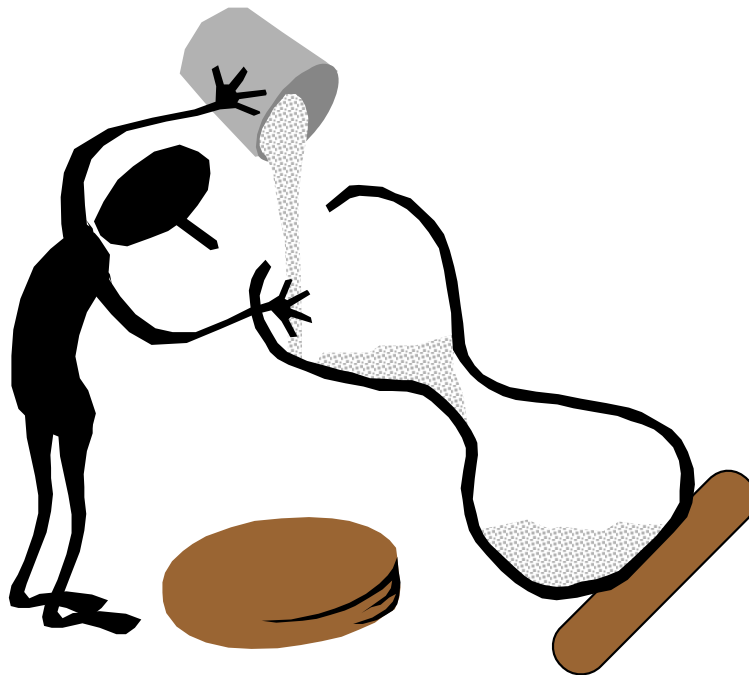




“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship



*What Do You Do With The
Time God Has Given You?*

Also In This Issue – Thoughts on:

Sin, Grace, & Pride; Born Again; & Modesty

From Pastor Dennis

It's All About Whom?

We are in the middle of 40 days of prayer at New Hope. Each summer we set aside this time of prayer to encompass the dates of our youth summer camp and Vacation Bible School, so that we will keep our children and teens in prayer. I've also asked that you pray for God to give us a passionate love for the lost; and stir us to reach out to the unchurched. A major challenge for Christians and churches is to think and pray outward, rather than inward.

As I observe my four-year old granddaughter Katie, I am reminded again that a child's world is "all about her or him." As children grow and mature, through the ethical, moral and spiritual teaching of parents and teachers, they learn that their world is really not "all about them," but that is not easy to learn. In fact the reality is that we spend our whole lives learning that.

When we become Christians, we become aware that our new life is in Christ; there is no real life without him. Paul said that each of us has "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator... Christ is all, and is in all." (Colossians 3:10-11)

Right after Jesus called Levi (Matthew) to follow him, Levi threw a big party for all his "sinner" friends and invited Jesus to come as the guest of honor. The Pharisees and Jewish lawyers were offended by this: Luke 5:29-32 - "Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners?'"

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Jesus was teaching them to think "outward."

God had to send Peter a vision (Acts 10) to show him that in fulfilling the Great

Commission, Jesus really did intend for the Gospel to go to the Gentile world too. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) teaches us that every person on earth is our brother or sister.

Sometimes when we have a "summer camp" day or a VBS day service at church, occasionally an older member will say that it bores them; they get very little out of it. When I think back to my high school days, when I played football, baseball and basketball games, it was so important to have the adults in our school community there as our extended "family" to cheer us on! That's what the church is - a family - who cares for and supports all of its members.

Paul compares the church to a family; and to the human body - 1 Cor. 12:25-26 - "There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

When we begin to think, "It's all about me," it may be a good time to go to our Lord in prayer and sing these words to the popular praise song by Matt Redman:

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
And it's all about you, all about you, Jesus.
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,
When it's all about you, all about you, Jesus.*



The Vine *Growing Together in Christ*



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Born Again

What Being Born-Again Means To Me

In John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. To Nicodemus' query, Jesus answers that he is not talking about being born of the flesh. In verse 5 he makes it clear that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.



