



"The Vine"

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

Why Bother



With Church?

Also In This Issue:

*Sin, Grace, & The Prodigal Son;
Forgiveness and A Life Remembered*

From Pastor Dennis

Why Bother with Church?

It's Sunday, and you didn't sleep well last night. You're exhausted because you had a rough week - very stressful, too many hours, too little pay and too little appreciation from your boss and your family. But it's time to roll out of bed and get ready for church. Perhaps it is on this morning that the question comes to your mind - Why bother with church?

Philip Yancey wrote a book, *Church: Why Bother? My Personal Pilgrimage* - Zondervan Publishing, 1998, where he asks the question, "Is church really necessary for a believing Christian?" Philip Yancey tells his story of growing up in a very strict, legalistic church, leaving church attendance altogether for a number of years, and then coming back.

"Church has filled in me a need that could not be met in any other way. Christianity is not a purely intellectual, internal faith. It can only be lived in community. I used to approach church with the spirit of a discriminating consumer. Give me something I like. Entertain me. Now I try to look up in a worship service, to direct my gaze beyond the platform, toward God. To worship is to remember *who* owns the house."



On May 27 Christianity will celebrate the anniversary of Pentecost, the birth of the New Testament Church. Who started the idea of church anyway? Who built the first church? It was Jesus who said he would build his church (Matthew 16:15-20) and not even the gates of hell would stop its forward advance. The church would have his full authority. Jesus is the Head and the church is his Body (Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 12). Every member is important and all the members are to work together in love. The church is given a purpose; a reason for its existence by Jesus himself, his Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20.)

The entire New Testament is about a community of faith working together to take the good news of salvation to the whole world and to make disciples

The entire New Testament is about a community of faith working together to take the good news of salvation to the whole world and to make disciples - to add new members to the Body of Jesus wherever they went. The four gospel accounts - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - tell of Jesus Christ teaching his disciples and preparing the foundation for his church.

Acts records the dramatic beginning and explosive growth of that church. Paul's 14 epistles are

all addressed to specific churches and the 7 general epistles were delivered and read to all the churches. Most early churches met in homes, but they were all part of the Body of Christ, and still subject to the leadership that Jesus intended (Eph. 4:11-16). Revelation prophesies the trials and ultimate victory of the Church. So the whole New Testament is about and for the Church.

Is there any biblical support for an independent Christian? No, that is a modern and false idea. Christ has a job for his Body to do working together. Jesus calls us and all Christians not only to believe in him, but to belong to the Body that he began.

It's a state law that our children attend public or private school to learn reading, math, science, history. How much more important is it for children and adults of all ages to attend church to come to know our Creator, Savior and Lord, to learn eternal concepts and values, and to love and care for and learn from the other members of our church family - God's family? Pentecost is a day to thank God for his Church and for the local community of faith, where he has placed every Christian. I am thankful for all of you, our New Hope family.

The Vine

Growing Together in Christ



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In Memory

Henry Miller His Life and Family (November 21, 1944 - April 3, 2007)

Henry J. Miller was born in Millersburg, Ohio, to Jacob E. and Susan J. Miller. He was the fourth of four children. Henry was raised in an Amish Community and baptized into the Amish faith.

In 1966 Henry moved to Pasadena and began working for the Worldwide Church of God. Henry worked for the denominational headquarters as a grounds man for over 30 years. In October 1996 Henry began working for the City of Pomona. He served as a playground safety inspector.

He was ordained as a deacon in the spring of 1984 and continued faithfully serving his Lord and his congregation, New Hope Christian Fellowship, to the end of his life.

Henry loved being with his family. He was a kind and loving man to all he met. Henry enjoyed traveling, history, genealogy, math and playing chess.

Henry is survived by his wife Bonnie, their four children Linda, Allen, Tim and Paula and two brothers Jonas J.E. Miller and Moses J. Miller. - *Excerpts from the Memorial Service*

Henry Remembered

What I saw on Saturday, April 7, 2007, was a sight I had never seen before. I sat in a chapel that holds 150 people. It became full in a matter of minutes. The reserve family room became full and overflowing. They began to seat people in the hallway. The parking lot and the sidewalk were lined (with people) also. The count came in an easy 300. All the guests came as a show of respect for Henry Miller and to show his family the love and support that we have for them.

