

BULLETIN

Equipping Today's Church Leaders

Volume 1, Issue 2

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BULLETIN

The Union University *Bulletin* is a bi-monthly publication designed to equip church leaders.

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Engaging

Baptists and Religious Liberty



By Gregory Alan Thornbury, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Christian Studies
Director of the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Christian Leadership

The defense of religious liberty stands as one of the greatest legacies of the Baptist heritage. From their origins, Baptists committed themselves to the principle that God alone is the Lord of conscience and that no human institution can usurp the authority of the Bible. Because Baptists insist on the regenerate church principle (i.e. only born again believers may be members of the local church), they have rightly opposed governmental or other societal restrictions on freedom of religious expression.

At the time of year when Americans celebrate the freedoms which are ours as citizens of the United States, Baptists would do well to remind themselves of the crucial role Baptists once played in colonial America to secure religious liberty. In pre-colonial America, key figures such as Isaac Backus and John Leland influenced the course of the future republic by offering clear and impassioned pleas for religious liberty.

Specifically, John Leland served in an important role in the deliberations of the Continental Congress in the dawning years of the Republic. Leland, a fiery evangelist in Virginia, enjoyed a large following in his home state. Leland held that every person is accountable directly to God, and that no government, society, or church can make intercession between him and the Almighty. In other words, governments must not interfere with a person's religious opinions.

Leland's notoriety resulted in a visit from James Madison as an emissary from the Continental Congress. Madison knew that the Constitution would fail if Baptists like Leland were not on board. As a result of the dialogue, the Bill of Rights was amended to the Constitution. The first amendment, of course, reads "Congress shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These words guarantee that American citizens can worship God freely apart from any coercion. As John Leland wrote in his treatise, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, "Every man must give an account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at liberty to serve God in a way that he can best reconcile to his conscience. If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise, let men be free."

Baptists still carry on the tradition of Leland and others when they defend the freedom of religious expression. Today, an array of interests threatens the freedom of religious speech

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Autumn Alcott Ridenour

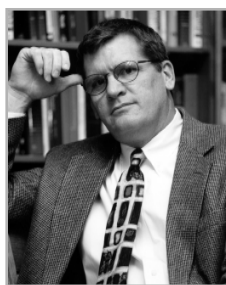
Home Town - Paducah, Ky.
Class - Senior
Major - Christian Ethics

“Union University has deeply impacted all areas of my life. Academically the university challenges its students to wrestle with theological thinking, cultural trends, and the application of a Christian worldview to all areas of life. The classroom is not a place to ignore one’s faith or disregard the relationship between faith and reason, but my classes seek to foster a faith-filled learning atmosphere.

While attending Union, I have prayer-walked through Morocco, and participated in missions in both Chicago and Wyoming. I have also enjoyed the amazing opportunity to help create and administer a woman’s ministry on campus that includes both large and small group Bible study, a “Titus 2” mentorship program, and accountability for young women among their peers.

My overall experience at Union is really indescribable through words. It has challenged my life, faith, ideas, dreams, and the context to which I apply a Christian worldview.”

PREACHING



The Liberating Power of Forgiveness

John 7.53-8.11

Paul N. Jackson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Christian Studies

Visibly upset, a middle-aged man begged me to ask the congregation to pray for him immediately. His gut-wrenching story would come later that afternoon. A recurring nightmare had tortured this Viet Nam vet for years—a nightmare fueled by the unfortunate reality of having had to shoot two twelve-year-old Vietnamese girls while on jungle patrol some 25 years before. The Viet Cong, eerily foreshadowing a page from today’s terror handbook, would booby-trap civilians in order to kill unsuspecting, friendly American soldiers. So, potentially any gift-bearing villager now posed as much a threat as the armed enemy. Upon entering all villages, point men leading search and destroy missions, instructed anyone approaching them to stop and lay down their gifts or food. This tactic worked well, but one morning proved to be as different as it was devastating. Apparently ignoring his clear warning in Vietnamese to stop, two young girls continued to approach him and his patrol. Eyes swelling with tears and a large lump rising in his throat, he hesitatingly told me he had to shoot them both, fearing he and his men were in danger. If that were not bad enough, imagine his horror when he learned both girls were totally deaf! Utterly distraught and at the end of his rope, this man had come to me wanting to know how to get forgiveness; how to gain some liberation from an action that had imprisoned him for better than two decades. Although stunned, I began to tell him of the amazing liberating power of God’s grace and forgiveness. We prayed together and agreed to meet the next week after he had time to process all we had discussed. I was hopeful. I want to hit the pause button here so we can take time to consider a well-known text that demonstrates the liberating power of forgiveness.

