully) practical suggestions for implementing these principles will be a stimulus to us all —to contemplation, conviction, confession, communion, consecration and co-operation in this great work, and that it will be for the ultimate glory of God alone.

Why This Is a Golden Moment (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

Five unequaled factors have converged in our path. They must be seized—or lost.

History provides opportune moments unequally. It is not every day that we may grasp them. See the upheaval in Congo, once fertile for missionary enterprise. The thrilling open door to Russia seems to be in the process of closing, forced shut by the very people who claim to be Christ's representatives. As well, freedoms here in the West, if unused, will be lost. And the rising tide of materialism in China may curtail gospel zeal there as communism never could.

> *There is a tide, in the affairs of men,*
> *Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune…*
> *On such a full sea are we now afloat,*
> *And we must take the current when it serves,*
> *Or lose our ventures (W. Shakespeare).*

Of course we would not question the graciousness of God. His longsuffering heart finds ways to turn back the clock, to "restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten"(Joel 2:25). Yet the Bible is full of incidents of missed opportunities and the warning to buy up the time, not gambling on the possibility of another chance, because "thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1).

What makes this moment in history so strategic for assemblies of God's people? Here are a few suggestions:

1. We have an unequalled opportunity to take North America for Christ. Literacy is high. There are now more than 60 million foreign-born people on the continent, the highest number ever. This means that we can reach out to almost any mission field in the world—at our doorstep, and often in our language, with democratic liberties (for how long, we do not know).

2. We have an unlimited range of possible methods and ministries. Who, a century ago, could have guessed that we would have digital printing, television, radio, email, the world wide web, jet travel, mobile phones, let alone GPS, DVDs, MP3s, and whatever may be around the corner? Are we thinking how we may utilize these tools for Christ? It was believers who invented the codex or book as we know it, and who first utilized printing. If we are going to serve our well-connected generation (see Acts 13:36), we certainly have been offered an array of tools to use in communicating the truth to them.

3. We have an outstanding generation of young champions. Generally, they have a wonderful combination of serious commitment to New Testament church truth and an eagerness to think in fresh but biblical ways about fulfilling the Commission. They seem to be energized, not enervated, by the challenge of struggling local churches. They are not prepared to bail out, increasing the problems. They want to be part of the solution. We salute all such “vessels of honor” and need to pray for, encourage, equip and support them every chance we get.

4. We have a massive supply of frozen assets. We have at our disposal many with latent spiritual ability and technical skills galore. We have multiplied millions in the

bank and in real estate (a solemn stewardship). And although we complain of being habitually busy, our generation has more time to use as we wish than any previous age. We have rapid transit, time-saving devices, and most have substantial holidays. Our problem is in the time-wasting department. Christian fiction, TV watching, and recreational activities on occasion may have a place but, even if beneficial, they are profitable only “for a little” (1 Tim. 4:8).

5. We have a strategic chance to rethink the message which we proclaim. It has been said that the message does not change; only the methods do. But is that true? Certainly the essentials of the gospel must always be included. But the way the early Christians preached to Jewish Pharisees was different from the way they spoke to pagan Gentiles. We must understand how to communicate to our post-modern world. When we hand out tracts with stories of sea captains on sailing ships and missionaries in China, what are we saying? We can hardly blame our audience if they think Christianity is outdated and irrelevant. Now is the time to seize the opportunity!

“Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (Mt. 24:46).

The Neglected Middle Tier (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

We've got fizzle, not sizzle. What's missing in the mix?

We often appear to have mechanics without dynamics, principles without the power. Is there more to discover about the Church in the book of Acts? Is it time for Powerscourt II?

Surrounded by a roomful of eager young disciples, I had just finished "waving the flag" for the idea of meeting according to the Church pattern as laid out for us in the New Testament. It was not only a good theological idea, I told them passionately; it was a good practical idea as well. The Church, as the Lord designed it, was persecution-proof; ideal for the rapid deployment of the gospel; structured to minimize the glory of man and maximize the glory of Christ. It would work among tribal peoples, in prison camps, and among the disenfranchised poor in inner cities. It was simple, functional, and beautiful. It even seems to be designed so a bad assembly could be a good school, teaching me grace, patience, longsuffering, love—in short, Christlikeness—just what I need.

An older Christian nearby (whom I suspect was unhappy with my zeal for what he considered to be an unacceptable status quo) asked pointedly: "Do you think [John Nelson] Darby had it all right?"

Well, no. We are thankful for his helpful translations, his tireless gospel work, his voluminous commentaries and

his lofty hymns. But I don't believe Darby had it entirely right, especially regarding the concepts of the church in ruins, corporate defilement ad infinitum, and exclusive reception policies.

"Oh, but you have it all right?" he returned, his voice with, I thought, a scalpeled edge to it.

My response at that time: "Well, brother, if there are areas of concern, tell us, and we'll compare them with Scripture to see what the truth really is."

End of conversation. But it was not the end of my thinking on the matter. Was it possible that the things we had seen were true—beautiful, lofty, gripping truths like the priesthood of all believers and the practical headship of Christ—but that the weakness in much assembly life at present had to do with what we were not seeing?

Careful observers of the New Testament writings concerning the early Church will notice three distinct tiers of information, although there is some blending between the various levels. I would like to suggest for your prayerful consideration that many who think of themselves as New Testament assemblies have a good grasp of two out of those three tiers. But the middle tier seems to be neglected in our thinking these days.

The Basic Tier 1 Truths

At the most basic level, there is historical and cultural data. All believers notice these facts. We see the way in which the early believers spoke, the territory they covered, and the modes of travel they used. We notice the current issues they faced—such as not eating food offered to idols, their painful disengagement from Jewish

national life, and their clashes with the pagan philosophies and lifestyles.

This information is not trivia. We should be inspired by the prodigious work done by a handful of believers with limited resources against massive opposition. And we may learn much from it. Some cultures around the world still struggle with the problem of food offered to idols. The arguments used against Jewish legalism and Greek philosophy are useful for similar antagonists to the gospel today. But hopefully most of us understand that the Lord is not subtly telling us by including this tier to use only parchments, wear cloaks and sandals, speak koiné Greek, or travel by sailing ships, because the apostles did these things. Yet there are principles which we may apply today.

Those Blessed Tier 3 Truths

It has generally been agreed that certain New Testament truths were almost completely lost to the Church at large for hundreds of years. Miller's Church History and Broadbent's Pilgrim Church unearth marginal groups, persecuted and despised by both civil authorities and state churches, who had varying degrees of light on some of these truths. But it was not until the early 1800s that the wraps came off these family treasures, long covered with the dust of years and stored away, neglected and forgotten.

It is not this issue's intention to focus on these breathtaking truths; they are (or should be) well known to Uplook readers. They include: the aforementioned practical headship of Christ and the priesthood of all believers; the presidency of the Holy Spirit; the final authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and

practice; the centrality of the weekly remembrance of the Lord; the plurality of spiritual elders; the organic unity and giftedness of each member of the one Body; the blessed hope of soon being with and like Christ; and the autonomy of each local assembly. We might also add the crucial distinction between Israel, the Kingdom and the Church, however many dispensations one might recognize.

Along with these we should keep in mind those general doctrines not specifically related to Church life but recognized as orthodox truth by every true believer. For example, the trinity and unity of the Godhead; the full deity and perfect humanity of Christ; salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Christ; the everlasting blessedness of the believing and the everlasting woe of the unrepentant, etc.

These magnificent revelations from the heart of God can never be taught too often nor held too dear. We are not calling for a minimizing of these blessed truths in any way. Shout them from the housetops. Weave them into your thanksgiving. Teach them to your children. Believe them with all your heart. But in embracing these blessings, are we missing other vital parts to God's present program for the Church?

The Missing Middle Tier

It would be, I think, a valuable exercise for the Lord's people who are serious about New Testament living to open to the book of Acts with this prayer on their lips: "Lord, show us every detail in this book. Keep us from assuming that we know it all. Teach us what we're missing and then give us the courage and wisdom to live out allthe counsel of God."

On the following pages I want to suggest fifteen truths well nigh lost from much assembly life in North America. These are principles and practices which we need to see and seek to practice; some may have seen some of these, although most would acknowledge there is still room for improvement. (If you are doing some of these, please don't be satisfied until you're doing them all!) May the Lord Jesus grant us much grace to happily embrace whatever truth the Spirit may reveal to us from the Word—just as the early believers did (Acts 2:41).

Thinking Big (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Bible study.

We need David thinking in a Goliath world. Acts 1:6-8

How does the book of Acts begin? The disciples asked the Saviour (only moments from leaving), “Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6). He responded, “Ye shall receive power… and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8).

They were thinking small—of Israel; the Lord was thinking big—of the whole world. They were thinking about the past and restoring it; He was thinking about the present and redeeming it. They were thinking defensively; He was thinking offensively. They were longing for Israel. But He longed for the whole aching planet to come to Him. Whose view won the day? Obviously it was the disciples that caught the Saviour’s vision. A short time later, Paul could write: “Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom. 1:8). More than that, “The gospel…was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23)!

Please note what I am not saying. This is no call for a man-designed, man-driven mass movement or for large religious pep rallies or for assemblies a mile wide and an inch thick. Apart from the initial gathering in Jerusalem (which was scattered—purposefully, the Greek suggests), it seems the majority of assemblies were not large. Many met in houses. Like a body, size has its healthy limits. How can shepherds know hundreds of

sheep well enough to meet their needs? But what I wish to say is that the early believers knew the Commission was for them personally, for their day. Does each of us know that? Do we wake every morning with this in mind? Whatever else I do for me, for mine, or for my employer, my Number 1 reason for living today is to do the will of the One who died for me. His will is that I be a witness for Him everywhere I go and to those I meet. That's what New Testament believers thought He meant and so that's what they did: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word"(Acts 8:4). Ignoring the impossibilities, they took Him at face value.

Is it possible to reach every creature in each generation? Jesus thought so. But if we are to do it in our day, there's no time to lose. As never before, "the harvest truly is great"; "the fields are white unto harvest"; "the laborers are few"; and "the time is short."