It occurs to me that before one can be born again, he must die first. And since this is not talking about physical rebirth but spiritual rebirth, our life goes on; we are the same person in our physical bodies. It is our inner being, the self, which must die.

This is symbolic of the water baptism that we undergo. The immersion into water represents the death of the ego, and the rising out of the water, the new self. We are now a new creation, born of the Spirit. The life that we continue to live is no longer our own. Our sinful life has been washed away. We now have a new life.

Our new nature leads us to change our focus in life. We no longer go the way of the flesh. We have lost our interest in a life of ease and a happy-go-lucky existence. We desire a more serious life of meaning and purpose. We are no longer attracted to mundane activities that promise material gains, power and influence, fame and popularity, since the old nature craving for such things is gone.

Our values have changed. We are more interested in our spiritual being than our physical. We find ourselves spending much of our time and attention to spiritual pursuits. We delight in knowing the truth. The center of our life is Jesus Christ; his command of love our daily practice.

Concern for our fellowmen becomes a considered factor for our actions, for the decisions and choices that we make. Our caring attitude for others is evident in our dealings with them. Thanks to our new nature, even our interaction with



those difficult to deal with has changed. For one thing, we are no longer offended when others do not treat us fairly or when they do us wrong or try to put us down. We are not our own. Jesus is in control and has occupied our hearts. There is no place there for vengeance to thrive; no room for bitterness and resentment to lurk; no ground for an unforgiving spirit to take root.

A born-again Christian abounds in good works. But he does not aspire for recognition for a work well done. How could he claim the credit when it rightfully belongs to the One working within him?

If we have special talents and abilities and we use these to cheer up and to comfort, to strengthen and to encourage and to edify others, we have done well. But actually we have only done what is expected of us. Our spiritual gifts have been given to us from above for the sole purpose of sharing them.

If we are blessed with adequate resources so that we are able to contribute substantially, especially to the household of God, what is there to be proud of when we don't really own anything. We are just stewards of everything we have at our disposal.

If a brother or sister or a neighbor is in great need, do you think it is not the Spirit within you who is stirring you up and urging you to make that great sacrifice for the sake of the one in need? And when you have decided to make yourself available, who do you think provides you with the strength, the time and resources to enable you to help? So, what have you really done of yourself alone that you should boast?

Every good thing that we do is actually accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit whose temple we are if so be we are in Christ. Christ in us - living a Spirit-led life - this is what born-again means to me. It is only to those who are born-again that Jesus promises the kingdom of God. For "there is therefore now no condemnation to those which are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1).

- By Divina A. Castillo



Book Review

Time Peace

Time Peace: Living Here and Now with a Timeless God, (Zondervan, 2007).

Imagine an archeological dig hundreds of years in the future. On each human skeleton—young and old alike—the diggers find a shackle on the left wrist. Some people's bonds are brilliant silver or gold, others appear to be leather or plastic. A few of these manacles are strangely ticking.

It seems, the archeologists surmise, these people were ruled by this little ticking object. Perhaps they considered it a household god of sorts. Well, our future archeologists wouldn't be too far off. We are constantly ruled by our watches. We have fifteen minutes to do one thing. Two hours to do another. We've only got five minutes to visit a friend or twenty to take for lunch. Our lives, as the poet T.S. Eliot once said are "measured out with coffee spoons." If we aren't careful, this constant worry about time can strangle our relationships and stifle our days. Time can become an idol.

In her outstanding new book, *Time Peace*, my friend and former colleague Ellen Vaughn offers sound biblical principles on how to think about time. She says, "Time is not our enemy when we are friends with God. It is but a resource to be used, like food or oxygen. We can keep it, rather than be kept by it."

Ellen reminds us that God gives us enough time each day to do His will for that day. She reminds us of the example of Jesus, who, while he had an urgent message, did not seem hurried or stressed. While his disciples yelled at people to go away, Jesus was not stingy with his time. But he also didn't try to "do it all." He did not heal everyone. He did not preach everywhere. He took time away from the pressing crowds and he lived well and completely, all within the constraints of time.