As I began to focus on the people that gathered, I began to think, "Who was Henry Miller?" Just by looking at the guests there

was no way to tell. They were white, black, Latino, and others. And just about all equal in number. Had I not known Henry I would not have been able to tell what race he was. And I mean this in a kind way.

I believed Henry really took God's words to heart. I truly believe Henry was trying to be Christ-like. He saw the image of a man and not the color of a man. This is evident by the guests in attendance. I appreciated knowing Henry even more. For it seemed he treated everyone the same -- with friendship, compassion, and caring.

He gave us all a great big dose of his famous smile. I thank him for these wonderful gifts and the great memories that others and I have of him.

The service, so beautiful, the music so tender and the minister so soothing. I want to thank the family for what was done to enable us to say our final farewell to Henry. I know the hardship, but thank you so much. I know his family wanted him to come back home, but we weren't done with him yet. Thank you once again.

So many of us wanted to speak at the service, but the disbelief and suddenness of this was too hard for most of us. And at the same time we were so sad. Sad, not because Henry was dead, but because he was gone. We all know death is to be expected one day. But, when someone good goes away, when someone you love is gone, that's what brings the hurt.

Dear family please know, this wonderful man you called yours, meant so much and helped so many of us by just the way he lived his life. Rest assured in knowing he will be missed, but not forgotten for the rest of our lives. He was a friend to so

many. We will love him for the rest of our lives. And rest assured, his family can always count on us. Love always, Barbara Burrell --The above comments are excerpts from a letter to Bonnie Miller from her neighbor.

Dear Dad

*I'm glad
That you love me
It's plain to see*

*I love you so
This I want everyone to know
I love you so
I even call you my 'Dadsio'*

*It's plain to see
That you love the family
You provided for us
Without a fuss*

*Your sense of humor was great
It was first rate
You tell jokes well
Yes, they were really swell*

*We enjoyed playing games
With different kinds of names
You were especially blessed
With a talent for chess*

*I love you so
This I want everyone to know
I love you so
You are my wonderful
'Dadsio' --By Linda Miller*



The Church

Why We Need The Church

Many people claim to believe in Jesus Christ but do not want to attend any of his churches. Some of them are fooling themselves. The New Testament shows that the normal pattern is for believers to meet together (Heb. 10:25).

Paul repeatedly exhorts Christians to do different things to "one another" (Rom. 12:10; 15:7; 1 Cor. 12:25; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:32; Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:13). It is difficult or impossible for people to obey these commands if they do not meet with other believers.

A local church can give us a sense of belonging, of being involved with other believers. It can give us some spiritual safety, so that we are not blown around by strange ideas. A local church can give us friendship, fellowship and encouragement. It can teach us things we would never learn on our own.

But perhaps the most important reason for each believer to participate in a local church is that the church needs us. God has given different abilities to different believers, and he wants us to work together "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:4-7). If only part of the work force shows up, it is no surprise that the church is not able to do as much as we would like, or to be as healthy as we would like. Unfortunately, some people find it easier to criticize than to help.

The church needs our time, our abilities, our resources. The church needs people it can count on—it needs our commitment. Jesus said to pray for laborers (Matt. 9:38). He wants each of us to be working, not sitting on the sidelines.

Individuals who try to be Christian without the church fail to use their strengths to help the people the Bible says we should be helping. The church is a mutual-aid society, and we help each other, knowing that the day may come (and in fact is already here) that we will need to be helped.

The church is described in several ways: the people of God, the family of God, the bride of Christ. We are a building, a temple and a body. Jesus described us as sheep, a field of

grain and a vineyard. Each analogy describes a different aspect of the church.

Scripture also calls us the bride of Christ—a phrase that suggests his love for us, and a tremendous change within ourselves, that we might have such a close relationship with the Son of God. In some of his parables, people are invited to attend the wedding banquet, but in this analogy, we are invited to be the bride.

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). How do we make ourselves ready for this? It is a gift: "Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear" (v. 8). Christ cleanses us "by the washing with water through the word" (Eph. 5:26). He presents the church to himself, having made her radiant, spotless, holy and righteous (v. 27). He is working in us.

Working together

The picture of the church that best illustrates the way that members relate to one another is that of the body. "You are the body of Christ," Paul says, "and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). Jesus Christ "is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18), and we are all members of the body. If we are united to Christ, we are united to one another, too, and we have responsibilities to one another.