Let's think big. Suppose I said, "Imagine if the Lord gave assemblies in North America 10,000 new baby lambs to look after in the coming month." Is that thinking big? Hardly. Assuming only the 1200 New Testament assemblies across the continent that I know about, that's just six or seven lambs each. By contrast, the 120 believers (not assemblies) in the early chapters of Acts were given more than 8,000 lambs the first week! Now there's a challenge. But the Lord thought they, with the Spirit's help, could handle it. And somehow they did. But these thousands were just the beginning of the harvest; what would that be out of the 300 million in North America? Or more than six billion worldwide?

What Can We Do?

Our prayers need to be larger: “for all [mankind]” (1 Tim. 2:1). Our vision of what the Lord wants to do through us personally needs to be greater. Our assemblies need to be more strategic, using our time more wisely, finding better ways to broadcast the seed. We need to support our pioneer evangelists better, practically and prayerfully. We need to become better informed about the people around us and the opportunities available. And we need to obey the Lord’s command to be witnesses unto Him, seeking His blessing on His Word which He says shall not “return void.”

A United Strategy (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

Autonomy has become independency. It's time to work together. Acts 14:21-23; 20:17-35

Without cell phones, email, or faxes, the early believers kept in touch. It seems from his writings that Paul knew the spiritual state of most if not every assembly within his sphere of influence. Although constantly harassed by civil and religious authorities, the Christians doggedly pursued their goal of world evangelization. The Jewish Sanhedrin, the Roman Empire, the Gates of Hell, could not stop them. Occasionally it looked like one thing would stop them—division (Acts 6:1-5; also chs. 11 and 15)! But the matters were wisely and quickly resolved, and the gospel work continued unabated.

"How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!…there the Lord commanded the blessing"(Ps. 133:1, 3). I know there are challenges, but if there is any place that those committed to the principles of New Testament gathering should be able to unite, it should be around the gospel banner and against our common foe. Blessed (though often bloodied) are the peacemakers.

We were heartened by the hundred intrepid souls who gathered from various assemblies to labor together in the gospel in Minot, ND. We salute them for their courage and grace, trusting the Lord inspires many more co-operative efforts like this. I dare say it brought joy to the heart of the One who prayed, "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee,

that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (Jn. 17:21).

That last phrase reminds us that we cannot expect the sinner to believe he can be reconciled to a holy God if we cannot even be reconciled to one another. And if we have the Lord's approval, what is the criticism of men? "A very small thing" indeed (1 Cor. 4:3).

I understand the problems: what kind of gospel effort; what kind of music, if any; what kind of dress for participants; and the nature of the assembly that hopefully will result. But surely reasonable brethren can discuss and resolve these matters when the honor of God, the salvation of souls, and the blessing of the saints lie in the balance. As Paul would write: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [mature], be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Phil. 3:15). Paul was not expecting some Christians to relinquish God-given convictions based on clear biblical truth; but if it is the Lord's work and we are His servants, surely He can show us all how He wants it to be done.

So what would a united New Testament-style strategy look like? Here are a few suggestions.

1. We would follow their path. Let's look at the way the apostles worked. In Acts 14, Luke lays it out for us in point form so we don't miss it: "And when they had PREACHED THE GOSPEL to that city, and had TAUGHT MANY, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, CONFIRMING THE SOULS of the disciples, and EXHORTING THEM to continue in the faith, and [WARNING THEM] that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when

they had ORDAINED THEM ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH, and had PRAYED WITH FASTING, they COMMENDED THEM to the Lord, on whom they believed" (vv. 21-23). There it is: preaching, teaching, confirming, exhorting, warning, recognizing, praying and commending. It took differing amounts of time to accomplish this (several weeks to two years). But they began with unbelievers and left with functioning elders within that time frame.

This has been done in modern times as well. Read J. J. Rouse's Pioneer Work in Canada or the biography of Donald Ross. The work of Oliver Smith in Iowa is a good example of persistent and effective gospel work followed by the establishment of assemblies, as are the concerted efforts in Newfoundland. The early days in North Carolina proved fruitful ground when evangelists were followed by those who shepherded and instructed new believers. Southwestern Ontario has examples where John Martin and his fellow workers have labored. And this field was the inspiration for the establishment of scores of works in Belgium in a relatively short period of time. But it is no part-time hobby. It is real work. Team work. The Lord's work.

In his book It Can Be Done, William Williams tells of the way a handful of missionaries took on the challenge of the country of Venezuela. In one generation they thoroughly evangelized it, preaching the gospel in every city, town and village in the country. There is no reason it cannot be done here as well. The thrilling works in many other countries could also be cited.

2. No one would need to work alone. I know servants of the Lord in North America who are great evangelists.

They see people saved. But the baby lambs drift off after a while, looking for grass because they are not being fed. Who will move to such places, get a job to pay the bills, and then minister to these fledgling believers through teaching the Word?

O that the Lord would raise up an army of young couples willing, like Priscilla and Aquila, to move to new areas, get tent-making jobs, then use their homes as beachheads for the gospel and havens for new believers (see Acts 18:18). But how much better if at least two couples could labor together in establishing new outposts for the Lord.

If Christians, instead of playing in the shallows, will "launch out into the deep" to catch "a draught of fishes," not just ones and twos, they will need our help. "And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships" (see Lk. 5:1-7).

At present a few couples are seeking to do just this, but I fear they receive little encouragement. They need our regular prayers, plus calls, visits, and practical ministry. They should not feel they are laboring alone and forgotten (see note from Lakeland, FL in Front Lines, for example).

Are you praying for Memphis, TN, that God will do a new thing there? For Phoenix (now 75 miles across) with one small assembly? Or its suburb, Mesa, which has now passed the population of Atlanta? For Mobile, AL, and Stockton, CA, for Tallahassee and Pensacola, FL? And who is interceding for Pueblo, CO and Kalamazoo, MI? Even in southern Ontario, what about Fort Erie and Grimsby? Think of the "foreign mission field" of Quebec

and the desperate need among native peoples, the burgeoning Hispanic, Asian, Arab & African-American populations

3. We would see North America as a mission field. If a missionary came from some other continent, we would find it quite appropriate if he used a map with locations marked to show existing assemblies and areas where work was needed. But do we get out our maps to look at North America? Do we have the facts about the people groups in the area where we are hoping to evangelize? Do we study the beliefs of those we long to see saved?

The early believers certainly had done their homework. Paul capitalized on the differences in belief between Sadducees and Pharisees (Acts 22). He knew what the Stoics and Epicureans believed as well as the Jews gathered at Mars' Hill (Acts 17). And John had to understand the Gnostic philosophy in order to effectively answer its false claims. We shouldn't expend our lives learning about every cult, but we should care enough to learn the mental impediments that people have in coming to Christ. The Bible has a specific answer to every specific challenge, whether to the cults that visit our doors (to whom we must speak with both grace and truth) or those waves of Hindus, Moslems and Buddhists flooding our countries.

4. We would keep in touch better. I spoke to a pioneer in Montana recently. I asked, "Would you say that there are about 20 assemblies in North America that even know you exist?" He thought that was about right. But it's not right. We need to be better informed, be in touch more, help each other more. Of course that means we'll have to do other things less to free up our resources. But

what an encouragement it would be if each week we asked a smaller assembly for their prayer list, and called an isolated worker somewhere to pass on some much needed encouragement. This will become increasingly important as we pray and plan to see the Lord thrust hundreds of workers out into the white harvest fields on this continent.

5. We would share resources. The Jerusalem council (Acts 15) is a good example of responsible brethren with a mutual concern, meeting to maintain a co-ordinated and united front against the enemy. Would it not be wise for like-minded men involved in the care of God's people to meet regularly and regionally? They would not only want a time for prayer, encouragement (through the Word and positive reports of the Lord's blessing); there should be times to speak of needs to be met in struggling area assemblies and how best to help them—not always by sending Sunday speakers. They may need help fixing up their building. Or a visit from our young people to help with a children's outreach. Or their struggling elders may need a prayer, discussion, and encouragement time with other elders.

Let's remember that there are two aspects to the life of the Body. Our interconnectedness is not only at the local church level but with other assemblies of believers as well (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:12).

Ceaseless Witness (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

We all have a strategic part to play in the Big Rescue Operation.

I just asked a highly committed young disciple what he thought the Great Commission meant for him personally. His response: “to shine for the Lord where I live.” It is certainly true that the Lord desires that we function as lights where we are. But how does “where I live” relate to going “into all the world”? If each of us stays where we are, how will they see the light in areas still in the dark?

This does not mean that everyone is called across the world, but I think it does mean that everyone is called at least across the street—maybe even across their city, state or province.

There has clearly been a retreat from the idea that every person in the world is either a missionary or a mission field. Many Christians feel that it is not their gift; only certain specially-equipped individuals are qualified for this work of evangelism. Let them do it; I’m not cut out for it, we say.

Some valiantly show up for neighborhood “cold call” door knocking with all the joy of a dental patient submitting for root canal surgery. Others haltingly leave a tract or two behind at restaurants or perhaps feel their obligation is fulfilled by attending a weekly gospel meeting. Of course the Lord will find a way to use every little bit done for Him, but is this enough?

Some assemblies, feeling collective guilt over a lack of personal gospel work, may invite a dynamic evangelist to show them how to do it. And this can be very helpful —if the evangelist doesn't give the impression that everyone must be a fearless frontline combatant like he is. Instead he should let them know that there is room for everyone on the team. There are unlimited possibilities.

Not every believer in New Testament days was a gifted evangelist, nor did everyone do it the same way. But notice, "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The commission to go "into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15) includes you and me. We are not all evangelists, but we are all to be witnesses. If we are willing to be involved, God will give us each a custom-designed way to fulfill it.

There are sisters in Belfast who send a comfort card and gospel literature to every bereaved family listed in the obituary columns of their newspapers. An aged "retired" missionary in Cardiff sends greetings to local Muslim families with an offer of a Bible course. There are jail ministries, hospitals and senior homes to visit, evangelistic Bible studies, radio and local public access TV (often for free). There are neighborhood kid's clubs, after-school outreaches, and a million more opportunities. For those already involved, our prayer for you is that you might be "…fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:10).

And for those not yet involved? Note the words of Ephesians 6:15, "…your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." How do we prepare our feet for

taking the gospel? For “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15).

