

Hear The Shepherds Voice

FREE

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Part I of a message
by Leroy Surface

"If"

Introduction

No one wants an "iffy" salvation. We need to know with absolute certainty that we are saved. We need to understand what salvation is and what we are saved from. We need to know who it is that saves us and what He did to save us. Eternity is too long, Heaven is too sweet, and Hell is too hot for it to be otherwise. Many people have been led to believe that if they have ever repeated a sinner's prayer and believed that Jesus is the Son of God, they are saved and cannot miss heaven when they die. Vast multitudes believe that the children of God are still sinners who "sin every day" but God forgives them when they pray. Many others believe they have already been forgiven for every sin they will ever commit, so there is no need to repent when they pray. Everyone seeks security in what they believe, often not even caring if it is the truth or not. The atheist seeks security in believing there is no God and this present life is all there is. We who "believe in God" understand that the "security" of the atheist is no security at all, because he will stand before God at the judgment regardless of what he believed in this life. Many "believers," however, do not believe they will stand before God to be judged. The apostle Paul tells us otherwise;

Romans 14:10-12: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

II Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

The prophet Isaiah warns us of the day of God's judgment;

Isaiah 33:14: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

When Isaiah prophesies of Zion in his day, he is also speaking of the church in our day. Many famous personalities have built great religious empires while telling the people that sin doesn't matter because Jesus died to forgive us "once for all." What if they are wrong? They are wrong! I received an "open vision" from the Lord almost fifty years ago (September, 1966). I saw the events of the end of the world as described in the sixth seal of John's revelation. I saw people run-

My Grandpa Rescued the President!

Author: Julie Barrier

The tiny skiff sailed across the English Channel in the foggy dead of night. Icy winds and frothy waves tossed the boat from side to side, nearly capsizing the fragile vessel. But my grandfather, nineteen year-old Ralph Waldo Tacker, kept a steady hand at the helm even though his fingers were numb from the cold. He was carrying precious cargo-President William McKinley. The bodies of brave sailors encircled the commander-in-chief to provide warmth and protection. A heavy black tarp covered the craft so enemy patrols would suspect nothing more than a lonely fisherman trolling for tomorrow's catch. Grandpa arrived at the English shore just before dawn where a cracker-jack escort greeted President McKinley and whisked him to safety.

"Boy" my nickname for my grandfather, seldom spoke about his Navy days in the heat of World War I. But the carnage he witnessed forged a strong faith in God and formed him into a remarkable man. Tough as nails and fiercely protective of those he loved, this man in my life was my mentor and my champion. I climbed up in his feather bed awaiting his colorful tales of "Geewhizzicus" and "Wallygoppers." He curled his big bicep and made his Navy ship tattoo undulate up and down his arm. Three little ducks adorned his right foot to remind him of his salty days at sea.

I now know that his love for Jesus and his steely courage sustained him as he witnessed the carnage of wounded soldiers suffocated by mustard gas and maimed by bullets piercing sinew and bone. The blood-soaked bodies were piled into his vessel and rushed to the safety of British hospitals across the briny waterway. Boy seldom spoke of the atrocities he witnessed. But his wartime days motivated him to cherish every moment and live his later years with unmitigated joy.

Juxtaposed on his life's canvas of grief and loss were brushstrokes of another man. Boy was a creative and accomplished musician. My sailor Gramps tooted the Sousaphone for none other than John Phillip Sousa himself. He belled peppy marches under Sousa's artful baton. Can you imagine? He played "Stars and Stripes Forever" the first time it was ever performed! What a remarkable experience!

But I didn't know feisty Ralph during his stint in the Great War. I knew the man of persevering faith he became. He opened his arms wide to welcome his granddaughter and twirl me until I was

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ning to the rocks and mountains to hide and crying *“fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb”* (Revelation 6:16). It seemed in the vision as if the entire world was on fire when the scene changed and I saw the *“Great White Throne Judgment.”* We are told that no one but the ungodly will appear at that judgment. That may be so, but everyone I saw stand before God that day expected to be received. Two angels brought them one by one before the throne. I watched as each one of them did the same thing; they raised their arms and lifted their hands to worship God when suddenly their countenances turned to faces of terror as they screamed, *“There’s blood on my hands! There’s blood on my hands.”* They were held accountable for the blood of others that were lost because of them. Those that I saw were professing Christians. I saw preachers; pastors, teachers and evangelists that had not given the truth of Christ to the people. Multitudes of souls that Christ died for were lost because these ministers had led them to believe that sin didn’t matter, because Jesus *“took the penalty”* for our sin. The *“truth of Christ”* is that God sent Him into the world to *“make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity,”* and *“bring in everlasting righteousness”* (Daniel 9:24-25) when He died for our sin on the cross at Calvary. Daniel 9:26 tells us that He was *“cut off, but not for Himself,”* (Daniel 9:24-26) through His death on the cross. It was there that He *“made an end of sins”* for everyone who will *“believe the truth”* and *“trust in Christ”* who did it. Christ came into the world as the *“Lamb of God”* to *“take away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). God’s *“lamb”* was not punished; He was the perfect sacrifice to take away sin from all who trust in Him. Hebrews 9:26 speaks this of Christ, the Lamb of God; *“...now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”* This is what He did through His death on the cross.