I. Evil is continually bent on destruction. Although not found in the most reliable Greek manuscripts, John 7.53-8.11 is consistent with other stories we read about Jesus and his relationship with “sinners.” This story begins with Jesus teaching the crowds who “were continually coming to him” (verse 2). The gospel accounts are peppered with reports of the people’s amazement and awe of Jesus’ teaching, “because He was teaching them as one having authority and not like their scribes” (Matt. 7.28-29). Jesus had managed in a couple of short years to become a prickly thorn in the sides of those more interested in power and control rather than the truth. This strange shepherd from Galilee was stealing their flock. He had to be stopped. He had to go. So, enter religion’s pawn and pivotal character in the story—a woman supposedly caught in the very act of committing adultery. The Greek text reveals she is the center of attention by the inclusion of an innocent little prepositional phrase translated “in front of the crowd” and “in the middle of the crowd” (verses 3 and 9). Rhetorically, it brackets the whole episode. I think the author wanted to contrast the beginning and the conclusion of what turned out to be a wonderful encounter with the liberating power of forgiveness. Much like the war veteran above, she distressed over the possible outcome of her dilemma. Going in, this woman probably had little confidence in survival. She most likely knew the punishment for adultery; maybe she

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READING



Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars: An Agenda for Engagement

By David P. Gushee
Baker, 2000

What vision should Christians bring into the public square? What goals should we pursue, using what tactics? What dare we hope?

These are some of the questions addressed in Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars, a collection of essays standing at the intersection between Christianity and public life. Originally prepared for presentation at a Union University Center for Christian Leadership conference, these papers from a diverse group of Christian scholars cover historical, theological, methodological, and practical dimensions. Issues discussed include educational policy, refugees and immigration, divorce, welfare reform, war and peace, church-state separation, and abortion.

Together, these essays offer the reader a snapshot of current public policy debates on numerous issues as well as a model of informed Christian engagement.

WORSHIPPING



Reflections on Christian Liberty

Charles Fowler, Ph.D.
Vice President for Development/Church Relations

The recent resurgence of open and unapologetic patriotism has been refreshing to our entire nation and has warmed the hearts of many veterans who genuinely understand the price of the freedoms we too often take for granted. Bumper stickers reading “God Bless America” now seem to have places of prominence on more cars than not. It could prove to be a great challenge to take even a short trip around town and not see many American flags waving with numerous other expressions of patriotism. America seems to be focused on God and Country in ways that this generation has not seen before. This sentiment provides fertile ground for purposeful and focused worship experiences on Memorial Day Weekend and The Fourth of July. These are at least two upcoming occasions when local churches gather for worship with the expectation of singing patriotic songs, recognizing those who have served our country and thanking God for His hand of blessing. Let’s think for a few moments about what we want our churches to reflect on after they leave our worship services on these special days.

First, allow me to suggest that the purpose of our worship does not change because of a special occasion. The basis of New Testament worship is that God chose to enter into a covenant relationship with sinful man. The historical evidence, Scriptural documentation, personal experience and the ongoing revelation of this relationship is the essence of authentic worship. If we fail to acknowledge, proclaim and celebrate God’s initiative on our behalf, there is no worship. First Peter 2:9 declares:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

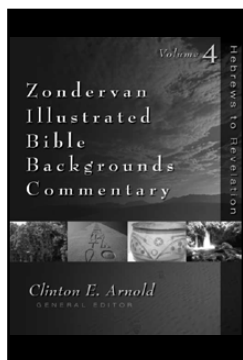
It is His act of calling us, “out of darkness into His wonderful light” that inspires our worship. Just as He delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians, He delivered us from the bondage of sin through the substitutionary death of His Son, Jesus. Peter continues by saying:

“Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (I Peter 2:10)

While the styles of worship utilized in our churches vary greatly, I pray that the heart and purpose of our worship is unified in our celebration of God’s mercy as expressed in and

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READING



Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary

Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor

“Hebrews” Commentary by

Dr. George Guthrie

Benjamin W. Perry Associate Professor of Bible and Chair of the Department of Christian Studies

Zondervan, 2002

Brimming with full-color photos and graphics, the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary is a major, 4-volume reference tool that walks you verse by verse through all the books of the New Testament. It's like slipping on a set of glasses that lets you read the Bible through the eyes of a first-century reader. Discoveries await you that will snap the world of the New Testament into gripping focus.

