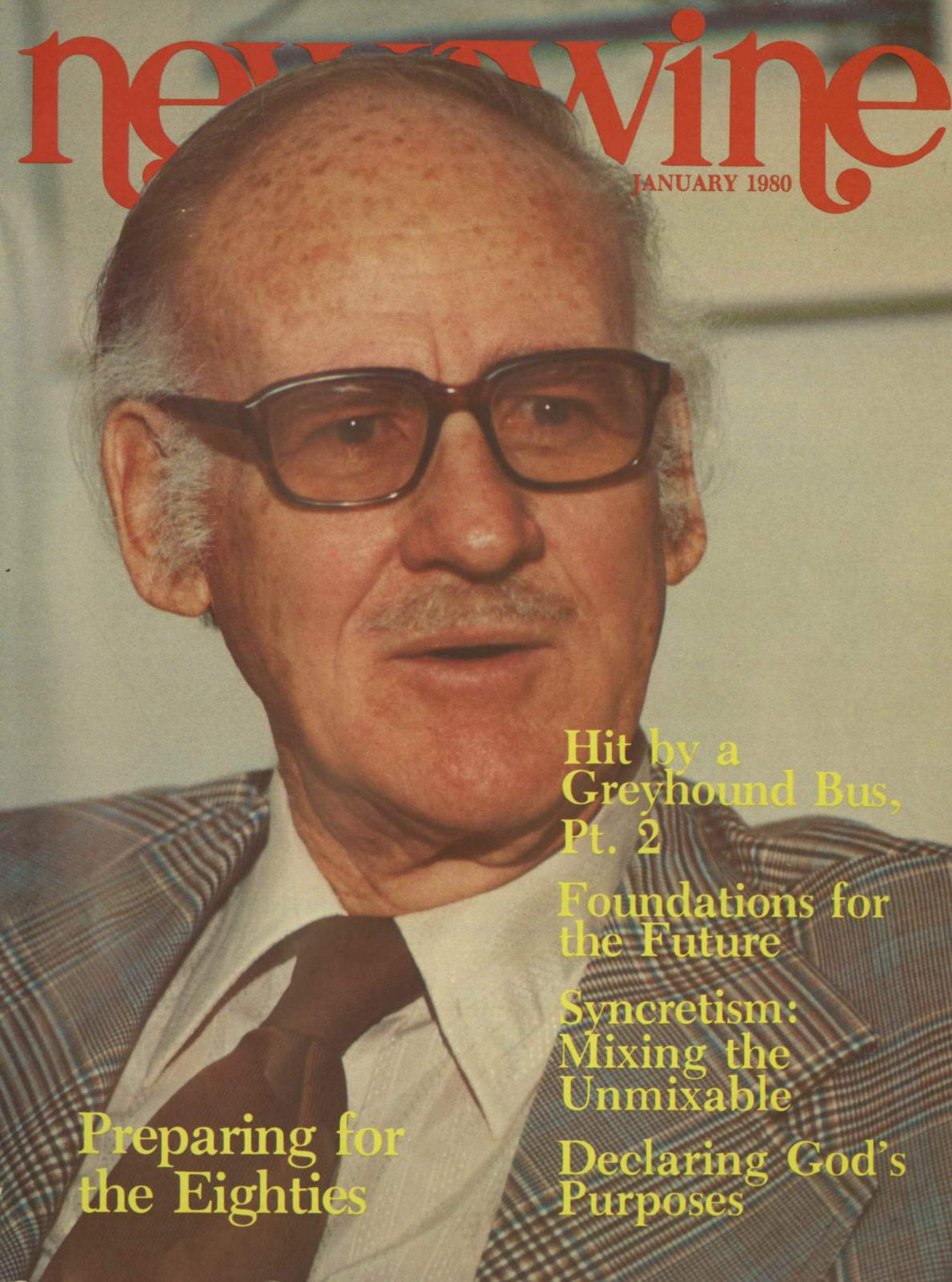


# new wine

JANUARY 1980



Hit by a  
Greyhound Bus,  
Pt. 2

Foundations for  
the Future

Syncretism:  
Mixing the  
Unmixable

Declaring God's  
Purposes

Preparing for  
the Eighties

# Declaring God's Purposes

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## An Interview with Ern Baxter

*NW: Do you see the 80s as crucial years in our society?*

**EB:** Yes, I do see the 80s as crucial years. I think anyone with eyes would have to agree that we are facing some considerable challenges in every area of life.