Not only did I see ministers stand guilty before God with the blood of lost souls on their hands, I also saw many who were the parents of lost children that could have been saved had they seen a reality in the home. This part of the vision is so hard to tell because I do know many godly men and women who have children that are rebellious and lost through no fault of the parents. Let those parents be intercessors for their children, but never their enablers. I wrote a message about why the children of Christians are so often lost; a message I have never published. I titled it *“Funeral Theology; Why the Church loses its Children.”* I may never publish that message unless I hear from the Lord to do so, but it was something I had to write for my own understanding. Paul tells us that the *“trumpet”* must give a *“certain sound”* (I Corinthians 14:8). *“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”* It is when the gospel we preach gives an *“uncertain sound”* that our children perish.

Something very humorous happened in our church recently that perfectly illustrates what I am trying to say about *“funeral theology.”* We have a little girl in our church, about six years of age, who is very loving and friendly to everyone she meets. She went to an elderly lady after one service and started a conversation. She said, *“You’re old.”* The kind lady said, *“Yes darling, I am getting old.”* The child continued, *“...but you are pretty,”* to which the lady smiled and said, *“Why thank you, darling. You are also very pretty.”* Perhaps the conversation should have ended there, but the little girl had one more compliment to give; *“You will look real nice when you are dead.”*

The word *“flabbergasted”* comes to mind. Where did this little girl get such an idea? The answer became obvious; she got it at a funeral. Small children retain almost everything they hear even when we think they are not paying attention. It is common when viewing the body of

too dizzy to stand. Yet even as a five-year-old, I noticed the limp he carried from a wartime wound.

On the Grandpa scale from one to ten, Boy was an eleven. His belly laugh woke the neighbors. His rich, chocolate-covered bass voice bellowed “Bringing in the Sheaves” in his church choir. And his boisterous humor and brilliant exposition of the Scriptures peppered the Sunday School lessons he taught week after week after week.

I recall scooting around his coffee table, barely able to stand on my rubbery legs, noticing the huge Bible-marked with his handwritten scribbles in the margins lying open on the glass top. That Bible was always in his hands or on the table before him. He served as a deacon in his church until he was too weak to leave his bedroom.

My grandfather knew me better than anyone. He prayed for me constantly. I’ve been told that I started shaking my booty to rock and roll before I could talk, so Boy assumed my fondness for “dancing” showed musical promise. He purchased a toy piano and showed me how to tinkle the ivories with my chubby index fingers. Boy was my biggest fan. He taught me to worship God with reckless abandon, and watched me pursue a career in Christian music for the next twenty years. He always attended my recitals or sat in the congregation cheering me on as I played, sang or conducted.

I sadly recall his last day of life. His booming voice had become raspy and quiet. Boy smiled and squeezed my hand as I approached his hospital bed for the last time. “Julie Girl,” he said, “Why don’t we sing Amazing Grace together?” I tearfully joined him in the words “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’ve first begun.”

I am God’s child because of Grandpa Boy. And I live in a country where I can freely express my faith in Christ because of Boy’s bravery and sacrifice. Thank you, my wonderful hero! I still miss you every day!

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Message By: Kirbbie Cowart

A Torphy for Satan

Message By: Leroy Surface

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That Cannot be
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FIRST ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Colmesneil, Texas

Services

Sunday - 10:30 a.m.

Sunday Night - 6:00 p.m.

