

VOLUME SEVENTY-TWO

THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

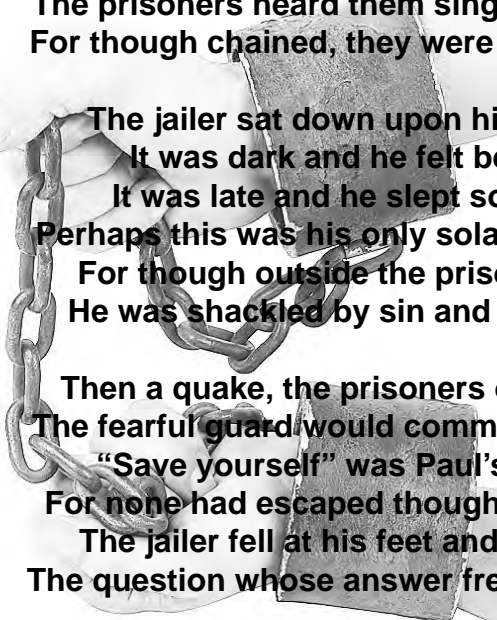


**PREACHERS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
PROCLAIMING THE WORD OF GOD**

Who Wore the Shackles?

Acts 16:22-34

**Deep in the prison, with their backs beat,
Sat Paul and Silas with shackled feet.
It was dark and they were tightly bound,
Yet their hearts put forth a joyful sound.
The prisoners heard them sing with glee
For though chained, they were truly free.**



**The jailer sat down upon his seat
It was dark and he felt beat.
It was late and he slept sound
Perhaps this was his only solace found.
For though outside the prison free
He was shackled by sin and misery.**

**Then a quake, the prisoners outside,
The fearful guard would commit suicide.
"Save yourself" was Paul's plea
For none had escaped though set free.
The jailer fell at his feet and asked
The question whose answer freed at last.**

**This situation applies to you and I
Just as it did back then in Philippi.
Have you obeyed the gospel call
Humbled yourself and done it all?
For how you spend today, shackled or free,
Will determine your place in eternity.**

Mark Ray

The Body of Christ

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.
(Ephesians 1:22,23)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
(Ephesians 4:4)

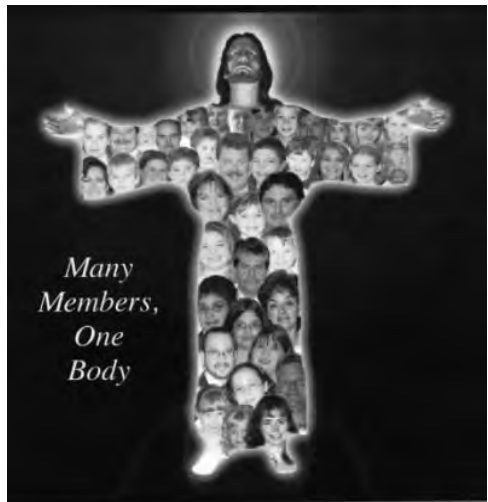
Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.
(1 Corinthians 1:10)

*Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ,
to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi,
with the bishops and deacons: (Philippians 1:1)*

**Jesus Christ,
the Head**

**The church,
His body:**

Elders
(Bishops/Overseers)
Deacons
Saints
(Christians)



There is one Body.

**No Division
Same Mind
Same Judgment
Same teaching**

Justin Hopkins

The Ultimatums of Salvation

Do This...

Or Else This...

1. Hear the Gospel

OR

1. Be Destroyed

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.”

Acts 3:22,23

2. Believe the Gospel

OR

2. Be Condemned

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Mark 16:15,16

3. Repent of Your Sins

OR

3. Perish

“... unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

Luke 13:3

4. Confess Christ

OR

4. Be Denied By Christ

“... whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 10:32,33

5. Be Baptized

OR

5. Be kept out of Heaven

“... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

John 3:3-5

6. Remain Faithful

OR

6. Be cast away

“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

1 Corinthians 9:27

Justin Hopkins

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THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST SALUTE YOU
 (ROMANS 16:16).



How Are We Impacting Others?