I want to point out from the first that I am neither a news analyst, nor a prognosticator of trends. I don't feel that is my calling. The other night I turned on the television and watched what I thought was a regular news broadcast. The announcer was armed with statistics about the balance of power in the Middle East, and with very refined information on sophisticated war planes. I listened to him with some interest, thinking I was listening to some kind of news analyst, until after about ten minutes he said, "All of this agrees with prophecy," and he started to tie all of these pieces of news into the Bible. Well, I do not feel called to that kind of newspaper exegesis.

Of course, as a normal human being I have opinions on many topics, but my *calling* is to declare God's purpose. When we talk about the 80s as crucial years, I am not equipped to address that topic as an economist or news analyst because those are not my areas of expertise. Instead I look at the coming years, whether the 80s or the 90s, in terms of what I believe the purpose of God to be.

I need to say that because I don't want to come across as somebody who knows everything that is going to happen and tries to tie it all into some obscure Bible verse. In fact, I feel many of God's people are so aware of current events that they have lost sight of

the decrees of God. My hope is based on the decrees of God, and that declaration of God is my ministry.

*NW: How then should a Christian properly respond when he sees current events that concern him?*

**EB:** He must react first of all in terms of his faith and hope. He should know what the purposes of God are through the gospel for the earth, for the church, for society, and then make realistic practical responses in his own life. What is happening in the world will definitely affect our life-style and our comings and goings. Obviously we are going to be affected by the energy crisis. But in terms of our emotional life, our thought life, our hope life, our faith life, the circumstances around us are not our anchor. We are related to what *God* is declaring. I am quite prepared to make the adjustments, economic and energy-wise, required of me as a citizen of the world. But I am also quite excited about what I see by faith in the affirmation of what God is going to do in the earth, in spite of what man is doing.

*NW: What definite things do you see happening that encourage you?*

**EB:** Personally I am encouraged that things are so badly shaken. The writer of Hebrews says in chapter 12 that everything has to be shaken that can be shaken, and only those things that can't be shaken

shall remain. When I see shaking, in terms of my philosophy, I don't just take it at face value as shaking: I see *God* in it. If I see this shaking as God getting everything ready for Kingdom exposure, then I can be excited about it. But if I am joining the crowd of those who are saying, "Alas, alas, Babylon the Great is fallen!" then it is a pretty miserable existence. But when I see Babylon falling, I am looking for Jerusalem to emerge.

*NW: What do you think that shaking will produce among God's people?*

**EB:** I think it will produce a restoration of simplicity. We are going to get rid of a lot of the unnecessary baggage and barnacles that have come into the Christian milieu which don't belong. I expect us to return to the simplicity referred to in Acts chapter 2, where the early church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayer.

I think we are going to rediscover the meaning of Christians relating to one another in the simplicity and ardency of their faith. A lot of the ecclesiastical bulk will have to give way. I see considerable changes in the whole "church" situation, and what would be alarming to others is exciting to me. However, to rejoice in the shaking just because it is shaking is a vacuous operation. I am rejoicing in the shaking because it will leave a residue of something that is really valuable.

*NW: What do you think of the attitude found among some Christians who are wringing their hands at the evil in the world, hoping that Jesus will return before things get too much worse—sort of an escapist mentality?*

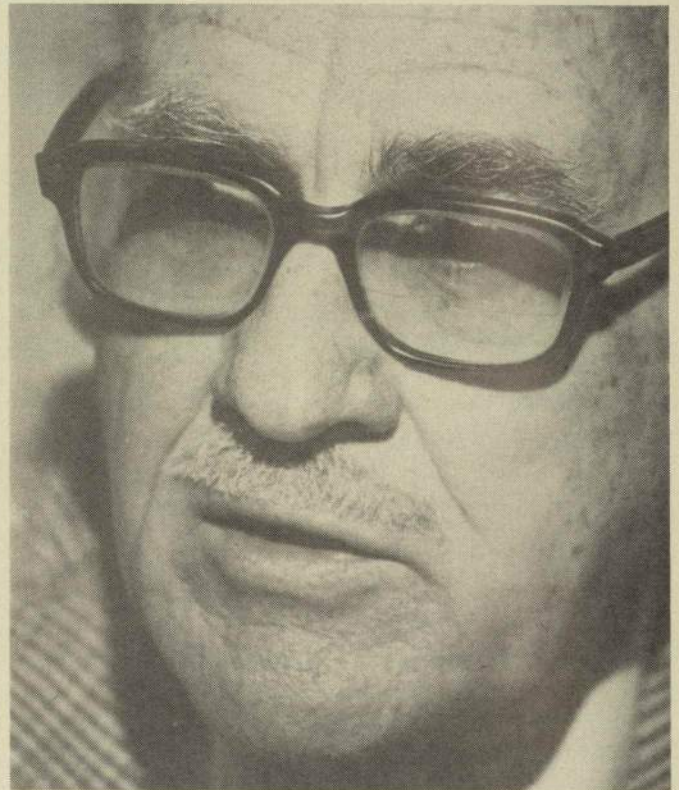
**EB:** I believe the Bible indicates that black gets blacker and white gets whiter, but the outcome is not in question. In John's Gospel he says, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot arrest it." I believe the hand-wringing mentality comes from having the dark side constantly portrayed. It is not uncommon to hear Christians lamenting the darkness instead of celebrating the light.