**Wednesday - Advance Christian
Development Classes**

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the departed at a funeral to say, “*She (or he) looks really nice.*” I’ve said it and you have said it. No problem, but it answers why a small child would think it to be a compliment to tell an elderly lady, “*You will look real nice when you are dead.*”

What else do our children hear at funerals? Funeral theology is invariably different than living theology. We teach our little children not to sin. We define sin, and tell them that sinners go to a “*bad place.*” Then we take them to the funeral of a person that did everything we told our children not to do, and they hear that they are “*in a better place,*” because “*Jesus took their penalty,*” or maybe they whispered “*God help me*” with their final breath. The child goes home hearing an “*uncertain sound,*” and everything we have told them to the contrary is lost to the child because in the final analysis, they hear that “*everybody goes to a better place when they die.*” That simply is not so. I have determined and I know the gospel I will preach at funerals. It is the same gospel I preach everywhere I go and in everything I write. I will tell them “*Who Christ is, what He came into the world to do, and that He did it through His death on the cross,*” and that it will be manifested in everyone who believes it and puts their trust in Christ. I will never tell any person at any time in any place that Christ came to “*take our penalty,*” or to “*suffer our punishment.*” Christ died for us to “*take away our sin,*” and those who trust in Him have it no more.

In the vision of people standing before God with the blood of lost souls on their hands, the one who sat on the throne did not say a word to them because they were condemned by the blood that dripped from their hands. I watched as one by one the angels led them behind the throne as they continued screaming, “*...blood on my hands.*” I did not see the lake of fire, but I saw the amber smoke that arose from behind the throne. The apostle John said, “*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:15).

Those who teach the children of God that “*we are all sinners, but we will never be judged*” will be very surprised in the day they stand before God to give answer for the doctrines they have taught. The greatest wrath will be upon those false teachers, but those who have believed them and have followed their “*pernicious ways* (II Peter 2:2)” will be very afraid as they approach the judgment bar. Jesus has already told us what He will say to them in that day; “*...depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matthew 7:23). The prophet Isaiah says, “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*” (Isaiah 55:7).

If Ye keep In Memory What I Preached

I Corinthians 15:1-4: “*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*”

What did the apostle Paul preach? If you could know for certain what Paul preached, believe it and stand upon it, you would know for certain that you are saved. Knowing what the apostle preached is not as easy as it may seem, however. Paul brought the gospel to the Galatians when they first converted to Christ, but hardly a dozen years had passed before they had moved away from Christ to trust in circumcision and the Law of Moses. When he wrote his epistle to them, he

came straight to the point of his letter; “*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed*” (Galatians 1:6-9). We can be assured that Peter, John, and the other apostles believed and preached the same gospel that Paul preached, but none laid it out as clearly as he. Yet today the simple truth that Paul, Peter, and John preached has been buried under centuries of rubbish given to us by the traditions and doctrines of men who were nothing more than middle age philosophers guising themselves to be theologians and ministers of Christ.

The apostle Paul tells us exactly what he preached; “*I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how the Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.*” Notice the words “*according to the scriptures.*” As twenty first century believers, we study the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to discover the events of the day Jesus was crucified. These are not the “*scriptures*” that Paul had in mind when he told us that Christ “*died for our sins according to the scriptures.*” Paul did not see the sufferings of Jesus first hand. Everything he knew about that day, he received from either Peter or one of the other eyewitnesses. Even if he had a written account of that day, he would not have considered it to be equal to the scriptures. The only “*scriptures*” the believers in the first century knew anything about were the writings of Moses and the prophets. These are what Paul speaks of when he says, “*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.*”

Jesus told the Jews of His generation, “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*” (John 5:39-40). To prove by the scriptures that Jesus was “*The Christ*” before His death and resurrection would have been very difficult indeed. Jesus pointed to the witness of John the Baptist (“*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” John 1:29), the witness of the Father (“*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” Matthew 3:17), and the witness of the miraculous works He did (John 14:10-11). All these things are proof enough for us, because we are “*believers,*” but they were nothing more than hearsay (circumstantial evidence) to the unbelieving Jew in their generation. We believe that Jesus is the “*Seed of the Woman*” whom God promised would “*bruise the head of the serpent*” (Genesis 3:15), but how could that be proven before the fact of His death and resurrection, which was “*according to the scriptures?*” We believe that Jesus is the sacrificial lamb that Abraham spoke of in Genesis 22:1-14 and confirmed by John the Baptist in John 1:29, but again, how do we prove it? Isaiah prophesied of a virgin who would conceive and bring forth a son whose name she would call “*Immanuel,*” which means “*God with us.*” We believe that Jesus is “*God with us*” (the Son of God) who was born to a virgin (Mary), but how can we prove this without His death on the cross and His resurrection the third day? The angel Gabriel came from God to the prophet Daniel to tell him of one called “*The Christ*” (the Messiah), who would come into the world “*to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.*” He would be the fulfillment of every vision or prophecy of a redeemer that was given from the beginning of time, thus He would “*seal up the vision and prophecy,*” and He would be “*anointed,*” by God, “*The Most Holy.*” Gabriel told Daniel the exact year “*The Christ*” would appear, which was the same year Jesus was baptized by John and approved by God when the Holy Ghost came visibly upon Him. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is “*The Christ,*” but how can we prove it by the scriptures?