Do you believe your neighbors and workmates are lost? Then make a prayer list of those you want to see saved. Surely this is the first evidence that we care about their plight. Then buy some good gospel tracts or get an audio tape with a good gospel message to hand out. Write out your testimony, simply, clearly, with as little “Christianese” as possible, to give away (have it proofread first). Ask the Lord every day for boldness (Acts 4:29), for “utterance” (Eph. 6:19), i.e., the right thing to say, and for God-arranged opportunities. Go into the day thinking of something you especially enjoy about God’s salvation (Now That’s Amazing Grace by William MacDonald or Key Bible Concepts by David Gooding and John Lennox will help you) and ask the Lord to let someone bring up the subject. He can and will do it! I know; I’ve asked Him.

Death to excuses and the desire that the lost think well of us! People in hell hope you’ll witness to their relatives (Lk. 16:27-28). Don’t wait till you have all the answers; by then you’ll be in heaven. No one needs the gospel there.

Barring unusual circumstances (eg., all in your assembly have been struck dumb), can you claim to be a New Testament church if the Christians in your local fellowship are not being taught how nor expected to share the gospel every day? That’s what Acts Christianity looks like!

Yes, Good Works (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

Good works and the gospel are the winning combo. Let's team up!

When Mother Teresa and Princess Diana died within days of each other, it was evident that their lives had virtually nothing in common, except this: they both were known for doing good works. It was obvious from its response that the world still appreciates good works. Isn't it amazing how much of our Lord's earthly ministry was involved in doing good works? He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), tirelessly ministering to the needs of others. And this was a pattern that the early believers followed. For example, "There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha…this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds" (Acts 9:36). Her winsome ministry softened the ground along the Sharon Plain so that Peter's seeding bore a mighty harvest. It could be the same today, couldn't it?

We have rightly preached against good works as a means of salvation. They are non-meritorious. Although we should not give the impression in our gospel preaching that good works are a bad thing. Recall Cornelius, whose prayers and almsgiving had come up as a memorial before God (Acts 10:4). Please also note, those who say that God does not hear the prayers of the unconverted!

We have also correctly opposed good works as a substitute for the gospel—the so-called social gospel. No doubt it is easy to get distracted by social programs that

meet only the needs of the body and neglect the eternal soul.

But having said that, Ephesians 2 links salvation by grace apart from works with the following words: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (v. 10). The busyness of our lives, increasing isolation in society, and an assumption that governments (or social agencies) now handle the good works department, has neutralized one of our greatest assets for winning souls.

A young believer I knew, who was saved out of a very dysfunctional home, took as his key verse, “Love never fails.” He set about to win his hardened family with deeds of kindness. He looked after his debilitated father, bathing and shaving him as his father would curse him. But love never fails, and his father was won to Christ. His twin brother (who beat him unmercifully when he told the family he had been saved) was reached in prison. Then his sister. One by one they succumbed to loving works that opened their hearts to the Saviour’s entrance.

When he would take tracts door-to-door, he carried a trash bag to pick up garbage along the way, because, as he said, “They don’t care about my tract, but they do care about their trash. Maybe if I pick up the one, they’ll pick up the other.” Because love never fails.

I think half the saints feel disenfranchised. They find it very difficult to communicate the gospel to strangers. But they would be thrilled to show some practical kindness to a sick or needy neighbor. “These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have

believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men" (Titus 3:8). And who is my neighbor? (I know the answer because I read the story.) Anyone who crosses my path who has a need that I can meet.

What happens when we do some good deed? "…they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). You must give the Lord the credit, of course; otherwise they will think you are just a good person. But Paul links good works with our fruitfulness! Is it possible that we are unfruitful in the gospel because we do not "maintain good works"? (Titus 3:14).

Our Christians should be encouraged in this (see article on 2:42 Fellowship). We need to "provoke [each other] unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24). Those who are rich (who isn't rich in North America, relatively speaking?) are to be charged, "That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (1 Tim. 6:18). When was the last time you heard that preached?

Widows over the age of 60 who have, during their married lives, been known for good works are a blue chip resource in the church. They should not, after their husband dies, be forced to eke out an existence. They should be financially supported to do visitation and good works in the community. So says the Scripture (1 Tim. 5:3-10).

"…Our Saviour Jesus Christ…gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:13-14).

Evangelist vs. Pastor? (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

We need both these gifts for advancing the cause. Where are they?

In writing to the Ephesian saints, Paul sketched out for them the progression of workers needed to establish the Church. This list is quite different to the ones given in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Notice the following:

Rom. 12/1 Cor. 12 — Eph. 4 The Giver: The Spirit — Christ The gift: supernatural abilities — gifted men Beneficiaries: your local church — the Body

There seems to be a specific order in that list: “And [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). The apostles came first, trained by the Lord. Then the prophets gave us “the apostles’ doctrine” in written form, as moved by the Holy Spirit. So that today, while we do not have these men among us, we have their teaching—really Christ’s teaching through them—in the Word of God. This is our “apostolic authority.”

These first two were foundation gifts (Eph. 2:20) while the others are maturation gifts. And the first maturation gift was the evangelist. It should be noted that, while there are local evangelists working in the context of a particular local church, the men spoken of in Ephesians

4 have a ministry wider than any local assembly. These evangelists went into uncharted territory.

Paul loved to take the evangel to regions where Christ was unknown: “Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (Rom. 15:20). But it seems today (I say this in kindness) that many men gifted in the gospel and commended to evangelism have gone “into all the assemblies to preach the gospel” or else ended up on the conference circuit. I can think of at least twenty good men in this category. If we asked them what new areas of the continent they have plowed up during the last decade, what would they say? The answer is, virtually nothing.

Why is this? For one thing, pioneer evangelists are the forgotten men. If they went to a foreign land, they would be remembered. But here—I’ve heard it said—why don’t they get a job? And of course for some of them it is the will of God that they have a tent-making arrangement. But that should not always be the case. “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). In plain terms that means we should be caring financially for these pioneers. But do we? My judgment is: not very well. Many of us would hardly know their names. That needs to be rectified, and in a hurry.

What happens as a result? A traffic jam in this Ephesians 4 process! When the evangelists don’t thrust out into new areas (see the article on the leading of the Spirit), there are no new gatherings of believers. Then what do those gifted as pastors do? Because very few new works are being started, men with pastoral gift end up

becoming resident in existing assemblies, where their "job description" is identical to that of the elders. A gift intended for helping a group of new believers ends up duplicating the work supposed to be done by the elders in a mature assembly.

True evangelists find it hard to answer the endless questions of new believers; they want to get on with the gospel. But someone needs to care for these lambs. That's why Paul had men like Timothy and Titus along—true pastors—to stay after the initial gospel thrust to care for the converts and see a proper assembly established. Their intention, as pro tem elders, was to work themselves out of a job as soon as a group of spiritual shepherds were raised up by the Lord. These pastors then moved on to do the same thing again somewhere else.

Is this the pattern we are following today? I'm afraid not. In many places the lines between gifts are blurred; we ask the same speaker to preach "gospel in the morning and ministry at night." A spirit of competition has developed: resident pastors vs. itinerant evangelists and teachers. This ought not to be. All are needed, but each in the proper sphere. God help us in this. We need to see this three-step approach again: evangelists, pastors, teachers.

Disciple-Making (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

The biggest challenge. The best investment. The crying need.

No one suggests that it is easy to do. Or demands little of you. Or is guaranteed to succeed every time. But two things are for sure: the Lord Jesus commanded disciple-making and the New Testament churches practiced it. Here is the command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you…” (Mt. 28:19-20, NKJV). A disciple is a follower, a learner, an imitator. Making them is the church’s business. Don’t expect God to send your assembly the finished product; you must grow your own.

Our Lord selected twelve men. It was His intention that they (barring Judas) would be sent out to preach. But His first reason in calling them was: “that they might be with Him” (Mk. 3:14). So it should be with us. We must honestly convince young believers that we want to spend time with them. It will, of course, require a willingness to be transparent. Your stock will go up, not down, if you are honest.

Following Christ Leads Others to Him

How would you like to see the kind of work that Paul and his co-workers saw done on their short visit to Thessalonica? It was absolutely spectacular! Scores

were rescued in a matter of weeks from a stronghold of Satan!

Notice the two linked statements in Paul's first letter to the young saints there: "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). Here he recounts the remarkable turnaround in their lives. Does he give us a clue to the reason behind the campaign's signal success? The answer is found in verse 5.

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake" (1 Thess. 1:5). He explains that the Holy Spirit did this work, blasting these Thessalonians loose from the world's bedrock by divine power. Yet His power remains unabated today. So was there something else?

Yes, Paul adds, "assurance"—convincing evidence to the Thessalonians that the gospel was real—was seen in the lives of the men who declared it. They were the proof that the gospel was worth trying: "what manner of men we were." Paul's "home assembly" at Antioch was the school where he learned how it was done. Barnabas took the young, newly converted Saul under his wing. Some were skeptical of the former persecutor and Barnabas had his work cut out for him, grooming the volatile young Benjamite. He was just the man for the job. We can surmise that the Antioch assembly was a very good disciple's school because "the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Christians? The word is the diminutive of Christ—little Christs, they were called. The resemblance between the One followed

and the followers was so close that even the pagans noticed. It was there Paul learned the principle, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Can’t Do Everything? Do Something

There may be some who can take a believer right through the process from disciple to disciple-maker. But if you feel inadequate for the whole process, help with a part. Is your ministry visiting a senior’s home? Then take a few young people along and show them how to speak—clearly, directly—to the old folks. Take them out for pizza on the way home and express thanks for their involvement.

Can you share some of the books from your library that you found helpful as a young believer? (You may lose a few in process; I hope you’ll get over it.) Or show them how to use a concordance? Or give them an opportunity to ask their questions. If you don’t know an answer, it’s better not to bluff—they’ll see through it. Just say, “Let’s get the books and look it up.” They will never forget it.

So when do we need to begin? It’s already late. There are scores of young Sauls looking for a Barnabas. First show them how you do it; then let them do it with you; then watch them as they do it (gentle correction mixed with a good dose of encouragement); then inspire them to find someone to teach. Only then is the cycle complete.

And then it’s time to start again with someone else!

All Bible Students (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

Walking Bibles? Not any more. We need to go back to school.

It was radical thinking when the brethren who met in Dublin and at Powerscourt discovered that the clergy-laity division which was taken as normative in Christendom was thoroughly unbiblical. And it is not unrelated that the standard Bible study helps—Wigram's Lexicon, Vine's Dictionary, Newberry's Bible, Mackintosh's Notes, and later commentaries written for a general readership—largely came from the pens of those called "Brethren." It was because they believed that while not every Christian was a scholar, every Christian should be a student.