Like Christ, we are to seize our days for the kingdom, but not with anxiety. We trust God that the time we have to spend, if

submitted to Him, is leaving a legacy which outlasts time itself.



In one moving story, Ellen tells of some missionaries to Vietnam in the mid 1960s. They knew it was dangerous to be in the country, so they had taken precautions, but they also knew that they had important work to do. One of the missionaries, Bob Ziemer, had three tactical goals he was trying to accomplish: translating the Bible into the local dialect, training indigenous leadership for the church, and finding local leadership for a leprosarium they'd started.

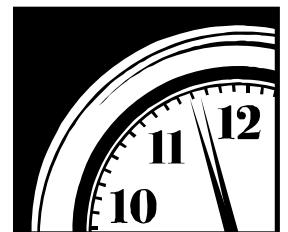
It was only days after those goals were accomplished that the Tet Offensive exploded throughout South Vietnam. Six of these missionaries were killed, but their families had the assurance that God had apportioned their days. As missionary Ruth Thompson put it in a letter home to her children in college some months before her death, "Don't you know we are immortal until our work is done?" Understanding time from a biblical perspective, as Ellen Vaughn's new book so skillfully shows us, can give us this same peace and focus as we live well in the time given us.

Time is not measured in the terms of the length of one's life. It wasn't cut short for Ruth Thompson. Ellen tells of going to Vietnam a few years ago, visiting the very area that Thompson worked in and seeing thriving churches. Her mission on earth was accomplished in God's allotted time.

Time Peace has certainly made me think more deeply about the way I think about God. I hope that as you read the book, you will discover where your ideas of God have been too small—and where your view of the time God has given you may be stunted, too.

I recommend this book. Not only is it a good read, it is also a powerful apologetic for the existence of God. -

By Charles Colson
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<http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=6749>



Modesty

Where Has All the Modesty Gone?

As my husband waited at a traffic light, a couple walked across the street in front of him. The woman wore what appeared to be a short, black negligee-type dress. It was a bit transparent and more than a bit revealing. That same day he



noticed another woman bend down to pick up something off the sidewalk (she was right in front of him - hard not to notice), and as she did, she revealed more than a little so-called plumber's cleavage. Joe doesn't consider himself the fashion police, but he did question their choice of clothing.

It's hard not to notice the revealing clothing choices of women these days. The fashion seems to be bare as much of yourself as you can legally get away with. But it's not just a problem with women's clothing. One town in Louisiana fines men \$500 and puts them in jail for six months if they show a lot of underwear. The mayor said he just wants to keep people from seeing too much of their "vital parts."

One of the morning shows did a segment on how much cleavage is appropriate at the office. Photos of what is and what is not appropriate were shown. I doubt many women will take their advice, as no one likes to be told what to wear. "Anything goes" has been the fashion mantra for decades. Television and movies only encourage this attitude and have established inappropriate clothing as the new norm.

But does anything go? How much cleavage--front or back--is appropriate? I must admit as the years go by, I'm less inclined to show much skin. Allow me to paraphrase a quotation (possibly Mark Twain, possibly a variation of Proverbs 17:28): Better to dress modestly and be thought youthful, than to dress revealingly and remove all doubt of your age.

Timothy tells us in chapter 2, verse 9, of his first book: "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety" (NIV). The Amplified Bible elaborates in this way:

Also [I desire] that women should adorn themselves modestly and appropriately and sensibly in seemly apparel." He goes on to talk about not going overboard with jewelry, expensive clothes and elaborate hairstyles. Rather, Timothy states, our focus should be on what's on the inside, which is good character and integrity.

If it's true that clothing reflects what is on the inside, what we wear gives others clues about our attitudes and intentions. Does this outfit draw attention to my "vital parts"? What am I saying about myself if I wear this? Is it appropriate for the occasion? More important, does it give glory and honor to God?