No one can say, "I don't need you" (1 Cor. 12:21), and no one can say, "I don't belong in the church" (v. 18). God distributes our abilities so that we work together for the common good, helping one another and being helped by working together. "There should be no division in the body" (v. 25). Paul frequently warned against the sin of divisiveness, even saying that a person who causes division should be put out of the church (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10).

Christ causes the church to grow "as each part does its work"—as the various members cooperate (Eph. 4:16).

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A local church can give us some spiritual safety, so that we are not blown around by strange ideas.

A local church can teach us things we would never learn on our own.

It is difficult or impossible for people to obey these commands if they do not meet with other believers.

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Church From Page 4

Unfortunately, the Christian world is divided into denominations that sometimes squabble with one another. The church is not yet perfect, since none of its members is perfect. Nevertheless, Christ wants the church to be united (John 17:21). This does not require a merger of organizations, but it does suggest a common purpose. True unity can be found only as we draw closer to Christ, preach his gospel, and live as he would. The goal is to promote him, not ourselves. The existence of different denominations has a side benefit, however: Through diverse approaches, more people are reached with the message of Christ in a way they understand.

Purposes of the church

Christ has built his church, given his people gifts and leadership, and he has given us work to do. Now let's review the purpose of the church.

A major purpose of the church is worship. God has called us that we "may declare the praises of him" who called us "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). God seeks people who will worship him (John 4:23), who will love him above everything else (Matt. 4:10). Everything we do, whether as individuals or as a church, should be for his glory (1 Cor. 10:31). We are called to "continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise" (Heb. 13:15).

We are commanded, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19). When we gather as a church, we sing praises to God, we pray to him and we listen to his word. These are forms of worship. So is the Lord's Supper, so is baptism and so is obedience.

Teaching is another purpose of the church.

"It is incompatible to claim to live in a close, loving fellowship with God while distancing oneself from one's brethren in the church."

- G Panikulam*

It is at the heart of the Great Commission: "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Church leaders should teach, and every member should teach one another (Col.

3:16). We should encourage one another (1 Cor. 14:31; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:25). Small groups provide an excellent setting for this mutual ministry.

If we want to be spiritual, Paul says, we should want to "build up the church" (1 Cor. 14:12). The goal is to edify, strengthen, encourage and comfort (v. 3). The entire meeting should "be done for the strengthening of the church" (v. 26). We are to be disciples, people who learn and apply the word of God. The early church was praised because they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

Ministry is a third major purpose of the church. Paul writes, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). Our first duty is to our family, and then to the church and then to the world around us. The second-greatest commandment is to love our neighbors (Matt. 22:39).

This world has many physical needs, and we should not ignore them. But the greatest need is the gospel, and we should not ignore that, either. As part of our ministry to the world, the church is to preach the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. No other organization will do this work—it is the mission of the church. Every worker is needed—some on the front lines, and some in support. Some will plant, some will nurture and some will harvest, and as we work together, Christ will cause the church to grow (Eph. 4:16).

- By Michael Morrison from Discipleship 101 A beginner's guide to Christianity Chapter 22
The full lesson can be viewed at <http://www.wcg.org/>

** The highlighted quotes on this page regarding the church are not from the Discipleship lesson but from other sources.*

In order for all the metaphors of the bible (concerning the church) to make sense ... it is important for us to be involved in a local church family.
- Allister Begg *

His (the Apostle John's) warning was that removing oneself from 'fellowship' (koinonia) with the apostles would result in a loss of fellowship with the Father and Son as well.
(I John 2:9-11)
- D. L. Akin*

inyourpocket

Pocket Guide to Forgiveness

Think back to the best gift you've ever received. What comes to mind? A beautiful piece of jewelry? A nice dinner out? An electronic gadget?



With Jesus' life, death and resurrection, he gave us many gifts. One of the best was the gift of forgiveness - unmerited pardon for our

sinfulness and our sins. As believers, we live in a perpetual state of grace, for which we can never be thankful enough.

But do we extend that grace to others? Jesus said we are to love each other, so much that we, as his followers, will be known by our love. When you think about loving others, do you also think of forgiving them? Can you love someone without forgiving them?