Publishing houses like John Ritchie, Pickering & Inglis, Loizeaux, and Marshall, Morgan & Scott flourished. Assembly writers dominated the evangelical market. As Harry Ironside said to Billy Graham, "Sooner or later, every Bible student must milk the Brethren cow."

I believe Emmaus Correspondence School is still the world's largest Bible correspondence school, though I suspect that far more of her students are behind bars in America than in assembly pews! And though William MacDonald's Believers Bible Commentary might well be the most translated modern one-volume commentary in the world, the average assembly is doing well if it has one or two serious students of the Word. They are often women.

We have now reached a critical point. Assembly publishing in North America hangs by a thread. Public ministry often shows painful evidence of a lack of preparation or a lack of Bible study skills. Christians turn to parachurch groups for food supplements to keep from starving. How can we expect biblical churches if we are not biblical Christians? What can be done?

Believing What God Has Promised

First, we must come to the amazing realization that God has made us all Bible students. You are to be a key part of the solution! All believers are indwelt by the Spirit, the divine Inspirer of the Book. In fact John goes so far as to say, “The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but…the same anointing teacheth you of all things…” (1 Jn. 2:27).

To whom does He unfold the truth? Listen to the Lord Jesus: “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Lk. 10:21). Does it also seem good in your sight, brother, sister? Yes, He meant you.

Freeing Up Time to Study

First, we must visit the altar of sacrifice. Serious Bible study requires a significant outlay of time and effort. What will we do less that we might study more? One brother in whose home I visited decried the sad state of his assembly, then took me into his bookless “study” to demonstrate his skills in video golf. I don’t wish to be hard, but it is fair to say that the “early brethren” were not remembered for their familiarity with the stars of

stage and screen, their designer clothes, or their knowledge of the best gourmet restaurants. But they did know the Book and its Author.

Having freed up time, and having some basic tools at hand, we then need prayer for illumination, patience in reading the text of Scripture, and diligence in thinking through the passage. Many helps are available to us.

Using What We Learn

Then, having gleaned from the Word, we need to find effective ways to give out what we have learned (not necessarily publicly). This helps us to understand it clearly, explain it accurately, to share its bounty, and to remember it, too. Could you meet with a young believer for lunch each week to talk over a passage you both have been studying? What could be more rewarding than discovering the very thoughts of God and, having seen the miracle of truth bring fruit in our own lives, commit these truths "…to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2)!

One other roadblock. Older believers, never shown how to study, feel sheepish about revealing their inexperience. Well, that's just what to do. Be sheepish! Confess your eagerness (in spite of your lack of ability), and invite another sheep to graze with you. You won't regret it.

Working Women (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

A key element in the work force of the New Testament Church.

Peter, in his discussion of priesthood, never mentions either gender or gift (1 Pet. 2:5-10). Every believing woman is as fully a priest as any man. She has equal access to the Spirit and to the truth of the Word. She is welcome into the Holiest to worship, intercede or supplicate. Thank God for worshipping, studying and praying women!

The woman also has a key role in witness. As a royal priest, she goes forth to show forth the virtues of the One who called her out of darkness into light (2:9). In many countries, certainly in the Middle East, if unsaved women are to be reached personally with the gospel, Christian women must do it. A man witnessing to a woman could bring a charge of infidelity.

As well as her dual role in holy and royal priesthood, when a woman places her trust in Christ, she is given a gift to use for the glory of God as surely as every man. Are there certain off-limit gifts unavailable to women? The Bible does not say.

Women Teachers?

I know some brothers (friends of mine) who insist that the woman is never to be in a formal teaching role, even with other women; is that what the Scripture teaches?

I understand the concern to maintain doctrinal purity in the local church; the elders should lay the doctrinal base

for the assembly—and woe betide any who seek to undermine this foundation! Scripture could not be more solemn: “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him” (1 Cor. 3:17). Here the local church is in view and the words “defile” and “destroy” are the same Greek word.

The elders should teach all the saints so everyone can “give a reason for the hope” within them, explaining why they believe what they believe. Certainly Priscilla is seen actively engaged in discussing Bible doctrine in the home setting with her husband and Apollos. She would not have dominated the conversation, being an exemplary woman, no doubt marked by “a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Pet. 3:4, NKJV). But the verse declares “…When Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).

The argument against women holding Bible studies with other women goes like this. Almost all modern cults were started by women (true). One reason for the silence of women in public meetings is that Eve was deceived in the garden (true). The word used for “teach” in Titus 2:4 is sophronizo, not the common word for didactic teaching (true). Therefore the Lord intends women only to train by example, not by expounding the Word. Is that also true?

We should note that all doctrinal error mentioned in the NT is traced to men: Diotrephes, Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes, and Philetus, to name a few. Only Jezebel (whomever or whatever she symbolizes) is linked with false teaching.

Secondly, it is true that the woman is to be protected (better than Adam did) and she should know she is especially vulnerable. But the application which Paul makes in that passage is also applied to men (2 Cor. 11:3). Surely we will not now restrict men from teaching! The Greek word used is found only there in our Bible; I would not want to hang an issue on the meaning of that word. The word means “teach to be serious” and what better way than through Scripture? What other authority do sisters have to teach the younger women how to love their husbands and their children, to be chaste and modest, etc.? Especially since the object of the teaching is “that the Word of God” not be blasphemed!

A Distinctive Role

It is common practice to tell the women what they can’t do in the meetings of the church. And it is true that Scripture places one restriction on the woman in the assembly of the saints. She is not to speak as a representative (the word “image” in 1 Cor. 11). In enacting heaven’s great love drama, the man is to play the part of Christ; the woman is given the part of the Church. It would be completely out of character, then, for the woman to teach the man in this setting. Would the Church dare tell Christ what to do?

Of course her silence is not as far as God is concerned. The woman is only silent to us. Her praise is heard with absolute clarity in the presence of the Lord. Yet the woman is free to sing audibly and to say “Amen” at the conclusion of a prayer. Why? Because she is acting as an individual priest, not as a representative of either the men or of the Lord. And of course she has the high

honor of being the steward of the coverings, acting as a guardian against any glories competing with the glory of God. Remember the man's glory is placed under the woman's covering, too.

Now why don't we emphasize what the women can do from Scripture? The New Testament is full of examples.

1. Anna: Heroic widow, faithful worshipper, fearless testifier, and godly example of being "fruitful in old age."

2. Mary: There are actually six Marys in the New Testament, each one a godly example. I keep them straight by linking them with their hometown: i) Mary of Nazareth, the mother of our Lord, "blessed among women," who expresses one of the finest paeans of praise anywhere in Scripture (see the similarities with Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam. 2); ii) Mary of Magdala, the women who never got over being saved, who lingered at the tomb and received the commission from Christ to tell His "brethren" that He was alive; iii) Mary of Jerusalem, mother of John Mark, who opened her home for prayer meetings; iv) Mary of Bethany, one of Jesus' dearest friends, the only one who let Him finish the story of the cross uninterrupted, and therefore anointed Him before He died because she knew she might not have time after; v) Mary of Emmaus, wife of Cleopas, probably the one who constrained the Lord in to break bread; and vi) Mary of Rome, a "mother" to Paul, no doubt caring for him when he was there in the capital.

3. Dorcas: "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha…this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds" (Acts 9:36), making the gospel winsome to win some.

4. Phoebe: a sister in the family; a servant of the church; a saint, separated from the world; and a succourer (protectress) of many who were the disadvantaged in life.

5. Priscilla: always mentioned with her husband (3x P & A; 3x A & P); willing to lay down their necks for Paul; moved to see a new assembly started; worked with their hands to free up Paul; an assembly met in their home; she and her husband discreetly helped Apollos in the Word.

6. Euodias and Syntyche, Tryphena and Tryphosa and all the other “work-fellows” in the gospel.

There are many other examples of hospitality, giving, prayer, visiting, comforting, teaching younger women and children, good works, encouragement, and more! Carry on, dear sisters! We need you and thank God for you.

Prayer & Fasting (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

The secret of their power was in knowing they didn't have any!

This small section is not intended to bring before the Lord's people the vital importance of prayer. I believe that the prayer life of many Christians (the writer included) as well as the prayer ministry of many assemblies could be greatly improved. But I think we know that. It is not a truth we have overlooked in the book of Acts. Every page of the history of the early Church is filled with the incense of the saints rising up to God.

It would seem that the vitality of our prayers would greatly increase if some of these other issues were resolved. For example, if "…a great door and effectual [was] opened unto [us], and there [were] many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9). Suddenly our prayers would have grip; we would again be in it, rather than watching from the sidelines.

Or if we were all in the Book again, up to our elbows in rediscovered truth—what would that do to our contact with the Throne? Or if we expected the Spirit to guide us into a God-sized opportunity, I mean ready guide us, rather than our planning, and expecting Him to approve! But what I think we may be missing is the instancy of NT praying. They didn't say, as we sometimes do, "We should pray about that." They went ahead and prayed at that very moment. We see the same in Nehemiah's prayers, and Paul's—he interrupts his own letter

writing! Then too, I think we're missing the constancy of NT praying. That's what fasting was all about, wasn't it. Hold all calls. Forget lunch. And supper, if it came to that. Pray on. Pray through until the answer came to all, clear as a trumpet on the morning air. Sure as the voice of God.

Lord, teach us to pray…like that!

Hospitality & 2:42 Fellowship (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

Hospitality

Heaven’s hospital, where love kisses away the hurts the doctor can’t see.

Why, when I was a boy… I must be over 50; reminiscence comes easier all the time. Nonetheless it is true that the believers were often in one another’s homes when I was young. Today we have little excuse. North American believers generally have substantial houses, and air conditioned cars to transport them in ease from one place to another. (My father used to say, “Solomon in all his glory was not conveyed in one of these!”) We have freezers and microwaves, 12-piece settings of china and dish washers to finish the task (all this must provide strange reading for our brothers and sisters in India and Africa who receive the magazine). Yet for all this, we live increasingly lonely lives, isolated from one another.

Hymn sings around the piano in a believer’s home have been replaced by entertainment centers that pump out the music for us. Preferably into insulated headphones. Are we the better for it? Hardly. It was during those times that we tuned our young voices, learned to sing in parts, enjoyed age-less fellowship, and increased our repertoire (like Redemption Songs, with 1000 hymns and choruses!).