Jesus chose twelve of His disciples to be His apostles, those whom He

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would send into the entire world with the gospel. The day before Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He had His last “Passover Supper” with them. They had followed Him everywhere He went for over three years. They had heard His words, seen His miracles, and witnessed His life, yet for all this, they were in complete disarray. Consider this; before the night was over, one of His “trusted apostles” (Judas) would betray Him to those enemies who sought to kill Him. Another, one of His “inner circle” (Peter) would deny that he ever knew Him, and he would do it three times with an oath and cursing. One of the twelve (Philip) believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the son of Joseph (compare John 1:45 with John 14:8-9), and another doubted that He was the Son of God and refused to believe He was resurrected on the third day (Thomas).

John 1:45: “*Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*”

John 14:8: “*Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?*”

John 20:25: “*The other disciples therefore said unto him (Thomas), We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*”

Jesus spent hours teaching and instructing the twelve at the last supper. After He finished teaching, the disciples said to Him, “*Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God*” (John 16:29-30). It is amazing that even among the chosen twelve there were those who still questioned in their hearts who Jesus was. Jesus’ response to their “profession of faith” could not have cheered them. In fact, He questioned their faith, asking, “*Do ye now believe?*” (John 16:31). Such was the condition of His chosen apostles the night before Jesus suffered and died to “take away the sin of the world.” Jesus’ words to them proved to be true; “*Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me*” (John 16:32). Before the night was over, the “chosen twelve” had all forsaken Him.

The Resurrection

Romans 1:3-4: “*Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*”

In the night of despair, it is hard to believe on the basis of hearsay or circumstantial evidence. It was easy to believe when they saw Him commanding the winds and the waves, cleansing lepers, causing the blind to see and the lame to walk and raising Lazarus from the dead.

Surely this is “The Christ.” Even Nicodemus, the master of the Jews told Jesus, “*No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him*” (John 3:2). In the night of despair, however, as they see Jesus taken, beaten, mocked, and condemned to death, it is different; how could this man be “The Christ, the Son of God.” Three days after the crucifixion of Jesus, two of His disciples walked with the resurrected Jesus and did not know Him. Their despair blinded them as they talked about the “death” of the “prophet from Nazareth.” They said, “*...we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel*” (Luke 24:21). They were walking and talking with the resurrected Jesus, but they did not know Him. After a while, Jesus spoke to them as recorded in Luke 24:25-27, “**O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.**” Jesus did not tell them that He was Jesus, raised from the dead, nor did He tell them that He was “The Christ.” Instead, He taught them from the scriptures of the prophets all the things concerning Christ, “*Who He is, what He came into the world to do, and that He did it through ‘suffering these things’.*” They still did not know that it was Jesus who taught them until He entered their house to eat with them. When He took the bread and broke it and blessed it, their eyes were opened to see that He was Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, proven to be so “*by the resurrection from the dead.*”



14 Families Yard Sale at Colmesneil, TX.

**Darlene Memorial Park
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MAY 10th

AG News

Does Church Attendance Dip as R-Rated Viewing Increases?

Viewing R-rated movies causes decreased church attendance and lessens importance of faith among young people, but doesn't influence whether youth have doubts about their beliefs, according to a study by a Baylor University researcher published online in the Review of Religious Research.

The survey included individuals with varying degrees of faith. Only 13.2 percent who indicated their faith is "extremely important" to them claimed that none of the movies they watch is R-rated. On the other hand, 21 percent of those whose faith is "extremely important" indicated most movies they view are rated R. Of those whose faith is "very important," 31 percent acknowledged most of the movies they see are rated R.

"Watching R-rated movies is prevalent among religious and nonreligious young people," researcher Phil Davignon said. "Nearly everyone watches them."

R-rated movies, as defined by the Motion Picture Association of America rating administration, may contain "adult themes," swearing, intense or persistent violence, sexually oriented nudity, and drug abuse.

In general, Davignon said, they contain themes contrary to Christian values.

Having more non-religious friends had a negative effect on the importance of faith and worship attendance, the study showed. Meanwhile, the influence of parents who placed greater importance on faith had a positive impact on church attendance, and young people were more likely to view faith as important if parents monitored media use.

"Viewing R-rated movies was damaging to religious faith even after accounting for the importance of religion in one's family, peer influence, and parental monitoring of media, among other factors," Davignon said.

Author: Pentecostal Evangel

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When Your Character Is Under Fire: The Withering Effect of Personal Attacks¹

By David Horner

Why does the church attract people who feel it is their responsibility to make the pastor's job as difficult as possible? In a strange way, it seems they think it is their right to keep their pastor under constant attack.