The time has come for us to affirm the Lordship of Christ—the ultimacy of Christ's Kingship—the fact that the darkness has to go and the light has to become permanent. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. I feel there are serious lacks in the thinking of Christians who are so engrossed with the world's evil. I don't think that is the area we should glory in.

We have been put in the world as salt and light.

We are here to celebrate light and to celebrate the grace of salt; we are here to affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord and that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." God is victor and He will vindicate Christ. This is the note that I am sounding and the note I would like to hear sounded more clearly.

The second coming of Christ is not the *hope* of the world. The second coming of Christ is the damnation of the world; it is the hope of the believer. I don't find anything in the New Testament that says the second coming of Christ is the hope of the world. My Bible says the *gospel*, not the second coming of Christ, is the power of God unto salvation. He is coming again for those that look for Him but for those who are not looking for Him, His coming will be the end. So I think the escapist mentality is based on a false premise. I don't think it can produce the kind of hope, faith, and joy that God intends us to have as we celebrate the ultimate victory of Christ.



*NW: Do you think it short-circuits a Christian's effectiveness?*

**EB:** I can't see it otherwise. If I thought that the whole answer was getting out of here, then I would spend most of my time packing my bags. In the New Testament Jesus said to His disciples, "As the Father sends Me, so do I send you." Our mandate is to go into the *world*, not go to *heaven*. Heaven is only a part of the deal. Although I expect to go there

eventually, it is not my present order. My present order is to go into the world.

For instance, I recently listened to a half-hour musical program featuring religious quartets, and every single number they sang was about going to heaven. Every single number—without exception. There was nothing about the victory of the gospel, nothing about God's victory in the world. The whole impression was, "I'm a Christian, and I can hardly wait to get out of here."

Now, there is a certain validity in wanting to go eventually, but as Paul said, "If staying here is going to benefit people, then I'll stay here even though I want to go be with Christ." As far as I am concerned, when my work is through here, I expect to go. But in the meantime I'm not going to sit around wanting to go be with the Lord when He wants me to get out into the world, salt it, light it, and bring Christ's victory into expression.

*NW: What redemptive attributes—I guess you could call them antidotes—do you see developing among God's people in response to negative trends in the world?*

**EB:** Before answering that directly, I would like to refer to a book called *An Evangelical Agenda* which is a report of the second *Future Evangelical Concerns Conference*. The first book that came out from this source was excellent and the second one is equally good. In one of the talks entitled, "Nurture, Form and Function," there is a quotation from a book by a man named Edge in which the life of a movement is described. I think it's done very well. Point number one says a movement generally is born as a violent reaction against errors, abuses and the injustices in the status quo. The second stage of the movement is that, to survive opposition, it must eventually organize its own institutions. In the third stage, the movement passes from rejection to toleration, and finally to acceptance by society. In stage four, the movement does not merely experience acceptance; it becomes popular. Stage five records how, for the sake of efficiency in organization and administration during this period of popular growth, there's a definite trend toward centralization of authority. In the sixth stage, beliefs become crystallized into dogma demanding acceptance. In the seventh and final stage, a new movement must break through these shackles with new ideas, new beliefs, new values and a new way.

## JUST AROUND THE CORNER

# PRAYER: The Ultimate Weapon

An issue examining the mightiest force available to mankind.