It was in each others' homes that we saw the Christians laugh—and weep. We saw past the Sunday smile and the starched shirts. We learned to sympathize with them, to appreciate them as real people. When you learn about their heart-aches and daily challenges, you can be a little more patient with their foibles. They became real friends and were not so easy to let go when assembly problems hit, as they will from time to time.

"Ye know the house of Stephanas…that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (1 Cor. 16:15). They might have had good reasons not to do it—short of time, tight on money, or they just liked their privacy—but they couldn't help themselves. They were addicted; they "set themselves" to do it, and wouldn't let anything stop them. Three cheers for such households today. Will yours be one? You will have to set yourselves to do it. But in the end it will be the best thing you can do for your own family, and one of the best things you can do for His family, too.

2:42 Fellowship?

Another meeting? Is that what we need? Just a suggestion.

Here's something to think about. We know that the early believers were involved in private Bible study, enjoyed personal fellowship in each others' homes, expressed individual worship throughout the week and prayed "without ceasing." Yet we believe that the words of Acts 2:42 have to do with their corporate life as a body of believers—at least three out of the four!

Here is the verse: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of

bread, and in prayers." If we believe that this verse is referring to public functions of the gathered church, why do we not have a fellowship meeting? And if we did, what would it be like?

Fellowship means sharing what we have in common. There are personal challenges, victories, the Lord's acting on our behalf (getting us a job, giving an opportunity to a family member to witness, etc.) which would be inappropriate for the Lord's Supper (a time of remembrance of the Lord, more focused than general worship), and perhaps too time-consuming for a prayer meeting. But what an encouragement it could be for the saints to share such real-life dealings. How it would "provoke [one another] unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24). Could it be abused? Could some dominate? Or fabricate? Of course. But we have all heard "horizontal prayers" or borne with inappropriate ministry or worship. Handled properly, I think it could be one of the most encouraging things we do!

The Spirit Leading (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

Is this just for an hour on Sunday morning?

It is a rare chapter in the book of Acts that does not prominently remind us of the strategic influence of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the Church. The early chapters emphasize the once-for-all baptism of the Spirit, a (partial) fulfillment of Joel 2 and of the promise of John the Baptist that the One coming after him would baptize, not in water, but in the Spirit (Acts 11:16). And so it happened.

This historic event led the disciples into a whole new way of life. The Spirit guided them into truth, directed their missionary efforts, and empowered their preaching. Of many we read that they were filled with the Holy Spirit—for example, Peter (4:8); Stephen (6:5) and his fellow deacons; and Paul (9:17). Not only so, but we read, “When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were allfilled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (4:31). Does this explain our lack of boldness in witnessing today?

The Spirit was an active agent in their gospel work. He directed them to the best fishing areas (see 8:29; 9:10). The Spirit also gave confirmation of the work (5:32). Paul would later write, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1:5). Do we not sense that much of our Christian activity and ministry is

of the “word only” variety? Where is this unction of which John wrote?

Who could deny that the events recorded in Acts would not have happened without the convicting, energizing, directing, encouraging ministry of the Spirit? He was key to the expansion of the Church.

Is this the dominant influence in assembly life today? Have we reacted so strongly against the false emphasis on the Spirit in the Charismatic movement that we rarely think of Him? Has the leading of the Spirit shrunk down to an hour or so on Sunday morning, directing worship at the Lord’s Supper? Are those who preach the Word evidently filled with the Spirit? Do elders fast and pray to seek the Spirit’s leading in sending out fresh forces to do exploits in the Great War (13:2)? Do those entrusted with the gospel spend serious time looking to the Spirit for guidance as to where we should work, and how we should be doing it?

I know it is possible to become overmuch righteous in the matter. Like the story of Harry Ironside. When a young man was asked if he would transport Dr. Ironside to a meeting, he replied that he would pray about it. “I don’t want that young man taking me,” Ironside replied. Why not? “He might find it’s the Lord’s will to take me and then decide it isn’t the Lord’s will to bring me back!”

Nonetheless I have become deeply concerned personally with the excessive scheduling of preachers, sometimes years in advance. If the Lord directed me to continue longer in one place, or to visit a needy area, it does little good to tell the Spirit, “I think I can fit that in late in 2006.”

There was a day when the Lord's workers were directed by the Lord Himself. I'm not saying that the Lord can't direct a group of elders to invite a minister of the Word to come to their assembly. I just wonder how much spiritual exercise goes into much of the filling of assembly preaching calendars. Have we become little more than a ministerial pulpit service?

Here is a vital area that may have, by slow erosion, changed from being Spirit-exercised to being man-organized. Would you pray with me about this? We need clearer direction in the work of God, so we can go through doors He opens instead of banging our heads against walls. We need to declare the gospel "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." We need to give the Spirit His rightful place again.

Community Impact (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

The whole world knew they were there and what they were doing.

How did these early believers make such an impact? By lives of holy separation, by good works linked with tireless gospel witness, by evident love for one another, and by strategic thinking.

Whole cities were stirred when the Christians arrived in town. They were talked about by the common people in the markets and in the mansions of the rich and famous. They were known in the prisons and the palaces. Slaves like Onesimus heard the gospel from their lips, but so did Caesar. Some mocked or persecuted them; some believed them; no one ignored them. Their accusers said, “These that have turned the world upside down are come here also” (Acts 17:6).

The believers had method in what they did. The evangelists went first to the big centers: Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Rome. Then, as Paul would write to the Thessalonians, “From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad” (1 Thess. 1:8). Of his stay in Ephesus, Luke observed, “…all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). By establishing bases at the crossroads, they would set up spheres of influence that spread into the interior.

We need to think about this in North America. At a time when millions are moving to the cities, many assemblies

have shrunk or disappeared there as the Christians move to suburbia or into the countryside, looking for a better environment for their families. This isn't to be criticized, but who will reach the cities for Christ? In the last few years there have been new assemblies started in some major centers, but there are many others that need a committed band of fearless workers to take on cities just as wicked as—but substantially larger than—Corinth or Rome.

As Hitler contemplated his invasion of Poland, he asked his generals with disdain, "Who would die for Danzig?" He greatly misjudged the resolve of the Allies; thousands gave their lives to stop him. But the question comes to us today. Would we give our lives for the cause of turning back the powers of darkness in San Francisco or Toronto, Miami or Vancouver, Phoenix or Detroit? Thank God for the Christians who are there! They need our prayerful concern and encouragement. But they need more. They need troops to help turn the tide. There are scores of mid-sized cities too, that need to be prayed for and wept over, and labored in while we still have time.

The apostles often went first to the monotheists where part of the work was already done. We should consider this. Instead of seeing mainline religions as a roadblock, acknowledge that they have taught some things right and start from there. Do they believe that Jesus is God? That men are sinners? Do they believe in heaven and want to go there? These are all wonderful starting points for witness.

If rejected by the synagogues, the apostles were willing to engage with the day's thinkers. Some object to Paul's

approach at Mars' hill, saying that no assembly was founded there (as far as we know). But it should be noted on that occasion, "certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:34). That makes a minimum of five, probably several more. I would be quite encouraged if, on an unplanned stop in Boston, I was hauled in before the professors at Harvard (a comparable scenario) and saw that many saved!

Clear thinking, straight talking, holy living, hard working, sacrificial giving, practical caring—no wonder secular powers saw them as a threat and the common people heard them gladly. We want New Testament churches? We need New Testament living.

Elders’ Commitment (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

This one almost slipped by me. I had to stop the presses to include it.

Immediately I must explain the title. I am not joining with those who say much about inadequate elders, but do little to help them. As many Uplook readers have heard me say, there are perfect elders—unfortunately they are all in heaven. The ones that the Lord has given us will admit they are not perfect. But the call to the sheep is not to criticize their elders; not even to hear an unsubstantiated charge against them (1 Tim. 5:19). Of course we are free to prayerfully “entreat them as fathers” (v. 1). We are to personally take the initiative to know them (1 Thess. 5:12); to honor them (1 Tim. 5:17); to “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls…”(Heb. 13:17).

So this article is not about the need for elders to be committed generally. The need for that is clear to all believers, and any elders not as committed as they ought to be should already know that.

The particular commitment I wish to address is extremely rare, perhaps because it is so peculiar for an elder. It seems to be the very opposite of the elder’s natural inclination to care for the sheep. Elders, by definition, are inward-looking “overseers,” protective of the little flock entrusted to their care.

This commitment is a longing to see other assemblies born out of their own assembly as soon as feasible. No parent finds it easy to say good-bye to their children as they grow up and move out of the home. But that is the idea, isn't it? Children should not be raised to be good children to us, but good parents to our grandchildren. And so with the local church.

Hear again Paul's words to Timothy: "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). It is generally agreed that the first generation of faithful men were the elders he was commissioned to see raised up in every place. But who were the next generation of faithful men these elders were to equip? True, the elders are to teach the flock generally, but it seems Paul is speaking about elders training another group of elders!

The commitment that every group of elders should have is this: As soon as the Lord enables it, we want to see another assembly born out of this one. We are committed to this, not because we naturally feel like sending away some of these sheep we love and care about, but because we believe it is the pattern of the New Testament.

I know what some elders are thinking. "We're just barely hanging on! We can't imagine letting some of our best people go to start another assembly!" Wait! I'm not saying this will happen tomorrow. But if the elders do not have this vision, others in the assembly will, and eventually little groups of shepherdless sheep will wander off to start something anyway—with or without the elders' help. We see it all the time. We believe that a

Christian really starts to grow when he begins to think beyond himself. The same is true of assemblies. One of the best things that happened to the Greensboro, NC, assembly was the start of the Reidsville group. The same was true with Tulsa and Little Rock. And I for one would never have developed if the brethren in St. Catharines had not concluded that it was time to branch out—first into two, then three, then four, then five assemblies—because the young men didn't have a chance. Someone was always stepping into the water before us; the elders didn't want us lying by the pool for 38 years!

We want our good young men to be committed? To what? A token job? Tell an athlete, "You better get training for the Olympics—the 2048 Olympics." Why bother? There's lots of time. But if every group of elders was committed to the ideal that ASAP they wanted to see healthy, well-thought-out, balanced new groups carefully planted in soil that had already been tested by gospel effort, how would that affect the young men? Why, every group of elders would be eager to train them, hands-on, to get them ready for the next assembly to be started. And young men—I mean committed, serious, yes, "faithful men"—would catch a vision worth laying down their lives for.