For pastors, troubles come in many forms. Pastors bring some troubles on themselves through their failures and mistakes. As difficult as it may be to learn from troubles that are our fault, finding the lessons God wants us to learn while in the middle of hostile fire seems even more difficult. When we see ourselves as victims of unjust and undeserved attacks, it is easier to get angry than to gain maturity.

The pastor often serves as a lightning rod for disgruntled people in the church. When we assume the title pastor, some believe that gives them license to unload their frustrations on us. I once heard Stuart Briscoe say, "He that dareth to raise his head above the crowd inviteth the tomato." How does a pastor learn to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ in that environment? How do pastors prepare themselves for attacks on their character?

Different Kinds of Attacks

Some of the most destructive attacks pastors face do not come from a pagan, unbelieving world. More often they come from within the church. Learning how to recognize and respond to these attacks that assault our character and ministry equips us to grow from them, instead of allowing them to cripple us. As I recall my own experiences and those of others whom I know, attacks on our character fall into two basic categories: intentional attacks and unintentional challenges.

Intentional attacks

Most attacks against a pastor are deliberate and have no redemptive purpose. The reasons behind such behavior are often not even clear to the one who has you in his sights and probably have little to do with you personally. This does not make them less painful when they score a direct hit on your heart. Simply saying "nothing personal" while they tear you apart seldom provides much relief. Our consolation comes from knowing that God promises to shape our character through these painful situations.

Personal attacks on your character. Personal attacks place pastors in the crucible where the fire becomes so intense they wonder if they have what it takes to survive with the character of Christ still intact. Integrity and honesty, competence and common sense, humility and openness — have come under attack during my ministry. People who neither knew me nor cared about me have accused me of all kinds of things. Yet, I have found myself defending my character in the face of such attacks.

Attacks on your preaching style. As a pastor, you invest time, prayer, and energy into sermon preparation and preaching. It is often difficult to remain objective about that part of your ministry. When people criticize your preaching, it often generates tremendous emotional reaction. I still recall the sting I felt when a couple sat across from me and said, "I'm sorry, but I just don't see Christ in your preaching." After sticking that dagger in my heart, their follow-up comment was, "But don't take that personally." What do you say to that kind of helpful comment?

A pastor is an easy target. Beside direct assaults on your character, some attack you simply because you are the pastor. Your visibility and accessibility make you an easy target.

Disgruntled people seldom have joy and are determined to rob others of their joy. As a result, they launch attacks on the nearest and safest target, and pastors usually fit the bill. What they would not attempt at their workplaces or within their own families, they feel comfortable doing in attacking you. They come to church looking for someone to target, and you look nice enough not to bite back. There you are standing by the door as they leave the church, or you are only a phone call away. The convenience is too much for them to pass up.

A case of mistaken identity. Many attacks on pastors are misdirected. People have a hard time distinguishing between the church as a whole and the pastor as an individual. If they have a different idea about what the church should be, it is easier to attack you than an entire institution. They direct their assault on the church at you.

At times, pastors identify themselves with the churches they serve. They find it hard to be objective when they think and talk about their churches. They see the church as an extension of themselves. By the grace of God that is not how He sees us. But as long as pastors struggle with that association, they will feel

defensive when people criticize them or the church.

A case of faulty information. Another group within the church attacks the pastor because it received bad information and did not bother to verify the facts before assuming the worst. Many times I have encountered irate church members who wanted to set me straight about something only to discover that some-

one had misinformed them, either intentionally or not. Even Christians will occasionally spread carefully managed presentations of the facts to achieve their purpose.

A desire to gain control. People who like to control their world often try to control their pastor. Sometimes they use flattery, manipulation, or personal favors to put the pastor in their debt. If this does not work, they have learned that many pastors wilt at the first sign of an attack.

I have learned through personal experience how unscrupulous and unprincipled people can become when they want their own way. Manipulation, deception, and intimidation are only some of the means people have used to control me and seize control of the direction of the church. Attacks of that nature will challenge a pastor, press in on him, drain him, and seek to wear him out — all for the sake of people who are trying to gain control and have their own way.



A desire to elevate themselves. Attacks arise from insecure people who continually tear others down to make themselves look better. Since they are not secure in themselves, they believe their only recourse is to force others into a defensive posture to elevate their own ego needs. When a pastor realizes that the church offers them the only safe place to act this way without immediate consequences, it helps him understand why they do what they do. Nevertheless, their barbed comments and sharp denunciations still cut deep.