As with a lot of things in life, it's easier to say the words I forgive you than it is to actually mean them. We often harbor resentment. We remember past offenses long after the other person may have forgotten them. Our thoughts toward the offender sometimes turn bitter and can cause friendships to end. Our lack of forgiveness may cause us to lose perspective. Our hearts can become hardened and our minds might even shut out the voice of God.

The problem of 'I forgive you' being easier said than done might be solved by having a plan to follow after saying the words. If you're like me, you could use a little help to make the somewhat abstract concept of forgiveness a little more concrete.

At a conference a few years ago, I heard a speaker talk about forgiveness. I didn't make a note of her name or even which conference. It might have been at Connecting & Bonding. I'd like to share her six statements of forgiveness and at the same time, ask forgiveness for not giving proper credit. If you recognize these, please let me know and I'll give credit where it's due.

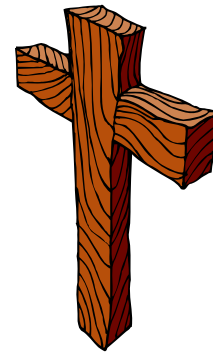
Six statements of forgiveness:

1. *I forgive _____ for _____.*
2. *I admit it was wrong.*
3. *I will not expect _____ to make up for what he or she has done.*

4. *I will not use the offense to define who that person is.*
5. *I will not manipulate _____ with the offense.*
6. *I will not allow the offense to stop my personal growth.*

These statements help me follow through in my heart what is on my lips, especially if I'm having trouble letting go. They remind me that my lack of forgiveness usually hurts me more than it hurts others. Statements 4 and 5 remind me the person I need to forgive is made in the image of God and is loved and valued by him, just as I am.

We all know we should forgive, just as we have been forgiven. But as with everything else, God is much better at it than we are, and he seems better able to forget the offenses too! Perhaps if we keep this pocket guide handy and with God's help, we might be able to forgive and forget a little better in the future. - *By Tammy Tkach*



It's easier to say the words I forgive you than it is to actually mean them.

Pun Time ☺

- + A hawk sat atop a church because it was a bird of pray.
- + The church janitor was also the organist, and had to watch his keys and pews.
- + A farmer brought a bucket of milk to church so it could be pastorized.
- + A church welcomed all denominations but preferred tens and twenties.
- + When a priest makes a mistake in church, it's a clerical error.
- + Twin monks who rang church bells died. They were dead ringers.
- + An architect for a church would draw a cross section.
- + A pear shaped like a church bell is a-pealing.
- + A lawyer for a church did some cross-examining.
- + Two churches being built in a race to completion were on a steeple chase.
- + When cannibals ate a missionary they got a taste of religion.
- + There is some Confucion about the oldest religion in China. - *From Pun of the Day*
<http://www.punoftheday.com>



Potpourri

Church is the Safest Place to Be 😊



Automobiles account for 20 percent of all fatal accidents, while 17 percent of fatalities for pedestrians occur on streets and sidewalks. Travel by air, rail, or water causes 16 percent of the deaths.

Yet, of all reported deaths, only .001 percent occur in worship services. Can you think of any place safer than Church?

From www.mondaymorninginsight.com Submitted by Robert Meade

Trey Carlisle Plays Two Characters on Two Different Networks



New Hope's Trey Carlisle who plays the afro-wearing, trailer park, five-year old 'Earl Jr.' on the series "My Name is Earl" debuts as a hip, high-five slapping, eight year old in "All of Us" during the April 30th and May 7th programs. 'Earl' is on NBC - Channel 4 and 'All of Us' is on the CW channel 5.

Sin and Grace from Page 8

inheritance and now he was penniless and hopeless, incapable of deserving his father's loving care.

Consequently, if we view God apart from our sin, we will only see God's kindness. But only when we comprehend the depth of our sinfulness, and how much God abhors sin, can we begin to grasp the meaning of his grace.

All of us are like the wayward prodigal son who can never earn or deserve God's merciful grace. But because of his grace, God extends his mercy, nevertheless. We must understand that grace resides in God's nature and has nothing to do with our capacity to deserve it as the apostle Paul explains in Eph. 1:7. "He is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son, and our sins are forgiven."

[To be continued] - By Larry Omasta

This article is based on the books Why Sin Matters, Mark McMinn, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004 & The Return of the Prodigal Son, Henri J. M. Nouwen, Image Books-Doubleday, 1992

First Graders Finish Proverbs

A first grade school teacher in Virginia presented each child in her classroom the first half of a well-known proverb and asked them to come up with the remainder of the proverb. Their insight and humor may surprise you.