Sacrificial Living (September 2004)

From Uplook, September 2004. Article.

True Christianity is so radical it puts die-hard Communists to shame. I've seen it in China, and it made me wonder, If that's Christianity, what are we playing at?

There is a widely repeated view (even by those who claim to closely adhere to the New Testament pattern for the Church) that the spirit of sharing seen in New Testament days is not something to be practiced by us now. We like to quote Acts 2:42, but seldom read on to verse 44, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common." But in case we missed it the first time, the Spirit of God feels it important enough to insert it again, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (4:32). Verse 33 begins with "And." It links this practical fellowship of possessions in verse 32 with the "great power"and "great grace"evident among the believers. Hmmm!

Let's get it straight. On one side of the issue, none of our money, time, energy or ability belongs to us. It is all a gift from God and a stewardship for God. But on the other hand, God recognizes the right to personal property. We see these two sides in Acts 5.

Speaking of his land, Peter said to Ananias, "While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" (5:4). Yes, it was.

They knew Christianity was costly. Communism says, “What’s yours is mine.” But Christianity says, “What’s mine is yours.” Communism is coerced; Christianity is voluntary. But the early believers (and those in the so-called early “Brethren movement,” too) happily relinquished their goods for the Great Cause. They expected Christianity to be costly because they saw its value. They “took joyfully the spoiling of [their] goods”knowing that they had “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34).

They thought Christ was worth it. The Lord Jesus sold all that He had, too (Mt. 13:46). For our sakes He became poor. What has God withheld from sharing with us? The world may be generous; we are called to be sacrificial. Just like Jesus.

Keeping Unspotted (October-November 2004)

From Uplook, October-November 2004. Editorial.

The world is a spotty place.

You may find it hard to believe, but I'm not only old enough to remember the "Dick and Jane" readers in the public schools—with their mythic dog, Spot—I can actually remember away back to the days when Christians wrestled over whether to have a television or not! When the saints thought that the Lord's Day should be wholly for the Lord. When fashions that attracted attention or were considered immodest were shunned by serious believers. There were excesses, I know. Some preachers found their "calling" in being fashion consultants, majoring on minors, never seeming to get past the externals, not "minister[ing] grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

But in spite of those aberrations, they seemed to be simpler times, and in many ways, better times. Today Dick and Jane are found only in antique shops. They are thought to be far too bland for children who blast there way through digitized death-defying traps and slaughter untold cyber-villains on their video screens. A stay-at-home mom and a working dad with well-adjusted children are too far from reality to be taken seriously. And few today would dare mention abstaining from worldly amusements for fear of being thought to be philistines. We should hardly expect worldlings to object to worldliness; like asking fish about water, it's all they have ever known. But things have slipped so far that

some unbelievers around us are actually crying out against the encroaching darkness. Yet the evangelical church through compromise has largely lost its voice against the incoming tide.

In Scripture, worldliness is not described so much in terms of what we have or do. In fact Paul warns against the “Touch not; taste not; handle not”approach to the problem (Col. 2:21). Instead it is in what we love: “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15). We have been sent on a mission intothe world but we are not of it (Jn. 17:14-18). How can we “[love] the world” of people (Jn. 3:16), yet “love not the world” (1 Jn. 2:15) as a system—religious, economic, social, and political—a system that is opposed to everything pleasing to God?

First, there are specific moral directives in the Word (with no wiggle room!). For example, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers”(2 Cor. 6:14). What is it about “not”we don’t understand? Or “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28). God turns thieves into philanthropists. There are many other such helpful commands.

There are also sweeping principles which must be applied to the particulars of life: “Do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:17). In these cases, we are not told specifically how to do these things, but are expected to want to do them, and to look for practical ways to see

them happen as we yield to the Spirit. But it is in a third area that we find the greatest challenge. Some call them "gray areas" but there are no more gray areas in the world than there were on Spot's coat. Paul teaches that some issues might be black to one believer and white to another, but every Christian should seriously ask the questions, seek the Lord's help in finding His answer, "be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5), and be gracious to those who may see it differently.

How can we escape from the vortex of worldly influence (2 Tim. 2:22)? By passionately throwing our energies in the opposite direction—"follow righteousness, faith, love, peace." I have enough problems with my heart without feeding on "foolish and hurtful [desires], which drown men in destruction" (1 Tim. 6:9). If we would "keep [ourselves] unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27), it will only be with dogged persistence.

So run from the spots, run!

Questions about Questions (October-November 2004)

From Uplook, October-November 2004. Article.

Is there such a thing as a bad question? The Book says Yes.

Webster defines a question as “an interrogative expression often used to test knowledge” or “a subject or aspect in dispute or open for discussion.” While these may be true in many cases, the meaning of the root Latin word quaerere is “to seek, ask.”

From Satan’s “Hath God said…?” to the angel’s query to John in Revelation 17:7, the Bible has 3,298 questions. It is a wonderful way to learn. Of course there are different ways to ask questions: expecting a positive response—“You’re coming, aren’t you?” or a negative response—“You don’t like that kind of music, do you?” or not anticipating any particular response—“Did you enjoy that taste?” We see more clearly the force of the Samaritan woman’s appeal to her townsmen when she said, “Come see a Man that told me everything I ever did. It couldn’t be the Messiah, could it?”

Many passages hinge on following the Q and A layout. Job 38 has 40 questions; 2 Samuel 19 has 22; 1 Corinthians 9 has 20. And some of the most powerful passages in the word are set in a question and answer format, Romans 8:31-39 and Galatians 3:1-5, for example.

The New Testament speaks of both good and bad questions. In fact, Paul gives four stringent warnings in his pastoral epistles:

• “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do” (1 Tim. 1:4).

• “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings” (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

• “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Tim. 2:23).

• “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain” (Titus 3:9).

That having been said, the writings of Paul are full of questions—and have stirred up questions—good, wholesome, helpful questions that have led many into truth.

The first time we hear the Lord speak, it is after His time with the doctors at the temple where He was “… both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Lk. 2:46). I imagine they were most probing kind of questions.

This first instance recorded in our Lord’s life reminds us that questions may take a rhetorical form, where the questioner already knows the answer but is calling on the hearer to think about the answer himself. Such was

the query in the Garden, “Adam, where art thou?” and our Lord’s middle cry from the cross, “My God, why…?”

After enduring a barrage of questions all day from the various sects of the Jews, Jesus said, “I will also ask of you one question, and answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things” (Mk. 11:29).

On another occasion the Lord posed the question to end all questions: “And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions” (Mt. 22:46).

This issue highlights the ten questions I am most frequently asked during Question and Answer sessions. In fact a conference hardly seems complete without some of these perennial ones popping up. Perhaps the comments included here will help to settle these and give the floor to others that will expand our biblical horizons.

In some places the Question Box is empty; the Lord’s people have nothing to ask. As my father used to say, “The tragedy is not when the Lord’s people don’t have the answers; it’s when they don’t even have the questions.”

Our own Bible study will supply both answers to questions and new questions to stimulate further study. May the Lord lead us on to know Him better and His blessed Word. After all, a good, thought-inspiring question will often prove more helpful than a glib, superficial answer.

The Top Seven Hurdles (October-November 2004)

From Uplook, October-November 2004. Article.

Clear answers ready for these questions will help to arm you for the fight.

1. If there is a God, and if He is good, why is there pain and suffering in the world? Why did God create the devil? Why does He allow evil to continue?

Cliffe Knechtle explains: “Don’t make the mistake of using moral indignation as an argument against God’s existence. For if there is no God, there is no authority to define what is absolutely right and what is absolutely wrong.” Of course if one rejects God because there is suffering in the world, it leaves you with nothing but despair.

The Bible tells us that God not only created the world perfect, but included in it creatures who could choose to love and know Him in a personal way. That meant, of course, that they could choose not to love Him, in fact to rebel against Him. And that, says the Bible, is just what happened. All the grief you see in the world is a result of a civil war in the universe.

But that is not all the Bible says about evil and suffering. It also explains that although God is not responsible for the evil, He has found a way to use it for good if we co-operate with Him.

First, He uses it to get our attention. C. S. Lewis writes: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Second, pain is God’s means of bringing things into focus. A phone call from the hospital about a loved one reminds us about what is really important in life.

Third, suffering—like a trip to the dentist or to the surgeon—can hurt us in order to heal us. Some of the things in life that we thought were assets turn out to be liabilities, like too much freedom or too much money. Other things we first thought were bad turn to our good. Many people thank God they got cancer, or ended up in jail, because that is what they needed in order to meet Him.

Some people think God should get rid of all evil as soon as possible. But then that would mean getting rid of every sinner, too. God says He is going to rid the world of evil and suffering, but Jesus has set about to rescue as many as possible first, to invite them to switch sides, to lay down their arms of rebellion, repent, and believe the gospel.

2. How can I take Christianity seriously with so many hypocrites in the church? And why are there so many denominations? Anyway, isn’t Christianity just a crutch for weak people?

Jesus reserved His most scathing remarks for the sin of hypocrisy. Why? Because as long as I pretend to be what I am not, I will never become what God designed me to be. Of course prejudging all Christians as hypocrites is

like saying all apples are rotten because I've seen a few rotten ones in my time. True, Christianity sets high standards for its followers, and there is no place for a Christian excusing his sin. But assessing Christianity by the performance of some Christians is to miss the main point.

Christians are often assumed to be claiming perfection because most religions teach that only a perfect person could be sure of heaven. But when a Christian claims such assurance, he is basing it on his trust in the perfection of Christ and His work, not on his own condition!

So the real question is: "What do you think of Christ?" He is the Saviour, and no moral imperfection can be found in Him. Yet His followers should seek to show His grace, love and holiness in our lives that others "may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

The variety of denominations—barring false cults that purposely twist Scripture—should not be an insurmountable problem to a true seeker. While some things need to be interpreted in the Bible, the essential message—believed by every true Christian—needs no interpretation. It needs only to be believed. The four elements in the message: i) all have sinned; ii) the soul that sins dies; iii) Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; iv) believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Christianity a crutch? Hardly! What good is a crutch to a dead man? What everyone needs is new life, and that is what the Christian gospel offers.