Attacks from the adversary. One last source of intentional attacks against pastors should not surprise us — the concerted efforts of Satan to undo anything God is doing. Scripture acknowledges Satan's ability to strike at one's weakest and most vulnerable points. Peter warns, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8, NASB).² Who better to devour than a pastor God has called to lead people into a growing relationship with Christ?

By the grace of God, maintain the diligence that Peter advises. Do not become the next pastor the devil blindsides. Protect your ministry from the wicked schemes of the accuser of the brethren.

Unintentional challenges

Other challenges pastors undergo come from people who do not intend for their words and actions to hurt anyone, but the effect is the same. Often these people speak thoughtless and careless words with little regard for their impact.

Constant questioning. Soon after our church started, I found myself continually on the defensive with a couple of church leaders. Regardless of what subject came up, I could count on objections from both men. They raised question after question in an apparent attempt to challenge my leadership.

When they raised questions, I would defend my ideas. They seemed determined to press their opposition in direct proportion to the strength of my defensiveness. After a meeting with some particular ill will, I had had it. After I returned home I called them and asked if we could meet and work this out.

When we met, I told them that their continual undermining of my leadership had become a stumbling block in our relationship. They both looked completely shocked. They had no idea that their questions were perceived as negative. They intended no defiance or opposition. They honestly did not mean to put me on the defensive or challenge me. As we talked, I saw these men in a different light.

They realized they needed to learn how to ask questions without appearing through subtle insinuations that they were trying to uncover wrongdoing. By the way they phrased their questions, people sensed they were under attack. When we brought this to the surface, we realized we were allies, not enemies.

In spite of how they phrased their questions, I saw that each man was sincerely interested in the things of Christ. They even had a deep concern for me personally. Their unintentional manner and my over-sensitivity had created an adversarial relationship in which I felt attacked.

Differences of philosophy. At times, people have tried to be helpful by offering me better ways to do my job. By insisting on a change of direction and a revision of my ministry calling, some have offered what they thought were legitimate alternatives to how the church functioned. As pastor, they saw it as my job to accept their approach so the church could be what they wanted.

Was I personally under attack? Even though it felt like it, I was not. Once I realized their concern was philosophical, and they had not meant to attack me personally, I was able to address that concern in its proper context. Unintentional attacks still carry a heaviness with them, but they are less threatening when you realize nothing personal is involved.

Legitimate evaluation. Another area of concern for pastors arises from legitimate evaluation and critique from those responsible for giving oversight and supervision to their ministry. Pastors need to be accountable to someone. In my

AG News

TV Versions of End Times Don't Line Up with the Biblical View

"Nothing brings a family together like Armageddon," says reality television star **Brent Sr., in a trailer for the National Geographic series Doomsday Castle.** "To live through the end of the world, my family is building a castle — with a catapult."

Armageddon and the end of the world are hot topics of conversation today. But the meanings behind these terms can vary widely, depending on a person's worldview.

In the Bible, Armageddon is the battlefield named in Revelation 16:16 where world rulers will gather to wage a futile war against God. (Bible scholars associate the location with Megiddo, a site in northern Israel.) In the modern vernacular, the term Armageddon may describe any destructive battle, cataclysmic event, or global catastrophe.

So-called doomsday preppers like Brent Sr. (the show never reveals his last name) and his family see apocalyptic disaster and the breakdown of civilization as inevitable. Their answer is a fortified hideout stockpiled with canned foods, weapons and a "survival garden."

Doomsday Castle joins a lineup of similar television programs, including Discovery's **Doomsday Bunkers** and National Geographic's **Doomsday Preppers and How to Survive the End of the World.**

Prepping is more than just a reality TV fad. Across the country, untold numbers of people are quietly preparing for their own version of doomsday. Some worry about catastrophic economic collapse. Others think a disease pandemic, widespread power outage, or terror attack will push society over the brink. These fears have spawned booming online businesses, with many preppers investing thousands of dollars in everything from water purification systems to concrete bunkers.

Disaster relief experts advise preparing for events such as natural disasters, though their recommendations fall far short of building castles and catapults. Compassion ministry **Convoy of Hope** suggests every family have a three-day supply of survival basics on hand, including water, canned food, blankets, a weather radio, a flashlight, batteries, a first aid kit and personal hygiene necessities.

But when it comes to the ultimate apocalypse — the one described in Scripture — physical preparations will be of little use, says James Railey, chairman of the **Department of Bible and Theology at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri.**

"As far as being able to sustain yourself in the face of the cataclysm foretold in the books of Revelation and Daniel, no one could really do that,"

Railey says. "Stockpiling weapons and buying a cabin in the woods wouldn't make a lot of sense in the long run."

