



News from the Blue Ridge



Volume 7

Claire & Lorin Cranford
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Issue 1



Family Events:

We only thought November flew by in a hurry! December has come and gone before we realized it. For me, the second half of it is mostly a foggy recollection. About the middle of the month my neurologist and I decided to try a rather new pain drug called Lamictal (= Lamotrigine) as a last ditch effort to reduce the growing neuropathy pain in my feet. It is one of the newer so-called 'clean' drugs; that is, it's not supposed to carry many side effects. But, true to form, the side effects were overwhelming for me. Very subtly it sank me into a deepening depression that took a while to realize. After about two weeks of feeling increasingly listless and sleeping upwards of twenty hours a day, I began to suspect that I didn't have the flu or some kind of bug, even though there were many of the symptoms. On Christmas day I stopped taking the medication, and within 48 hours my mind had cleared up dramatically. The down side, however, was the return of high level neuropathy pain in my feet. Consequently, I did virtually no work done for two weeks before Christmas, and we had to cancel the Christmas trip to Donald and Hallie's in Sterling, VA. So the time after Christmas has been an intensified catchup work time in



order to be ready for the beginning of the spring semester on Jan. 7. To some of you, I owe an apology, since I promised to get some projects out for you before Christmas. They're now coming.

The primary positive aspect of Dec. and Jan. has been the opportunity to preach Sundays and Wednesdays at the Midway Baptist Church in Gaffney, SC, some fifteen miles south of us. The church is composed of a wonderful group of people who love the Lord and are trying to serve Him. They are searching for a new permanent pastor and are using university and seminary professors for their interim. GWU has been one of the schools they have turned to for help.

I am looking forward, though, to returning to Dr. White's Sunday School class as their interim teacher on Sundays at the First Baptist Church, Shelby, at the end of January.

An interesting milestone has been reached with this issue of the newsletter. This is the 73rd issue that begins the seventh year of publishing these reflections. We have managed to share our thoughts with family and

friends every month that we have lived in NC beginning in January 1998. What began as a monthly journal allowing us to reflect back on each month's accomplishments has become an opportunity for ministry to many people in various parts of the world. Little did we realize how God would use this!

Academics:

Jan. 7 is the operative day at GWU. That's the first day of classes for the spring semester in the undergraduate program. In other words, that's when classes start for me. This semester will continue the regular load of four classes, this time, all during the day and mostly bundled in the middle part of each day. I'm looking forward to having chunks of time both in the early mornings and late afternoons to work in the office at home and having the evenings free.

The main objective is completion of the course development for [Religion 492](#), A History of New Testament Interpretation. Beyond that are some research and writing projects, including getting the first pericope finalized on Galatians in the on-line [Biblical Insights](#) commentary. Gradually, I'm regaining excitement about commentary writing. It is enormously tedious and time consuming, but does provide a wonderful opportunity to explore the sacred text anew along with catching up on scholarly perspectives on that text. The SBL meeting in November provided me some inspiration for picking up this project again.

Galatians is one of the more fascinating and difficult books in the New Testament. Although I've been teaching it at graduate school level for over two decades and have published articles and study manuals related to it, I continue to learn new insights every time I work my way through the text. A very lengthy commentary on this NT document will be the first installment of

the Biblical Insights commentary to be available free at [Cranfordville.com](#). American and European scholarship have gone two very different directions in the interpretation of this document. The European approach is still anchored largely in historical oriented approaches to the text, while the American pattern has gravitated toward a variety of literary approaches. The result is frequently a very different reading of Paul's thoughts in Galatians.

Finding a healthy, holistic balance in interpretative method is a real challenge. Also, it behooves one to become sensitive to and avoiding of cultural and political biases in reading the sacred text. This is one of the consistent weaknesses that I find in a lot of the current approaches. Paul can quickly come out sounding like a German speaking Lutheran, or a liberal American Episcopalian, if these biases become blunted. This is my challenge in this work, and the many years of teaching interpretative methodology have hopefully prepared me to avoid some of these pitfalls. But the challenge of interpreting these sacred texts while aware of these dynamics at work in my own experience is exciting and inspiring to me.

Doing this work while working with advanced undergraduate students studying how the New Testament has been understood over the centuries should provide an interesting and stimulating semester for me personally. I expect to learn a lot myself, and hopefully the students will profit from what I learn as well.

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😊 *Claire's Musings:*

Jan, 2004

I finished my last class with an "A" and was so glad when the holidays arrived. I was tired and ready for some time to accomplish things around the house. "Home is where the heart is" really applies to me. I love working around the house and trying to get caught up, but didn't get near enough done. I now have 27 of the required 39 hours of classes finished and have hopes of graduating this August. Being this close makes it easier to not give up. I'm inspired to keep going.