The authors of the Backgrounds Commentary are biblical scholars who help you understand relevant background information at every point in the New Testament. The writers answer such questions as: Who were the “palace guard” of Philippians 1:13? What did Jesus mean when he called the religious leaders “white-washed tombs”, and how did His statement relate to burial practices

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REVIEWING



Resource Recommendations from the Center for Biblical Studies

Ray Van Neste, Ph.D.

Director, Center for Biblical Studies

Instructor of Christian Studies

Over the last several years IVP has produced a very good three volume set of Bible dictionaries covering the New Testament: *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* and *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*. The contributors to these dictionaries consist predominately of respected evangelical scholars, and they bring to bear the latest research on specific topics, themes, events, issues or people in the New Testament. The *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development* also covers the period from the close of the New Testament to A.D. 150 thus including some of the writings from the early church.

I, myself, have found these books to be very useful in preparing sermons and Bible studies. They supplement commentaries by providing in one place a summary of the pertinent information on a specific topic. Thus, at times these articles will provide more information on a topic than the commentaries will have the space to provide. Some articles also summarize a broad area of teaching, for example doctrinal categories in the teachings of Jesus or the letters. For instance I have found the article on “Prayer” in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* particularly good and helpful. There are summary articles of each New Testament book as well, tracing the flow of thought in the book, noting key elements of the book, etc. Furthermore, the articles “Preaching from the Gospels” and “Preaching from Paul Today” by Sidney Greidanus will be very profitable for preachers as he lays out a very solid process of handling the text insuring that we preach what the text actually says which will result in Christ-centered gospel-oriented preaching.

As with any multi-author work, the quality varies as does the theological perspective of the authors. These tools, as any others, must be used critically. The articles will also contain analyses of current scholarship which the hurried pastor (which is most of us!) may be tempted to skip. However, a brief read through these portions will pay off with a greater awareness of what is being said about the text and a greater confidence in discussing it with others. Our people are hungry for depth of insight in the text and tools such as these will help us to provide it.

Lastly, these three books can be purchased in either paper or electronic form, with the CD-Rom edition containing several other dictionaries as well. Both formats will also be available in the Center for Biblical Studies at Union when it opens next fall. You will be receiving more information about the Center, but one of its key elements will be a study room containing the best tools (electronic and paper) for biblical study. While the books will not be available for checkout, the study room will be open for pastors and Bible study leaders. We desire to make available the best resources to those who are “working hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). May the Lord bless your labors.

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both at home and abroad. Recently, Christopher Hitchens, infamous columnist for *The Nation*, declared Christianity, Islam, and Judaism to be the real “axis of evil” in the world, and openly hopes for their extinction. A proposed ordinance in Utah would ban door-to-door evangelism. And as we have been reminded since 9/11, much of the world is closed to the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. These and like instances warn us to be vigilant. We must *protect* the religious liberties which we enjoy.

Southern Baptist pastors and leaders bear a responsibility for guarding freedom of religious expression. President Bush recently appointed ERLC president Richard Land to serve on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. College and seminary leaders such as David Dockery and R. Albert Mohler, Jr. have been invited by the White House to join the discussion about faith-based initiatives, and have been called upon to speak to the media about such matters. Pastors and church members likewise play a crucial role in speaking for religious liberties in their respective communities.

As we celebrate our freedoms as citizens of the United States of America, let us do so as both Americans and as Baptists, even as we remember the words of the Apostle Peter, “we must obey God rather than men.”

RECOMMENDED READING



David S. Dockery, President

Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism, by Millard J. Erickson (InterVarsity)

If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat, by John Ortberg (Zondervan)

Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Faith and Mission, by Harold Netland (InterVarsity)

Ecclesiastes: Ancient Wisdom When All Else Fails, by T. M. Moore (InterVarsity)

John Stott: A Global Ministry, by Timothy Dudley-Smith (InterVarsity)

Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil, by Cornelius Hunter (Baker/Brazos)

Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity, by Ken Boa and Robert Bowman (NavPress)

Justice That Restores, by Charles Colson (Tyndale)

Dictionary of Contemporary Religion in the Western World, eds. Christopher Partridge and Douglas Groothuis (InterVarsity)

No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, by John S. Feinberg (Crossway)

Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance, by Robert Saucy (Word)

Glimpsing the Face of God: The Search for Meaning in the Universe, by Alister McGrath (Eerdmans)

Designer Universe: Intelligent Design and the Existence of God, by Jimmy H. Davis and Hal Poe (Broadman & Holman)

Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way, by Philip Jenkins (Oxford)

The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance, by Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday (InterVarsity)

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of the day? What did the word translated “drift away,” in Hebrews 2:1, mean in the Roman world at the time Hebrews was written?