After all, the Bible describes hailstones the size of cannonballs and a host of unprecedented plagues, disasters and calamities that will wipe out large portions of humanity in the last days.

However, Railey says there are things people can do to prepare.

"The best preparation is to be ready to meet the Lord," Railey says. "We do that by nurturing our relationship with Him through the spiritual disciplines of praying, reading the Bible, and engaging in worship."

Railey says the promise of a Rapture — the Bible's teaching that Christ will return to take His followers to heaven before the final global collapse — should be a source of encouragement for Christians.

"The Assemblies of God holds to a pre-tribulation Rapture approach that would indicate a removal of the Church before some of the very extreme things we see pictured in the apocalyptic Scriptures," Railey says. "We can look

forward to meeting the Lord, who has redeemed us and worked in our lives in so many ways. For believers, the joy of that anticipation should override any doomsday fears."

According to the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths (available at ag.org), the resurrection of deceased Christians and the catching up of those who are alive at the time of Jesus' return (as described in 1 Corinthians 15:51,52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17) is the "imminent and blessed hope of the church."

"We need to return to preaching the Word, including the passages that deal with this blessed hope," says Bruce Rosdahl, chairman of the Department of Bible and Theology at Southwestern Assemblies of God University in Waxahachie, Texas. "It is a comforting doctrine in troubled times."

About 1 in 7 people worldwide, and nearly a quarter of the U.S. population, believes the world will end in his or her lifetime, according to a 2012 poll sponsored by Reuters news agency.

With worldwide economic struggles, rogue nations pursuing nuclear weapons, wars around the globe, and the constant threat of terrorism, Railey says it's easy to understand why many people — including those outside the Church — believe the end is near. Yet he says such an environment makes the good news of the gospel even more attractive.

"Any time the world is fraught with uncertainties, it's a great opportunity for the Church to remind people of the hope that is available in Christ," Railey says. "We don't know when the end will come, but we can be sure Jesus will return to bring believers into His presence."

While the Bible warns readers to maintain a sense of urgency and readiness for Christ's return, Railey points out God's idea of preparing for the end times is radically different from the kind of prepping depicted on reality television.

"Our answer is not in renewed human effort, skilled resources or technological advances to meet some doomsday challenge," Railey says. "The Church is called to continue to be a steadfast beacon of hope — preaching the gospel, calling people to repentance, ministering to needs, and reminding others of the peace that is found in Jesus."

Author: Christina Quick, Pentecostal Evangel

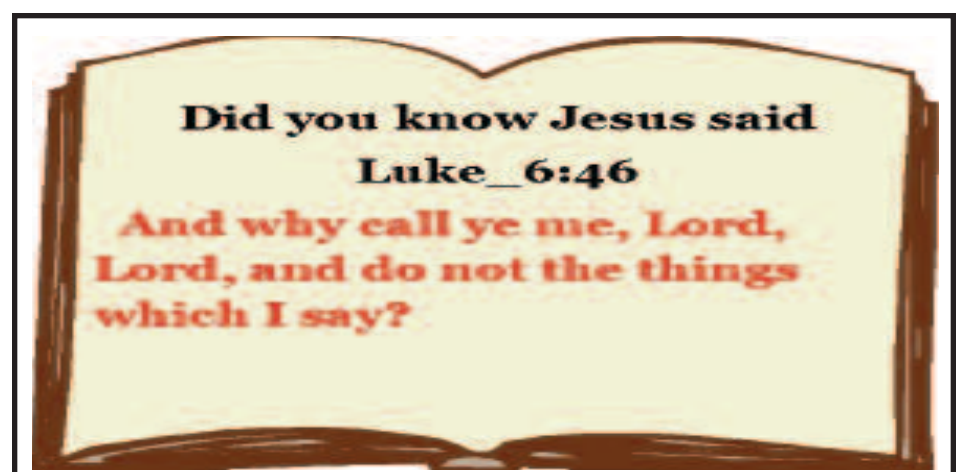


Brent Sr., a former Army infantry training officer, is featured in the National Geographic series **Doomsday Castle**, which he built in the woods of the Carolinas

Read The "Shepherds Voice" on our church web-site,



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When Your Character Is Under Fire: The Withering Effect of Personal Attacks¹

From Page 5

ministry, the group responsible for overseeing the pastor is the elders. Each year we evaluate the ministry as part of our plan to grow and learn how best to serve Christ together. Regardless of how many kind and affirming words are in our evaluation, human nature causes us to zero in on what we believe are negative critiques. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses.

Pastors need help in identifying both to excel in their strengths and shore up areas of weakness.