I was happy to be able to spend a couple of times with the girls during the holidays. Once we had a little Christmas celebration with Clay and Taylor. It brought back some special memories of when Angie and Carrie were younger. They had decorated some and included their stockings (which I had made for them when they were little), and two little stuffed Santa's. All of their growing up years when we were doing something special together as a family we said that "We are making memories." I have so many wonderful memories that I am thankful for. Although, there is one small problem, my memory is getting worse with age. I have a T-shirt that says "Lord, When my memory goes, please help me find my scrapbook." How perfect for me and I have enough photos to last a lifetime. The last time Carrie, Angie, and



I met was hard for me, but they seemed excited about their new lives. Continue to pray that they may find the Lord's way.

Lorin has been preaching at Midway Baptist Church in Gaffney for the month of December and they want him to continue for a few more Sundays. They are in the difficult position of searching for a new pastor. It is a small church full of people who love the Lord. I have been having a wonderful time going with Lorin. I love to hear him preach and the people are so nice. I sit in church with and go to the Sunday school class of some sweet "little ol' ladies" who are precious. When Lorin finishes there, I will miss everyone a lot. The Christmas holidays were full of celebrations of all kinds, which included this church, and our church Sunday school class, and the men's class that Lorin has been teaching. What fun!

Last week, before our church took down all the Christmas decorations, Clay, Taylor, and I had a photo session. We made some great photos there and at here at home. They are such precious children. I did bribe them with a trip to McDonalds, which helped them to cooperate more.

This was the strangest Christmas that Lorin or I have ever had. We've always had family before, but this time it was just the two of us. We had planned a trip to Virginia to visit Donald and family, but Lorin was sick. We discovered too late that it was some new medicine he was taking. How thankful Lorin and I are to have each other. Besides, there is something to be said for quiet and peaceful.

Happy New Year!



✌️ *Lorin's Musings:*

After the December interlude on interpretative procedure, we again resume our exploration of important aspects for any credible approach to understanding the Bible. For about three issues we have been looking at the topic of paraenesis (moral exhortation). This is one of the dramatic distinctives of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, especially in the ancient world where religious observance and standards of moral behavior seldom had any connection with one another. By the beginning of the Christian era, the Jewish religious tradition for the most part had reduced this connection down to a "pull yourself into Heaven by your own boot straps" mentality. Moral conduct was a key element in the devout Jew earning his own acceptability before God. When the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), he came to the realization that such a religious approach amounted to spiritual suicide, since through his own efforts no one could ever become sufficiently good enough for God's approval (Gal. 2:16, NRSV): "No one will be justified by the works of the law." Out of this conversion the Pharisee Saul became the apostle Paul, who discovered that a different connection between religious commitment and moral behavior exists via the teaching of Jesus on God's will and plan.

In Christianity, authentic moral behavior flows outward from within the person's transformed heart. Without the spiritual transformation that only Christ can bring about, the heart itself becomes the source of defilement before God, as Jesus declared (Mk. 7:20-21, NRSV): "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come..." This is one of the core principles taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7 and Luke 6:20-49. Thus the inner spiritual condition of a person is critical to the nature and value of his patterns of behavior.

Superficial goodness can be achieved, but with absolutely no spiritual worth whatsoever, as amply illustrated by celebrity fund

raising involvement in charitable causes all across our society. This behavior becomes a mask lamely concealing an inner self that is evil to the core. But in facing God such will become devastating as Paul declares (1 Cor. 6:9-10, NLT): "Don't you know that those who do wrong will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, who are idol worshipers, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, abusers, and swindlers – none of these will have a share in the Kingdom of God."

When a layer of religiosity is added to this exterior, such behavior takes on either a repugnant phoniness or a rigid legalism, both of which God despises and will ultimately condemn (Mat. 7:21-23, NRSV): "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, go away from me, you evildoers.'"

Thus the scriptures are quite clear. The only goodness that counts before God is the behavior that naturally flows from deep down inside the believer whose heart has been transformed by the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. As Paul put it so clearly (2 Cor. 5:21, NLT): "For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ." Jesus is the basis of our transformation today just as it was for Paul when he shared this testimony in the late 40s of the first Christian century (Gal. 2:19-20, NLT): "For when I tried to keep the law, I realized I could never earn God's approval. So I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Our challenge is the one Jesus gave (Matt. 5:16, NLT): "In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."