Byron Nichols

I once read of a newspaper vendor who sold his newspapers every day at the same busy corner in one of our large cities. Regardless of whether it was hot or cold, wet or dry, windy or calm, he and his best friend (his dog) were out there every morning making that day's edition available

to folks who were fighting the heavy traffic on their way to their work. This man not only sold newspapers, but he and his companion dispensed free energetic and entertaining cheer to all who came their way.

Then it happened...one day the vendor and his dog were gone. There was a new vendor in his place, but it wasn't the same. Oh, of course the newspapers were the same, the price was the same, the location was the same...but it just wasn't like it used to be. The new vendor didn't display that consistently joyful disposition that was typical of the former one. The cheery smiles and laughter were missing. And the dog...where was he? He and his master were a team, and the new vendor just was no match for them. Oh well, that's life, and life must go on, even without those who have helped to brighten the beginning of each new day.

It was some time later that those people taking that same monotonous route to work each day approached that same intersection as usual... only this time it looked better than it had for a while. What was different? THEY were back! The man and his four-legged partner had returned! Drivers kept coming by asking, "Where have you been? We've missed both of you! You will never know how much you managed to brighten the morning for the rest of us!" The man said that they had gone to another city for a while and decided they needed to come back. Happiness was all over his face as he said, "So many old friends have stopped to see me this morning...this is where we belong."

This man had been unaware of how much of an impact he was having in the lives of people that he saw every morning, while not knowing any of their names. I have no knowledge of this man's relationship with God, but I do know that he was having more positive influence on others than many Christians do. I know that he put into practice a very important principle found in both the Old and New Testaments. Solomon advised, *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might..."* (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Paul conveyed a similar message with these words, *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men"* (Colossians 3:23). This man seems to have accepted and enjoyed his lot, in spite of the fact that many were likely very grateful that they didn't have to trade places with him. It appears that he was able to see the wisdom of the saying, "Whatever your lot in life, build on it." He was doing what he could, and his attitude enabled him to find some pleasure in what most folks would consider to be an unpleasant way to make a living.

As I thought more about this fellow, I was impressed with the fact that he was impacting the lives of many people of much higher standing socially and economically. He exhibited kindness and love in the obvious care and concern that he showed for his dog. Had he neglected or abused his dog he would have totally destroyed his positive influence on people.

When this man returned after being gone for a while, his former customers were delighted to see him, **and they told him so**. In Proverbs 22:29, Solomon asks, *"Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men."*

Do you suppose that there would be more productivity on the job if there were more words of commendation and appreciation expressed to the workers? Is there any chance that employers would have any better attitude toward their employees if they received more positive feedback from their workers?

I don't suppose that very many people ever complain about having too many friends. We might all have more friends if we showed ourselves to be more friendly (Proverbs 18:24), like this newspaper vendor.

There would be many more happy marriages if more spouses expressed their love for each other with regularity. Those families that are strong and worthy of admiration and emulation are those where the family members speak of and show their love and gratitude for one another.

One of the marks of a spiritually healthy congregation of God's people is the building up of the group by communicating to all elements of the group the importance and appreciation of the contributions that all of them make to the benefit of all.





The Many Facets of God

Jerry Bates

The Bible uses many metaphors to help us better understand God. A metaphor is a figure of speech where one word or phrase denoting one object is used in place of another to suggest a likeness between the two. This is a good way and the only way that we

can even begin to understand God. Isaiah asks the questions, *“To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?”* (Isaiah 40:18) Of course, the answer is that there is nothing we can really compare to God. Nevertheless, these figures of speech help us understand God.

The problem comes when we try to contain God in one or a few metaphors as if they fully describe God. Many metaphors are used in the Old Testament to describe God, and sometimes they almost seem to contradict one another. Consider for example, Isaiah 40:10,11. *“Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold His reward is with Him, and His word before Him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.”* In verse 10, God is pictured as a mighty warrior, who will conquer, rule, and take the spoils of war. However, in the next verse God is portrayed as a tender shepherd to His flock, Israel. He is not pictured as merely one who protects the sheep, but one who gathers the lambs and carries the weak in His arms. God is thus an agent of violent power, yet also very gentle and kind. It is hard for us to picture a powerful warrior being so tender; nevertheless, that representation describes God. It is not that “shepherd” or “warrior” are poor metaphors, but simply that speech in its very character cannot fully describe God.