3. Don’t all religions ultimately lead to God? Are you saying that all other religions are wrong? Does it matter what you believe as long as you are sincere?

A student described his belief as a mountain which everyone was climbing, all on different paths yet all leading to the same summit. This has one fatal flaw. It only works if you can prove that humanity is going uphill! Not easy to believe of the generation that has seen two World Wars, the collapse of the family and common decency, and lives with the constant reminders of incessant bloodshed around the world. The Bible says man is getting worse.

The shocking fact is this: with all the religions in the world, there are many ways. So says Isaiah 53: Everyone has turned to his own way. But there is only one Saviour! No other religion even offers one; they say that a person must accomplish their salvation by their own works.

The politically correct way to look at things in the West these days is to assume that all beliefs are equally valid. This moral relativism is shown for what it is in the following paragraph by Hadley Arkes: “In one society, a widow is burned on the funeral pyre of her husband; in another, she is burned on the beach in Miami. In one society, people complain to the chef about the roast beef; in another, they send back the roast beef and eat the chef.” Any difference?

We all know from experience that sincerity is not enough to guarantee arrival at one’s destination. One must also take the right road. On this Jesus was perfectly clear: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, except by Me” (John 14:6).

4. What about the people who have never heard of Jesus? Will they all go to hell? How can a loving God send anyone to hell? And is it fair to be punished for ever, no matter how much you sinned during 70 or 80 years?

Certain things we know for sure. God never gives us information just to tickle our fancy. If we are not to be the judge in this matter, God feels no obligation to tell us how this judgment will be decided. Yet we know “the Judge of all the earth”will do right. And that Judge is no one other than Jesus Himself. What does He say in John 3? “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil”(John 3:19). So the light has come, yet men refuse to respond.

We know as well that all those saved are saved through Christ and His finished work. There is no other saviour. And there is a real place called hell. It was not made for humanity; it was made for the devil and his angels. But if certain people decide to remain with the devil in his rebellion, they are welcome to share his fate. After all, doesn’t hell show that God takes human decisions seriously? He doesn’t drag people kicking and screaming to heaven. If they don’t want His Son, they certainly don’t want heaven since heaven will be filled with His glory. Imagine being with millions of psalm-singing Christians and never able to get out! It is an unbeliever’s nightmare of astronomical proportions. Hence Jesus’ comment to the highly respectable Nicodemus, “Men love darkness rather than light.” Nicodemus needed to be born from above if he ever hoped to see the kingdom of God.

But back to the question of who can be saved. We know that many have been saved who never heard of Jesus, in Old Testament times. It was not only people like Abraham, who "rejoiced" to see Christ's day, but those like Rahab and the men of Nineveh—who clearly were saved since they will be used as witnesses for the prosecution at the Last Trial (Mt. 12:41). What did they know of Jesus?

David Gooding states: "When Romans 2 says that God's goodness to people was meant to lead them to repentance, was that goodness extended to Jews only or also to Gentiles? I would have thought that God, being no respecter of persons, was good to Gentiles as well. Paul says it to the people of Lystra, Acts 14. God didn't leave Himself without witness; He was good to them.

"Now Romans 2 says that this goodness of God was meant to lead people to repentance. Did God hope that they would repent? Unless He was insincere, of course He did. What really happened when they did repent? Did God, by His silence, indicate, 'You've repented, but that isn't enough, of course. I haven't revealed to you the means of salvation and I am not intending to. Therefore, you repented but there is no salvation for you'?

"Another indication in the OT of God's attitude to the Gentiles is the famous one, 'Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22). That seems to suggest that God was interested in saving Gentiles and He bases that invitation on the fact, if one looks at the context, that He is the Creator. There is no other God, and in God alone is there salvation. Thus the Gentiles were urged to look to God and be saved. Unless God is saying things that are

ultimately meaningless and tantalizingly insincere, He must have meant it seriously, inviting Gentiles to look to Him and be saved."

As to suffering punishment forever, three factors must be considered: i) do they want out of their place of torment if the only alternative is living in Christ's glory? ii) will they stop sinning—and therefore stop running up their debt—when they die? iii) what is suitable punishment for being guilty of the death of the Son of God and never repenting for it? We must beware when we think that we are more merciful that God After all, His Word itself declares that there is no other escape if men "neglect so great salvation."

5. Doesn't evolution disprove the necessity of God? Can't science explain everything we need to know?

John Lennox states: "For many centuries theism was the dominant view, that God is the Creator and Upholder of the universe. It was the view of many leading figures in the scientific revolution. It…comes as an astonishing surprise to many…intellectuals that many of the figures that they revere in science as being responsible for the great upsurge of science in the 16th, 17th & 18th centuries were not only theists, but Christian theists. In fact, 90% of the founding members of the Royal Society of Great Britain were believers. Sir Alfred North Whitehead, one of the leading historians of science of all time said this, 'Men became scientific because they expected law in nature and they expected law in nature because they believed in a Lawgiver.' We owe a great deal of modern science to people who were motivated by their belief that behind the universe there was a Creator

God, so that science and Christianity were certainly not incompatible in their minds."

As far as the question of evolution—meaning that all we see in the universe can be explained by impersonal force randomly acting on mindless matter—is concerned, it is far from being proven. Michael Behe, Associate Professor of Biochemistry at Lehigh University, argues that "the most convincing evidence for design is not to be found in the stars or the fossils, but in biochemical systems. Behe uses examples such as vision, blood-clotting, and cellular transport to demonstrate that life comprises an astonishing array of chemical machines, made up of finely calibrated, interdependent parts that defy current naturalistic explanations. Behe surveys professional science literature and shows that it is completely silent on the subject, stymied by the elegance of the foundation of life." Behe writes: "It is important to realize that we are not inferring design from what we do not know, but from what we do know.... A man from a primitive culture who sees an automobile might guess that it was powered by the wind or by an antelope hidden under the car, but when he opens up the hood and sees the engine he immediately realizes that it was designed. In the same way biochemistry has opened up the cell to examine what makes it run and we see that it, too, was designed.

"It was a shock to people of the nineteenth century when they discovered, from observations science had made, that many features of the biological world could be ascribed to the elegant principle of natural selection. It is a shock to us in the twentieth century to discover, from observations science has made, that the fundamental mechanisms of life cannot be ascribed to

natural selection, and therefore were designed. But we must deal with our shock as best we can and go on. The theory of undirected evolution is already dead…"

It is unwise to think of God as "a God of the gaps." John Lennox explains: "As science advanced, God appeared to be squeezed into the gaps in scientific knowledge and, of course, He got tinier and tinier…The notion that God is simply a God of the gaps is a very dangerous notion. It ended up in deism—that God, if He existed at all, started the whole thing off and then He simply lets it run. You can see that it wouldn't be very long down that road before you would end up with God losing His existence altogether. As science pushed the frontiers further and further back, God would become less and less necessary. So we get to naturalism, a situation where God has lost His existence; only the universe exists as a closed system of cause and effect.…

"There are certain logical problems within naturalism that are worth pointing out. Because we believe in God as a God of rationality, we are guided by Scripture to the conclusion that when intellectuals give up on God, Romans tells us that they become darkened in their understanding.

"Professor J.B.S. Haldane was an atheist and yet, he could see that the extreme form of reductionism that reduced everything simply to physics and chemistry and mathematics had a logical flaw at its heart. He put it this way, 'If my mental processes are determined solely by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. In particular, I have no reason to believe that my brain is even composed of atoms.'

“Here you have a very curious situation. If we are simply to be reduced, as George Gaylord Simpson says, to being the product of a natural process which didn’t have us in mind, then, in the end, it’s true that the thoughts in our minds are simply the results of motions of atoms in our brain. Then why on earth should we believe them? There’s a logical absurdity at its heart.”

Lennox continues: “Let me tell you a story. In Siberia I gave a lecture some years ago, chaired by the Communist Party, on ‘The Search for Meaning and Values at the End of the Twentieth Century.’ One man, a senior politician, was very angry. He went up and drew a lightning flash on the blackboard and said, ‘People used to believe that that was caused by God and now we know how lightning works.’

“I looked straight at this politician, and said, ‘I am amazed how much we agree. The God you don’t believe in I don’t believe in either. A God who disappeared when you discovered how lightning worked wouldn’t be worth believing in anyway, would He?’ Then I looked at the audience and I said, ‘Our friend here, I suspect on the basis of his logic, when he discovered how the main spring of a watch worked, he ceased believing in a watchmaker.’

“So many people feel that once you have discovered a mechanism, you’ve wiped out the notion of a designer. So in science, the only place you’re going to find God is in the places we don’t understand anything. That is nonsensical. It is actually the other way around. The more intricate you discover the mechanisms to be, the more it ought to increase your wondering at the sheer brilliance of the Mind that invented them.”

6. If Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, why didn't most of the Jews—especially the religious leaders—recognize Him?

When the leaders in Jerusalem cried, "Not Jesus but Barabbas" they made it clear why they rejected Him. Barabbas was a freedom fighter against the Romans, and the rulers of the Jews wanted a Messiah who would deliver them from their earthly enemies. Thus Jesus' words to Pilate, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight"(Jn. 18:36). Nor did the Jews like Jesus absolute claim over their life because of His insistence that He was indeed God manifest in flesh. They objected to Him being "Lord of the Sabbath," forgiving sins against God, and telling them that He would yet be seen by them in His kingdom glory (causing the same irritation as Joseph telling his brothers about their bowing to him).

But the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus' claims does not weaken the Bible's argument; it strengthens it. After all, many OT prophets warned that Messiah would be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Isa. 53:3). David warned of the "The stone which the builders refused" (Ps. 118:22). Paul, quoting Isaiah, quoting God, asked, "Who has believed our report?"Of course, as Paul points out, there were many Jews (including himself) who did believe and responded with John, "It is the Lord!"

7. How can someone know for sure? Many Christians say that it is presumptuous to say you know until the final judgment. After all, Jesus said that some who will stand outside knocking who thought they should be inside. Couldn't you be one of those people?

If we are to know for sure, certain factors are required. First, it would have to rest on a finished work with no possibility of failure. That Jesus did at Calvary. The logic is inescapable. He was verifiably perfect, five trials by His enemies overwhelmingly proving the point. If perfect, He did not die for His own sins. He states that it was our sins for which He died. Therefore, since "the wages of sin is death," one sin left unpaid-for would keep Him in the grave. The resurrection of Christ is our receipt of a payment for sin fully satisfying God.