- ✓ Strike while the *bug is close*.
- ✓ It's always darkest before *Daylight Saving Time*.
- ✓ Never underestimate the power of *termites*.
- ✓ You can lead a horse to water but *how?*
- ✓ Don't bite the hand that *looks dirty*.
- ✓ You can't teach an old dog new *math*.
- ✓ If you lie down with dogs, you'll *stink in the morning*.
- ✓ The pen is mightier than the *pigs*.
- ✓ Where there's smoke there's *pollution*.
- ✓ A penny saved is *not much*.
- ✓ Two's company, three's *the Musketeers*.
- ✓ Don't put off till tomorrow what *you put on to go to bed*.
- ✓ Laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry *and you have to blow your nose*.
- ✓ There are none so blind as *Stevie Wonder*.
- ✓ Children should be seen and not *spanked or grounded*.
- ✓ If at first you don't succeed *get new batteries*.
- ✓ You get out of something only what you *see in the picture on the box*.
- ✓ When the blind lead the blind *get out of the way*.

From the Internet

Grace

*Both sides
of the
story must
be told...*

Sin and Grace

What the parable of the prodigal son tells us about both

Sin and grace are really part of the same story. Thus, both elements of the story MUST be told. Sin needs grace, and grace can only be offered in the presence of sin.

The risk is in telling only half the story. If we leave grace out of the equation, as many Christians have done over the centuries, good intentions for pursuing spiritual maturity give way to excessive rules and judgmentalism. Without grace, we end up trying to earn salvation which can never be earned and ignore the gift of grace.

When Jesus told the story of the prodigal Son, he included the older brother. Conscientious, hardworking, faithful, diligent, this brother only understood part the story. He was quick with his accusations toward his younger brother - reminding his father how the younger son had sinned, disrespecting his father by demanding his inheritance while his father was still



The Return of the Prodigal Son (1773) by Pompeo Batoni

squandered everything on sinful living including consorting with prostitutes.

And do you know what? The older brother was right; well in reality he was only *half right*. He saw his brother's sin but failed to grasp that he too was sinful. He fell into the easy trap of his self-righteous human nature comparing himself with other people and not with God.

As we have noted when we leave grace out of the story, it produces legalism and alienation. But when we leave sin out of the story, it robs us of life-giving grace.

With cheap grace we don't see ourselves as sinners but as a "good" person with a few occasional problems. When we become aware of our wounds or flaws, we see them as a result of poor parenting or lack of self-esteem or the result of someone else's mistakes.

Today grace is popular; sin is offensive. When we emphasize grace without addressing sin, we "turn grace into lasciviousness" (excess wantonness) Jude 4 (NLT). When we

minimize the sinfulness of sin, we also minimize the impact and value of God's precious gift of grace.

True grace can't be cheap because sin is so costly. We can see the vast cost of sin as nations wage war, as the strong oppress the weak, and as the greed and power of certain individuals destroy the lives of others. God doesn't think grace is cheap because it cost him his son's life. Jesus death on the cross to atone for all humanity's sin shows us the ultimate cost of sin.

God's amazing grace comes into focus only through the lens of our own sinfulness. Let's look at the example of the prodigal son. It's a story about grace because it's a story of one whose arrogance had expired and is ready

to confess his sin. The prodigal son had nothing to offer. He spent his entire inheritance and was returning home penniless. He also returned in a state of moral bankruptcy because he had lived in wanton pleasure. The son had nothing with which to begin in seeking his father's mercy.

In fact, he had rehearsed what he was going to tell his father. *"I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man."*

With this backdrop of complete humiliation, we see a picture of God's grace as the father welcomes his wayward son home and insists he wear the finest robe and gives him a ring for his finger. His father then throws an exuberant party for him and proclaims, *"The son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, now he is found."*

A picture of amazing grace emerges from the hopelessness of one who can't possibly deserve his father's kindness. The lesson Jesus is teaching us is that sin is bigger than we think, but so is God's grace.

Now we might think of the father as a kind man, but he was more than kind in taking back his son. Some might say the father demonstrated mercy to his wayward son. But the power of this story goes beyond kindness and mercy - it extends to grace.

Not only did the son not deserve his father's kindness, he had nothing to offer. He had misspent his

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