Union's own Dr. George Guthrie is the author of the Hebrews section of the commentary, which will be released as part of the fourth volume in the 4-volume set, but will also be published as an individual book. Dr. Guthrie states, “God delivered His Word at given places and times and with words and images of those places and times. The more we understand the background behind the New Testament writings, the more we will be able to understand and live the Word. Background information, when used well, can give a great boost to Bible study and effective preaching.”

The Illustrated Backgrounds commentary is due out in July.

WORSHIPPING...continued from page 3

through His relationship with sinful man. Regardless of the occasion, when God's people gather for the purpose of worship, the wonderful story of how God loved the unlovable and sent His Son to pay a sin debt He did not owe must motivate our worship and be the focus of our worship.

Secondly, patriotism for Americans has as its basis the celebration of freedom. Most countries have citizens who, on special occasions, give expression to their patriotic fervor. They love their countries. However, very few outside of America are celebrating freedom when they celebrate country and even fewer are celebrating God. It is important to note that while Americans applaud freedom and hold freedom up to the rest of world as a "Hallmark of Distinction" for America, I believe most know very little of the depth of meaning to "freedom." The New Testament describes true freedom in the following way.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

Even a commonly understood patriotic term like "freedom" can only be truly defined through the mercy of God and His desire to be reconciled to fallen mankind. This is best communicated by Jesus, Himself, when He said:

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

True freedom is available only through Christ Jesus. It is not available because of a vote of Congress or a decision of the President. It is made available by the mercies of God. Let's commit to help those with whom we worship to understand "freedom" through God's eyes. I

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For more information contact Dr. Charles A. Fowler at 1-800-338-6644.

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had even witnessed a stoning in her day. She felt as trapped as the scribes had hoped Jesus would feel. But the scribes worried little about the plight of their pawn; they wanted only to nail Jesus to the wall. They tried to make it impossible for him to answer correctly by pointing out that the Law of Moses prescribed stoning for such a crime as this. They believed this legal trump card would force Jesus into an unanswerable corner. How? If he complied, his reputation as "the friend of sinners" would be severely compromised; conversely, if he called for compassion and an investigation, throw Moses and the Law out the window. Our hero is seemingly cornered and befuddled. His opponents may have given each other looks that said, "We've got him now!" The woman heard the verdict. What sentence would Jesus pass?

II. An Exposed Conscience Is a Sure Cure for Hypocrisy (6-9). True to form John begins the next scene with an authorial explanation that includes a word play (pun) yielding a beautiful irony. The two Greek words involved are translated "to accuse" and "to write down" in verse six. John identified the motive of their loaded question as the attempt to hear something they could use against him (*katagorein*). But the second half of the sentence demonstrates Jesus effectively "turning the tables" on them by what he wrote in the dirt (*kategraphen*). Evidently unimpressed or simply ignoring what he wrote, they defiantly demand an answer in verse seven. What follows can only come from the lips of the Savior as he says, "All right, stone her. But let those who never sinned throw the first stones!" (NLT). The woman must have gasped for air upon hearing the first part of the sentence, much like the defendant did when the guilty verdict of second degree murder was pronounced recently in the Diane Whipple case in California. The \$100,000 question still remains: What did Jesus write? What would have caused these so-called religious men to walk away, one by one, from the eldest to the youngest, without slinging as much as a pebble? Mike Warnke, a Christian comedian, quipped, "Jesus wrote the names of their girlfriends in the dirt!" Maybe. Or maybe he wrote a list of the various, personal sins residing in their own hypocritical hearts. Whatever it was, it worked and it matched perfectly with what he scribbled in the dust. Do you see the force of the pun now? Although they attempted to gain an accusation against Jesus (*katagorein*), Jesus effectively accused them by what he doodled in the dirt (*kategraphen*). Case dismissed? Not yet.

III. The Sinner Is Neither Condemned nor Is Her Sin Condoned (10-11). Jesus had bent over to write a second time maybe to avoid the uncomfortable eye contact

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believe many who will gather for worship in the next few weeks and sing with hearts full of emotion in celebration of freedom are in reality no more free than billions of people around this world who have never tasted freedom, either political or spiritual.

