

## Summer 2005

Next summer I will celebrate my 60th year on the earth, and, therefore, am realizing more than ever what is essential and what is not. When I look back in retrospect and consider what has served to sustain me, it has not been any particular event or accomplishment, but the ever-present Person of the Creator who has guided me, protected me, and “covered my backside.” What has amazed me most is the fact that He has remained faithful to finish what He has started in me (Philippians 1:6) in spite of my many blunders, mistakes, and misjudgments.

I also better understand the struggle that many face when it comes to keeping Jesus as the central issue in the midst of their “activity.” It has always been about Jesus, will always be about Jesus, and will never, throughout eternity, be about anything but Jesus. It is not about organizations that have to do with Jesus, nor movements “about” Jesus—it is His Person that is the issue—nothing more. I guess what I am seeing above all else, after having taught God’s word for some thirty years, is how difficult it is for those who have been steeped in tradition, religion, and a performance based acceptance mindset, to come to appreciate the freedom (and rest—Hebrews 4:9) that is available to the redeemed. In fact, nothing is more mind-boggling to me than what has occurred (in some circles) with the truth of the gospel—the greatest, most liberating truth ever communicated to man. Because of how it has been dispensed, instead of bearing fruit that causes the unredeemed to thirst after what is available to the believer, it is fast becoming the laughingstock of the 21st century. Postmodernism, a warped mindset that scoffs at the idea of absolutes, is taking our universities (and, therefore, many of our young people) by storm. And what has allowed it to do so? I believe, to a great degree, it is the manner in which the body of Christ has handled the gospel. Many involved in Christendom believe they are saved by grace and kept by works. They believe (and teach with much exuberance—though misguided) that their personal righteousness before God is enhanced as they behave more righteously. In other words, they teach that through their good deeds they can improve their righteous standing before God. There was a group of people who believed and taught this in Paul’s day, and he made reference to them as “bewitched” (Galatians 3:1-3). Also read what Paul wrote in Colossians 2:20-23. Has the body of Christ of the 21st century bought into this same lie? Could this be why so many youth, after leaving home, choose to no longer darken the door of any church of any flavor, but listen attentively to those who bash the gospel with no evidence to support their accusations? When a person is raised in an environment that never allows them to measure up (which is what a legalistic environment produces), they will, many times, opt out for anything that will “free them” from their bondage, regardless of the degree of error it contains. Have we done this to our kids? Judge for yourself, but before doing so, do your homework by checking out the latest statistics relating to what is happening to our kids once they leave home.

A friend once asked me what safeguard he should use to assure himself that his theology remained sound and unflawed. My answer, which in my mind, at least, is the safeguard of safeguards, is a statement that I have made for years—“Regardless of what my mind is exposed to, no matter who says or writes it, if it communicates the cross plus anything, it is error.” It is not the cross plus works, nor the cross plus trying harder, nor the cross plus my church attendance (although the redeemed should involve themselves in fellowship with other believers), not even the cross plus my Bible knowledge (although those who know Jesus will, and should, desire to passionately pursue the truth contained in the Scriptures). Jesus did it all in 30 A.D. on a cross, as Paul states so forcefully in Galatians 6:14. It is a finished work which allows the believer to rest and enjoy what the Creator has done to make life the greatest adventure known to man—and at the same time, allow the believer to possess something other than just a big smile and sad eyes. Big smiles and happy eyes result only when we appropriate the cross on a daily basis and live by

the life of the being who subjected Himself to such brutality. Trying to imitate Him will not suffice—that is the purest form of legalism and religious nonsense known to man. The goal is living by His very life every second of every day. Such living will cause even the unredeemed to sit up and take notice.

### **Family News**

When Benjamin was born, we were told by friends to enjoy every second, knowing that time passes very quickly between the birth of a child and his departure from home. They were right, for he is now nine years old and over one hundred pounds. In fact, he recently attended a football camp and was the biggest nine-year-old there. We can't understand where he got his "thickness," but he got it somewhere, and along with it enough strength to make his dad fear at times during our frequent wrestling matches. We continue to home school and enjoy watching him learn.

Need I explain how Kim spends her time? Between home schooling Benjamin, caring for our family, and serving as a part-time secretary, she has a fulltime job. I don't know how she does it, especially with such calmness and peace. She remains a great friend and companion.

We have all had a very busy summer, as the section titled "Ministry News" will validate. I have had as much to do here physically in the last three months as I can remember. It has been enjoyable in that I have been writing for the past several years, and the transition to a more physical lifestyle was therapeutic and very enjoyable. I am now ready to begin writing again, something I greatly enjoy.

Using our time wisely is one of the greatest challenges we face as a family. There are so many things that seek to sidetrack us, but hopefully we are choosing the excellent over the good at least part of the time. Most people we know face this same struggle. My prayer is that God might grant us the grace and discernment to make choices so as to present to Him a heart filled with wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

### **Ministry News**

Tuesday night Bible study has begun and we are in 1 Samuel. I am teaching through the history portion of the Old Testament and greatly enjoying my time in preparation. The Lord continues to send hungry believers to the hill to join us in these studies, and we are blessed beyond measure.