But we would also need to have God's word on it. And we do. He says: "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). And Jesus declares, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (Jn. 10:28). "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 Jn. 5:13).

As far as the people standing outside (who thought they should be in), what are they saying? We trusted in Christ's finished work? No! We did miracles in your name. They were claiming that, on the basis of their performance that they deserved a place in heaven.

Notice Christ's response. He does not say, I knew you once, but I no longer do. Instead, He sadly declares: "I

never knew you.” Anyone who comes to God must be honest about their sin; anything else is an alias. Because only your sins rightly introduce you to God—like this: “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk. 18:13).

Serving Our Generation (October-November 2004)

From Uplook, October-November 2004. Article.

The clock is quickly counting down on the Boomers.

The Boomers are dying. I ought to know. My boyhood friend, one year my senior, is gone. Just like that. Gone. We rode our bikes together, went swimming on hot summer afternoons, attended the same schools. We fellowshipped in the same local church where we tried—with fits and starts—to stir up our gifts, and stumbled into manhood together. You see him standing in my wedding photos. My heart holds happy memories of those times.

Anyway, two weeks ago, when I was in Ireland, his family stood around his grave. One morning at work he felt a tightness in his chest. He paid a visit to the local hospital, was given some medication, and was left for only a moment or two. But when the nurse returned, he was gone. Just like that. His passing was a solemn reminder to me that time is running out for reaching this generation.

There are no definitive dates that mark out the Baby Boomer generation, but many observers use the period between 1946 (when the end of the war in Europe began the dramatic climb in births) and 1964 (when the widespread use of the Pill led to a decline in the birthrate). One study (Spring 2004 Biography magazine) states:

By 1959 there were over 50 million children under the age of 14 living in the United States. Together they made up over 30 percent of the population. There were as many children in 1959 as there were people living in the US in 1881…

The baby boom would prove to be the single greatest demographic event in American history…. Boomers were so disproportionately numerous, so affluent, so blessed by the cold peace of the Cold War (Vietnam notwithstanding), that they would have the motive, means, and opportunity to reshape the nation (pp. 49-53).

Of course simple arithmetic shows that even the latest born of that generation are now 40. The oldest are approaching 60. If we are still going to reach this generation—my generation—for Christ, we must do it now.

What factors might help us understand the Boomers so we could be more effective in impacting them with the gospel? The Scripture states that someone who has built up a defense against us "is harder to be won than a strong city" (Prov. 18:19). When seeking to do exploits for God, it makes little sense to seek entrance to a person's soul at the point of its strongest defense. Instead we should ask: What are the vulnerabilities of this generation? Where might we find entry into their materialistic, me-centered, often cynical hearts?

In assessing this generation, the article continues:

The Boomers have been dismissed by many commentators as selfish, or self-indulgent, a generation that never had to make the sacrifices of its predecessors…But this stereotype is short-sighted and

misses other very different trends…the steady rise of church-going; the explosion of charitable giving; the explosion of entrepreneurship…Though they pushed the country toward liberalism when they were young, they pushed it right back to conservatism when they grew older.

Whether you agree with that assessment or not, it is the case that many who once embraced the free-wheeling, anti-establishment spirit of the 60s and 70s have turned 180 degrees from that. I know because I meet them in local assemblies all across the continent. Somehow they were reached and rescued by the gospel.

But it isn't the 60s and 70s now. Boomers aren't experimenting with hallucinogenic drugs and free love. Instead they now struggle with kids on drugs, crumbling marriages, financial uncertainty, bodies that prove to them daily that they are mortal (Superman just died!), and parents slipping into the netherworld of Alzheimer's.

Many of them were inoculated against the Real Thing by their parents' religion. But if we can gain their trust, they do have pressing questions, which many despair of ever having answered. Questions like: If there is a good God, why is it such a sad world? Is there any way of knowing for sure that there is a heaven? And knowing if I'm going? Can I really trust the Bible? Can I understand it?

I'm convinced that Boomers will listen if we prove our certain hope by living caring, contented and victorious lives before them. We need to be there for them in their times of crisis and be ready with real answers to their real problems (1 Pet. 3:15). And there is no time to lose.

Two-Faced (December 2004)

From Uplook, December 2004. Editorial.

Janus was supposedly the god of doors. There's one before us now.

As 1950 drew to a close, I cannot help but think that my thoroughly Scottish father anticipated with some relish the timely arrival of a new little tax deduction, a deduction to be applied for the whole of the previous year! But alas it was not to be. Although my dear mother spent the waning hours of the year and into New Year's Day laboring on my behalf at the hospital, I kept everyone waiting until the third day of January.

Grace triumphed in a remarkable way, however, and each April passed without my being made to feel the irreparable financial hardship which my untimely birth had caused.

I sometimes wonder: Is my enjoyment of history, of reminiscence, linked to my birth in the month named after Janus, the two-headed Roman god? Or is it the advancing years? Perhaps it is a combination of the two. Both New Year's and birthdays cause most people to reflect. When they come so close together for me, I can have a spring tide of emotion and personal evaluation sweep across my soul. Hopefully, like ocean tides, the experience flushes out polluting residue and brings new vitality into our experience.

Although believers are present possessors of eternal life, we now make do in the narrows between the inland sea of memories behind us and the boundless ocean of possibilities before us. Of course some things are better

forgotten—old hurts, failures and sins now “under the blood,” regrets of the things that might have been, even past successes which might cause us inflated egos or early retirement to rest on our laurels. All these Paul lumps together, and calls us to forget “those things that are behind” (Phil. 3:13).

On the other face, some things are essential to remember. “I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old” (Ps. 77:11). His works are to be seen everywhere; He incessantly is at work on our behalf. His wonders may not appear to us as frequently, but they too are there in times of crisis or great need.

As noted on our masthead, the ministry of this magazine began in 1928, seventy-seven years ago. But I was handed the baton in 1990, and we began with the full-format Uplook in January of 1991. So for this month, we have gone back to the early years and selected some of the best articles for our commemorative issue.

Of course many articles could have been included. But my (very arbitrary and highly personal) requirements included the following: the articles must be short—one page or less with few exceptions; they should be by current authors (at time of writing); and must be pertinent to today’s readers. I trust you will find them helpful.

But as we also scan the future, let me leave you with a story from the back cover of the November 1991 edition:

The story is told of a little girl who was taking a long cross-country journey. In the course of the day, her train crossed a number of rivers. The water could often be seen in advance as they twisted their way through the

mountains. The girl said nothing, but her mother could tell that something was stirring doubts and fears in the child. It was that she did not understand how the river they were approaching could safely be crossed. As they drew near, however, a bridge appeared and provided the way over. Several times the same thing happened.

Finally the child leaned back in her chair, and emitted a long breath of relief. “Somebody,” she said to her mother, “has put bridges for us all the way!” So God does for His children every mile of the journey home.

So What? (December 2004)

From Uplook, December 2004. Article.

Statistics have their place, I suppose, but don't lose your way in the number mumbo-jumbo.

Like kudzu, the oriental vine creeping its way across the landscape of the southeastern U.S., statistics are crawling into every area of our lives. Nothing seems beyond reach. And it seems nothing can stop the thing.

By definition, statistics deal with political facts and figures on the status of the state. Now statistics refer to anything—even the Church. In many places, it has become the basis of ecclesiastical decision-making. It was not so long ago that the measure of an assembly was its spiritual temperature. What was the tone of their worship? The fervor of their prayers? Their knowledge of the Word? Their zeal for souls? I don't recall the size of their building, budget, or congregation, or the effectiveness of their telemarketing coming into the conversation.

We would do well to examine the way the Lord assessed an assembly. We need not guess. The Revelation gives us His appraisal of seven. There is no mention of numbers, nor methods, nor what the community thought of them. There is commendation for faithfulness to responsibilities, hatred for the things He hates, endurance in difficulty, purity of doctrine, tenderhearted service, suffering for righteousness, and identifying with His name in the day of His rejection. There is also chastening: for having divorced labor from love; for following Balaam in cultural, religious, and social

compromise; for following Jezebel in the corrupting of divine order and divine truth; for allowing, by neglect, the assembly to become so weak that it is in danger of dying; and for becoming so confident in their own resources that they felt little practical need of the ministry of Christ in the assembly.

If, on the other hand, we were to use a statistical method to assess the churches of Asia Minor, Laodicea might have come out quite well. But the voice of the Master had been stifled; His presence was no longer sought—it seems no one noticed He was missing! Their goods had wooed them from heaven's gold. Their haute couture had spoiled them for the simple, white, linen garments of heaven's priests. And like a man growing slowly blind, they had learned to adjust by squinting at life. Any hope? Some suggest we measure the problem quantitatively.

I confess my lack of confidence in statistical analysis. How does it help me to know that the majority of churches in America are relatively small? Should I conclude that churches in America are small because a) the West is a tough part of the world to grow a church, or b) we're not working very hard at it because the octopus-world has us in its embrace, or c) God intended assemblies to remain at this manageable size (like the Lord getting the multitude to sit down in fifties and hundreds), or d) true Christianity always has been a little flock? Could it be that our statistician friends are no closer to the truth after they have gathered their numbers than before?

Would Philip have left Samaria with its mighty stirring to meet the Ethiopian if he was using statistics? Would Paul

have enjoined the assembly at Corinth to stand against the lax moral standards of the city; to separate themselves from ecclesiastical compromise; to clearly define the distinctions between the man and woman in church order—knowing these issues would undercut the popularity of the Corinthian church in the community? Did he suggest an assessment of the pagan expectations for the assembly and then redesign it to make them feel comfortable there? For a man with such a consuming desire to see souls saved, he never suggested the introduction of Greek drama to enhance their outreach.

Stats are plastic; you can bend them into amazing conclusions. When I hear them used to assess the condition of the church, I'm not impressed. My reaction is "So what?" I identify with Charles Dicken's David Copperfield: "Mrs. Gupp had indignantly assured him that there wasn't room to swing a cat there; but, as Mr. Dick justly observed…, 'You know, Trotwood, I don't want to swing a cat. I never do swing a cat. Therefore, what does that signify to me?'"

Like statistics in the church, very little.

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