Now, before I say anything else, let me say this: I cherish a hope that we may be at that point in history where we will avoid some of these historical trends so that what is happening now in terms of restoration and rediscovery of primitive Christian principles may not fall victim to this process. It is my personal belief that as we come toward the end of history (and I believe history has an end), there will be a generation that will avoid this trend and will remain primitive and pristine and pure. To that generation Jesus Christ will be able to return.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "The things that you've heard of me among many witnesses, the same declare to faithful men, or loyal men, who in turn will teach others also." Paul put personal character at that point above gift, charisma, oratorical ability and academic attainment. He said, "If we don't have loyal men, men of character, men of integrity, regardless of whatever else we do have, we haven't really got what we need."

When we go back to the New Testament, we find such things as loyalty, integrity, covenant relationships, community, bearing one another's burdens. These traits are the warp and woof of the kind of Christianity which must ultimately demonstrate Christ to the world. There is a strong movement among men of various doctrinal and ecclesiastical backgrounds around the world to return to some of these primitive principles. I feel this is "where it's at."

**\* Don't forget: January 4th is a national day of prayer and fasting.**

**NW:** *Do you feel these developments are pretty much cross-cultural or cross-denominational?*

**EB:** I think so. The rampant disillusionment in society at large is causing men either to fall into despair or to turn to other options. Many of them are researching the Scriptures again. It's like the old search to rediscover the historical Jesus. We're searching for the historical Christian. What was the original Christian like? To what degree are we caricatures?

If we go back to the original Christian, we find interpersonal relationships and loyalty and integrity and covenant as the important things in his life. As I travel across the world, the healthiest signs I see are where men are finding one another in Christian covenantal relationship and starting to work out some meaningful life situations that go beyond Christian profession, right down to the nitty gritty of Christian life.

In the larger perspective I feel the ultimate form of evangelism is what Jesus described in John 17 when He said, "Father, I pray that they may be one as You and I are one; that they may be one in Us, that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me." Now if we work that back negatively, what He said was, "Until the redeemed community becomes one, the world will not know that You have sent Me."

The kind of unity that must come cannot be contrived. It must be Christian people finding one another in the genuine pressures of everyday life within a Christian context. This is happening, and I see it as a genuine hope for the future. When many of the ecclesiastical trappings start to crumble and fall, people will be looking for this sort of relationship. There is a vanguard now in preparation to be ready to give that option to people when these times come.

**NW:** *Isn't this quite a departure from "traditional" Christianity?*

**EB:** Yes. There's a considerable concern now about what is referred to as para-church groups. I think many para-church groups are the product of a sincere attempt to realize a restoration of the kind of simple primitive community that seem to be the genus of the early church. [That these para-church groups are not interrelated in any way is less than ideal, but nothing is ideal right now.]

I believe in the Church. By that I mean I believe in Jesus' statement that He would build His congregation, His people—the people of God. I believe in that and I don't want to be considered as somebody outside of the mainstream of the divine thrust in history. But in being a part of that mainstream, I am

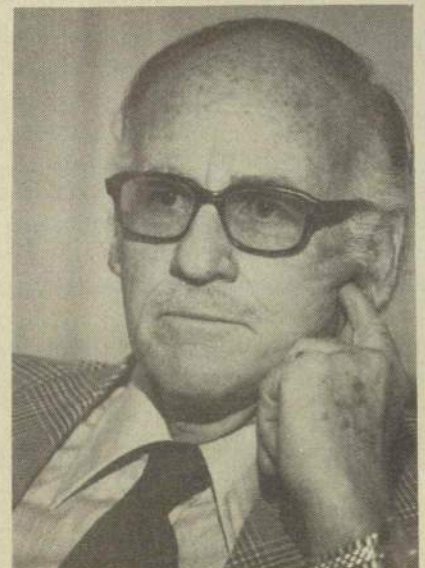
responsible to speak out concerning the maintenance of the simplicity of original Christianity.

I believe that the New Testament has in principle everything necessary for us to maintain a sound Christian life and witness to the end of time.

Many of the things we have invented in an attempt to help the Lord with His situation were unnecessary and have only cluttered it up. The story of Mary and Martha comes to mind. Martha was not getting lunch for the devil; she was getting lunch for Jesus. But Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing His word.

After Martha had labored long in the kitchen getting lunch ready, she stormed into the room, whirled upon Jesus and said, "Master, don't You care that I'm out there getting lunch while my sister is sitting here doing nothing?" What she was saying in essence was, "I *know* You didn't ask me to fix lunch, and I *know* that lunch is probably not in Your will, but I'm doing the best I can for You. Bid my sister to come and help me." Or in other words, "Have my sister help me in *my* program for You." We need to keep this in the proper context.