As I stated earlier, I have been working a great deal more with my hands this summer. The Lord has allowed us to convert the log workshop on the front of the property into a lodge, and we are excited about the new avenues of ministry this opens to all involved here. The building was originally designed for such a transition, and using our sawmill to manufacture the additional logs, beams, shiplap, and molding was not only fun, but a very economical way to produce what otherwise would have been cost prohibitive. There were a number of miraculous things the Lord did during the time of construction that allowed us to meet our deadline—I wish I had the space in this letter to relate them to you. With the addition of the lodge, the hill has the capability of housing approximately 150 people, giving us a great deal of flexibility in what we can offer groups of all ages. It is all part of the dream that God gave us some thirty years ago, and we are humbled that He would allow us to be a part of such a wonderful adventure. We hope you can visit soon and see what the Lord has done.

We had one of the best summer camps ever (youth ages 13-18)! The youth came ready to learn and were such an encouragement. We had three to four hours of Bible instruction per day, plus, they helped build the new lodge. The counselors were amazed at their character and diligence—and our counselors, by the way, were terrific. Much thanks to all whom the Lord used to make it work.

### **Some Events to Consider Attending on the Hill**

**October 14-16, 2005** Annual fall retreat for men and women, both single and married.

**April 7-9, 2006** Annual men's retreat for fathers, their sons, and single men of all ages.

**Summer Camp** for ages 13-18 will be in July 2006, the particular date to be announced later.

**September 1-2, 2006** Two-day school. Topic: Romans 1-8. .

### **Speaking Engagements off the Hill in the Short Term**

I will be teaching at a men's retreat in Baltimore, Md. September 9-11 I will also be at Cherry Hills Baptist Church's men's retreat, Springfield, Ill. October 28-29. For more details concerning ministry information, you can go to our website at [www.lifeonthehill.org](http://www.lifeonthehill.org).

### **A Word of Thanks**

We could never express the degree to which your friendship, prayers, and support encourage us. Our prayer is that God will reveal His Person to you in a powerful way as we learn what it means to live by His life.

Walk on—in His strength, of course!

### **THOUGHTS FROM THE HILL**

The following is taken from a commentary that I wrote on the book of Ephesians. What a wonderful book Paul penned, filled with a wealth of truth concerning what the cross accomplished for the redeemed. I hope you enjoy reading what follows as much as I enjoyed the research and writing of it.

*who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3b)*

Did you realize that God's idea of a good time is blessing His people? As early as the days of Abraham, God was preparing to bless mankind through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:3). The seed of Genesis 3:15, who would bruise the serpent's head, was also Abraham's seed (Galatians 3:16) through which the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Therefore, Christ was sent to bless man, that is, those who would accept Him as Savior (John 3:16-17).

Paul blesses “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3a) because He “has blessed us

with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3b). Wow! Can you comprehend this? God the Father not only sent His Son to redeem fallen man, but has already blessed believers with every spiritual blessing. This means that the moment we were saved (justified—Romans 5:1), God gave us everything needed to live life to the fullest. In fact, all we will be doing until the Lord takes us home is digging through that huge treasure chest of spiritual blessings we received the moment we accepted Christ. It is for this reason (and many others as well) that we should go on to spiritual maturity, for only then can we begin to comprehend all that is already ours. Many in the body of Christ, due to their immaturity, are “doing” to try to attain what is already theirs. This brings defeat and despair—a big smile and very sad eyes.

The next thing to notice is “where” God blessed us with these spiritual blessings. He has done so “in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3b). Because Christ is now at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 8:1-2; 9:24), to be placed into Christ means that we were taken into the realm of the heavenlies. Thus, Paul’s words are “who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (italics mine—Ephesians 1:3b). This means that when a person repents of his sin and accepts Christ through faith, he, through the avenue of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), is placed into Christ. I don’t even pretend to understand all the positive ramifications here, but one thing is certain: All who believe are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and all who are in Christ have been blessed with every spiritual blessing needed to live life abundantly (1:3b). So if you are God’s child, give up on trying to perform well enough to obtain more spiritual blessings. They are already yours. So rest dear friend (Hebrews 4:9-10) and enjoy the journey from the view above as we look at just a few of these blessings!

As we continue, key in on the phrases "in Christ" and "in Him." Take these phrases out of this epistle and you have a different epistle; in fact, take them out of the New Testament and you have utter chaos. But begin to view your walk from this perspective and you realize that whatever you are or possess is "in Christ." Your battles are His battles, for we fight in the strength of His might (Ephesians 6:10). We also wear His armor (Ephesians 6:11 and 13). "In Christ" we—have redemption (Romans 3:24), are alive to God (Romans 6:11), have eternal life (Romans 6:23), are sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2), receive the grace of God (1 Corinthians 1:4), are made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22), are led to triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14), are made into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), have liberty (Galatians 2:4), have received the blessing of Abraham (Galatians 3:14), have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6), have been created for good works prepared by God (Ephesians 2:10), are brought near to God by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13), have received God's forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32), have all our needs supplied (Philippians 4:19), and are complete (Colossians 1:28). "In Him" we—are enriched in everything (1 Corinthians 1:5), become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21), are chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), have redemption and forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), were sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), have been made complete (Colossians 2:10), and were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands (Colossians 2:11). And this is only a partial listing of the blessings received as a result of being "in Christ" or "in Him." Wow!

Scripture also speaks of Christ living in the believer. Passages like Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 1:27 confirm that Jesus lives in all who have accepted Him as Savior. But Scripture speaks much more about the believer being in Christ than it speaks of Christ dwelling in the believer. Therefore, the heavenly vantage point is the most important as we pursue the victorious life.

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