Summer's here and no doubt we'll be seeing a lot of skin and more of people's vital parts than we want. Let's make sure we remember Timothy's words and remember who's looking - God, our daughters and everyone else! - *By Tammy Tkach*



Grace From Page 6

"In love he (God the Father) predestined us to be adopted as his sons (and daughters) through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Eph. 1:5-8).

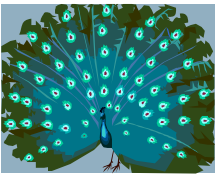
As we said in the beginning of this article, the story of sin must be told as the story of grace. Seeing our sinfulness helps us grasp the immensity of God's grace. But we can only bear to see our sin when we can anticipate the possibility of grace. It is only in the presence of God's grace can we have the courage to open our eyes that have been blinded to our brokenness and honestly confront our sins.

John Newton's song, *Amazing Grace*, says it all so poignantly. "*Amazing Grace - how sweet the sound; that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found; Was blind but now I see.*" - *By Larry Omasta*

Pride & Self Justification

Sin and Grace (Part 3)

Sin and grace are really part of the same story. Sin needs grace, and true grace can only be offered in the presence of sin. The risk is in telling only half the story. In part one, we told the story of grace. In part two, we talked about how important it is to admit that we are sinful and broken. Now in part three, we'll take a look at a couple of things that often prevent us from admitting our sinfulness.



Pride: Pride causes us to think we are better than we really are. Pride causes us to see the worst in others and their sins while pride causes us to see only the best in ourselves. Because of pride, we minimize our sinfulness. Augustine lamented, "[My] sin was all the more incurable because I did not judge myself to be a sinner."

Modern day British Christian apologist, Harry Blamires, writes, "In the Christian moral system, the key sin is pride - that perversion of the will by which the self is asserted as the center of the universe."

C. S. Lewis, in his book, *Mere Christianity*, wrote the following. "According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil; Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind" (p. 109).

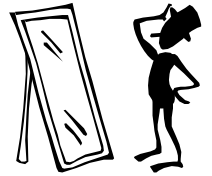
Self-Justification: Our prideful human nature causes us to justify our behavior. When something bad happens to us, we blame others. But when something bad happens to others, we tend to explain it as being their own fault. When something good happens to us, we take credit for it. When something good happens to others we say they got lucky.

Our pride allows us to recast the story so that we always look acceptable regardless of the outcome. Here are a few examples of our spin. When I fail an exam, it's because the test was awful. However, when you fail,

it's because you didn't study enough. When I get a speeding ticket, it's because the officer needed to fill a quota. But when you get a speeding ticket, it's because you drive too fast. As you can see, we can always seem to justify our action, which in turn allows us to deny our sinfulness.

Pleading Guilty: The question we often wrestle with is "Can I bear to face the truth about myself or shall I retreat again into the false safety of denial and self-justification?" Pleading guilty requires enormous courage. It also begs for the promise of grace.

As paradoxical as this statement may seem on the surface, it is, nevertheless, true: "Guilt is good!" That's because guilt is an appropriate response to acts of sin and the consequences those sins. Godly guilt wakes us up, causes us to grieve our wrongdoing, brings us empathetic sorrow for those we have hurt, and draws us to a place of confession.



Mark McMinn, in his book, *Why Sin Matters*, explains the difference between guilt and shame. "Guilt says 'I did something wrong. I hurt you deeply, and I feel terrible about it.' Shame says, 'I am a bad person and feel terrible about myself.' Guilt helps us focus on the other; shame absorbs us in self-pity and self-recrimination. Guilt is an appropriate response to our acts of sin. When we sin, we hurt others and we grieve God. Sin has consequences" (p. 43).

Hope is on the way. If we are so prone to pride, so capable of self-deception and self-justification, then where can we find hope for our brokenness? Our hope lies in Jesus Christ! Our hope lies in accepting the grace that is extended to us through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

God, through his love for us, will give us the strength to take a realistic quick peek (not a lengthy look) at our flaws and sinfulness and realize that we are, indeed, sinners, in need of a Savior. God, through his love, will give us the strength to accept his offer of grace, be cleansed from our sins, and then to be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. See Grace on Page 5