Unfortunately, even after I have prayed for a heart that is willing to learn and a spirit that is open to change and growth, I sometimes still find it hard to handle even legitimate suggestions for improvement. Listening with a godly, humble heart can protect you from missing this excellent resource for your personal growth. Leaders with discernment and wisdom who love you and embrace the same calling and vision for ministry are trustworthy. Their role is not to attack you or tear you down, but to challenge you and build you up. When we misread their intentions, we invite misery. When we believe their intentions are wholesome and healthy, we can endure their critique even though they may not express it as sensitively or as helpfully as we might have wished. In Psalm 141:5, David wrote, "Let a righteous man strike me — it is a kindness; let him rebuke me — it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it" (NIV).

Unintentional challenges and attacks consist largely of comments and behaviors that are not malicious. Prepare for the inevitability of having to deal with them by learning to assume the best and give the benefit of the doubt as long as possible. This will help you keep things in perspective.

The way we handle attacks on our character and ministry demonstrates how much we are conforming to the image of Jesus Christ. At times you may respond badly when attacks seem unrelenting, merciless, and unjustified. But getting knocked off balance does not mean you will repeat the mistake every time you come under fire.

Unforeseen attacks can be so disheartening and discouraging that we sometimes question whether it is worthwhile to keep going. We might ask, Who wants to tolerate this abuse anyway? But that is not the issue. The bottom line is how we respond so Christ is glorified. People need to see it is possible to take direct hits — whether from the enemy or from friendly fire — and still maintain a positive testimony for Christ. The way we respond reflects the way we are growing in Christ.

Preparing a Wise Response

When attacks come your way, consider these ideas:

View attacks as a call to prayer

When the heat of attacks builds, the fire can sear you or serve as a call to take the concern to the Lord in prayer. Worrying and obsessing about the causes of our trouble never bring positive results. But when I remember that God invites me to cast all my anxiety on Him and to present my worries to Him in prayer, then I come to Him as one who is weary and burdened and find rest in His presence. Soon I find relief from the sting of the hard times, and I am made aware of the refinement God is producing in my heart.

Find any kernel of truth in what people say

Prideful as I am, it seldom occurs to me that the attack might get under my skin because I know what the person has said contains an element of truth. I need to ask the Lord to show me how to be honest with myself and with others. The normal defensive posture I assume when under attack can insulate me from confronting a truth about myself.

Before retreating or counterattacking, a more helpful approach may be for you to consider the possibility they may be right somewhere in their diatribes against you. While I am preparing a rebuttal, the Lord often slows me down long enough to point out some truth He does not want me to miss.

Refuse to consider anyone your enemy — meet with him personally if possible. Shepherds lead and feed all their sheep, not just the kind, supportive, and cooperative ones. The Lord leaves no room for us to accumulate enemies. Even if those who intentionally try to cause trouble regard us as their enemy, we must refuse to reciprocate.

Christ offered one way to deal with our enemies — love them. If possible, meet with your assailants. Bring one or two others who love Christ with you. Mediating a godly solution does more than just restore peace. Seeing enemies reconciled demonstrates the power of God's love and forgiveness to others who are not used to seeing love in the midst of conflict.

Resist taking the matter into the pulpit



On more than one occasion I have been tempted to inject a few choice words into my sermons regarding a troubling situation I was facing. Sometimes I gave in to the temptation and made some veiled comment — a subtle public statement to vindicate myself. Being neither entirely foolish nor completely clever, I never said enough for anyone to know what I was talking about, and people often left wondering what that was all about. Since the matter was appropriately confidential, no one should have known. Looking back, I realize that I was probably trying to rally people to my side of the issue in a manner that was abusing the power of the pulpit and dishonoring the privilege of preaching. Keep things private and as confidential as much as possible.

Maintain a balanced perspective on the size of the problem

Pastors cannot ignore attacks, but these attacks do not need to dominate their lives and ministries. Early in my ministry I believed an attacker when he said, "What I am saying is not just my opinion. A lot of others agree with me." That is usually not true. But if I believed it were true, I became paranoid about whom those others were, how widespread the concern was, and why no one else was saying anything. There will be times when the problem is bigger than we think. Until you know that to be true, treat the criticisms and attacks as isolated incidents you need to address. Do not treat them as major crises that demand the suspension of everything else you are doing until you can resolve them.

Keep Seeking Christ

By the grace of God a pastor can prevail in times of trouble through the power of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us to rejoice always. When hard times come, let nothing rob you of your joy as you devote yourself to "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1, NASB). The hymn writer says it

well, "The things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

Benefits To Be Gained

Life is richer because of what we learn through our troubles. There are many benefits to be gained after we fail when we open ourselves up to the things God wants to teach us when we are humble enough to listen and learn.

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