Jesus' answer was beautiful. He said, "Martha, Martha, you're troubled and concerned with many things, but Mary has chosen the better part." Dr. Moffat translates that, "the better dish." And Jesus said, "It shall not be taken from her." In other words Jesus said, "Mary is sitting at My feet and listening to My word. When I want lunch, I'll tell you. In the meantime, don't get Me lunches I haven't ordered." I think that we've gotten Jesus a lot of lunches He never ordered.



*NW: What do you see as the ultimate destiny of the people of God?*

**EB:** I personally see the people of God in the earth as the manifestation of Christ's ultimate victory and the demonstration of His Lordship. I believe "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" and that the gospel must ultimately be successful. I believe that the redeemed community in every geographic locality is also the governmental center of the Kingdom of God. I also believe that unfortunately the people of God have failed in their spiritual government over the earth.

1 Timothy 2 gives us the apostolic command as the redeemed community for when we're together in our common gatherings: First of all (or "most important of all" says one translation), we must pray for all men everywhere, for rulers and governors and those in authority over us that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, for God would have all men to be saved."

I don't believe that's optional, yet in the last few years, when teaching in large conferences, I have asked audiences, "How many of you in your gatherings have obeyed this apostolic injunction?" In conference after conference, among thousands of people, the number of hands raised would be only eight or ten.

I don't think this is just a peculiarity that can be treated lightly. If God's people are to exercise spiritual authority and rule, and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God—if our power doesn't lie in the bullet, or the ballot—then it lies in the spiritual realm. But it is no less a power because of that. In fact, it is a superior power. But if it's not used, it's useless. I don't care how good a sword is, if it doesn't get into the soldier's hand, it wages no warfare.

If God's people have not picked up the divine mandate to govern the world through their corporate life and prayer, then we really can't complain too loud at conditions. The world is waiting for a demonstration of Christian authority through community life and intercession. As I read the New Testament, there is no question but that the people of God are to exercise Christ's risen authority and bring the Lordship of Jesus Christ into the world so that nations are literally brought under the thrall-dom of Christ's government.

I know that what I have just said would be received almost with holy horror by thousands of Christians who have been trained and taught that the world is going to get worse, and that the Church will go out of history with a whimper. But as I was recently thinking about these things, I thought about the element of surprise that God has manifested in His activities throughout history.

Presuming that the angels were created before the material universe as we know it, when God spun the planets off His fingers and created the material universe, the angels must have been so surprised that they burst out spontaneously into singing and applause, because they had not been party to the mind of God. The angels had no idea what a material universe looked like, and then suddenly it appeared by a fiat of divine creation. What angel could have anticipated that?

Or consider Adam in the garden without a companion: to be put to sleep and then awake to find this exquisite creature awaiting him. How could Adam ever anticipate a thing like that?

Who could have anticipated the flood in Noah's day, or the separation of the Red Sea, or the manna from heaven, or the water out of the flinty rock? Or if you like, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?

Now, people say, "But Baxter, you must not read the newspapers. You must not be up on current events. What you're talking about is balderdash. It can't happen, given our current situation." But *I don't accept that situation* as final. The situation I'm functioning in is the situation of divine decree and power expressed in the character of God. It just seems out of character for God to allow history to finish up with Satan winning the day. If the best God can do is to come back in a fiat way and demolish the devil by the Second Coming, then He's saying, "My gospel wasn't the power of God. I had to come in and rescue My gospel."

Rather, God has declared that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and that in this age, in the fulness of time, He is going to gather together all things in one in Christ. God has declared that He is going to take out of the Kingdom all things that do offend. God has declared certain things He is going to do. I don't know how He's going to do them. But as I look back at the history of God's activity, I'm just excited and on tip-toe to see what God is going to do. It almost seems like God's got a twinkle in His eye as He says, "These folks will never learn that when things are the blackest, I do my best job."

I believe that God wants us to fulfill the implications of the gospel and carry it to its intended conclusion. It is intended to change all of life, and it must change it first in the redeemed community. When we become an example of a gospel life-style and a Kingdom life-style, then we will have something to demonstrate to the world—that the government of God, the will of God, has come to us in response to the 2,000-year-old prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." ♥