A trip through one of our national cemeteries is always a humbling experience. To walk among the graves of many men and women who served this country and willingly placed their lives in harm's way to protect American freedom is inspiring. The trip becomes even more humbling to see all of those rows of graves marked with white Crosses. They remind me that the Cross stands as our only symbol of victory, hope and freedom. Those veterans died to protect freedom as they knew it. Jesus died to provide the only true freedom that can ever be experienced. So, as you plan the worship for your church on these upcoming patriotic holidays, allow me to encourage you to keep Jesus at the center of all you do and use the occasion to introduce those in attendance to the fact that true freedom is available only through Christ. If you want folks to leave your services reflecting on these truths, then plan the services purposefully and allow these messages to be the unifying themes throughout every element of the service. Perhaps their reflection will cause them to have genuinely thankful hearts for all that God has done on their behalf, at His initiation all the while knowing that we are all overwhelmingly undeserving of such love. This should motivate us to agree with psalmist when he said:

“O praise the Lord, all you nations; extol Him, all you peoples. For great is His love toward us; and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord.” (Psalm 117)



Franklin Pollard



Rick White



Paul N. Jackson



Greg McFadden



Sheila McFadden



Charles Fowler

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that could be misinterpreted by the accused as “rubbing their noses in it,” or maybe he wanted to allow this bruised bunch a chance to slip away to lick their wounds. Whatever the reason, the story shifts to scene three and we hear a conversation between Jesus and the once imperiled woman who undoubtedly could not believe what had just taken place. No accusers! No stones pummeling her body! No embarrassing death! No ignominious, Hawthorne-like “A” to hang around her neck! Only Jesus asking, “Where are they?” It is important to see that Jesus does not condemn her, but neither does he condone her sin. The admonition to “go and sin no more” grants a new lease on life, not an unholy tolerance of sin.

Unforgiving or seemingly unforgivable people both have a way of incarcerating us. You can jail yourself or others by refusing to forgive or to accept forgiveness. Sometimes, ironically, we have the key to let ourselves out of our self-imposed prisons. After preaching a similar sermon from this text some years ago, I received a phone call from a man who reconciled with a brother he had refused to forgive for years. He said it liberated him and his brother from a hateful animosity that, at best, could only divide and destroy. You see, forgiveness can heal the forgiver and the forgiven. Oh, let me hit the play button now so we can see how my distraught friend worked through his hellish jail. He incessantly had nightmares of shooting those two innocent, sweet, twelve-year-old girls. He relived the horror night after night waking to sweat-soaked sheets and a pounding chest. But once he realized and accepted the amazing, liberating power of God's grace and forgiveness, his whole life changed. He had refused to believe God could actually forgive him for something so horrible, so tragic, even though it occurred in the context of war. When I saw him just a week later, his whole countenance had changed. He joyfully, confidently told me he no longer had the same haunting nightmare. A dream took its place. A dream of those two girls dressed in white, no blood, all smiles, extending their arms to him as if attempting to hug him and to drape an “F” around his neck, an “F” for forgiven.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



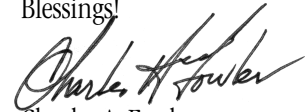
Greetings from Union University! I hope you received the first issue of the *Union University Bulletin* and found it to be a helpful resource. Our prayer was that it would assist you in leading your church through meaningful worship experiences in celebration of our Lord's death, burial and victorious resurrection. Likewise, we offer this second issue as a ministry tool with helpful insights into true Christian Liberty.

The events of 9/11 have brought to the forefront of public conversation terms such as liberty, freedom, patriotism, and God's blessing. Many are asking questions that less than a year ago perhaps had never crossed their minds. Questions such as, "Will things ever return to normal?"; "Where was God on September 11?"; "What is evil?"; "Will we ever feel freedom like we did prior to our War on Terror?"; and "After Enduring Freedom, will freedom really endure?". These are truly thought provoking questions and they provide a wonderful opportunity for us to direct others to the Word of God for answers to life's questions and to the Son of God for Life. Many in our society equate patriotism

to discipleship, prosperity to freedom, and world leadership to God's blessings. The opportunity and need for people of mature faith to enter this dialogue is clearly evident all around us. The challenge is to engage this unbiblical discourse with a genuinely biblical world view that teaches us that true freedom is only available in Christ Jesus and that love of country alone does not draw one closer to God. While these conversations are taking place around us each day, I pray we will seize every opportunity to help others think Christianly, to direct their search for answers to Almighty God, the only One who holds the wisdom and knowledge to provide meaningful answers, and to understand the importance for God's people to respond to the tragedies of day by consistently being persons of conviction, integrity and reflection for God's glory. This would be a tremendous ministry to a confused world.

God is so gracious to allow you and me to serve as His instruments to build and equip His Church. I pray He uses the *Bulletin* to be a blessing to your ministry and church.

Blessings!


Charles A. Fowler



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