How often do we look at only one side of God? Most of us think of God as a

God of love, and so He is (1 John 4:8), but He is also a powerful Judge who will condemn the evil. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31). How often have you heard someone say that God loves us so much that He will not send someone to hell? To think that is to only consider one aspect of God. Yes, God loves us with a love that we cannot really comprehend. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:19 that God’s love is beyond our understanding. However, Jesus warns us that we should also fear God much more than any man. *“But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”* (Luke 12:5). God wants to save all men; nevertheless, He is also a God of justice that requires Him to punish those who refuse to submit to His authority. These images are not contradictory, just two sides of a God that we cannot fully comprehend.

This also highlights the great gift of salvation. Indeed, God does love us and wants to save us. How could He save us and at the same time maintain His justice and punish sin? The answer is Jesus, His Son. Jesus came on earth and lived a sinless life. He also chose to die on the cross in our place, paying the price for our sin. Thus, through that sacrifice, God can save sinful man,



**May we never put God into
a box of our own making.**

satisfying both His love and justice.

The New Testament also recognizes that God has seemingly

opposite sides. Remember the familiar verse, *“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God; on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off”* (Romans 11:22). How God acts towards us is dependent upon us. If we reject Christ, we can be assured that God will respond with severity on the Judgment Day. On the other hand, if we respond in faith, we can be assured that God will react with even more goodness towards us. God’s nature has many facets, all of which should be considered, and yes, marveled at, since we cannot fully understand God. May we never put God into a box of our own making. †

ASSOCIATE EDITORIAL



John 13:1-30 records the episode where Jesus took it upon himself to wash the feet of His apostles. Ordinarily in the ancient eastern world, upon entrance into a home, one would wash the dusty road from his bare feet, or a servant would perform this function upon a guest at the behest of the host. Sandal clad feet and dirty, unpaved boulevards were the backdrop for this antique custom. In another Scripture, this footwear combined with filthy thoroughfares was the basis of a symbolic gesture of disdain. *“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet”* (Matthew 10:14).

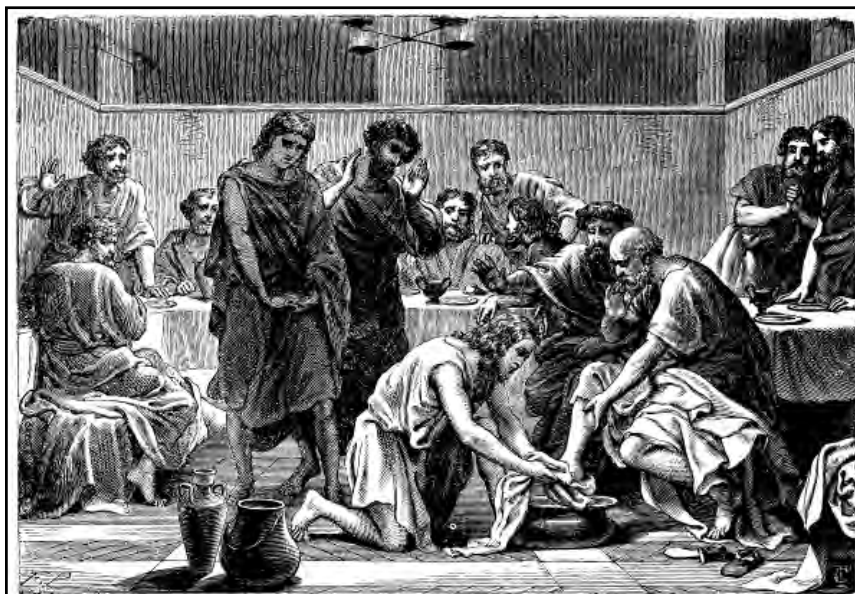
Go Wash Judas’ Feet!

Louis Rushmore

The occasion of this feet washing — not foot washing that some well-intending but misguided moderns practice as worship — took place following the conclusion of the last authorized Passover meal. Though the apostle John did not include it in his biography of Jesus, between the Passover dinner and feet washing, our Lord instituted the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-23) or communion (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Removing His outer garments, Jesus — the second person of the Godhead — the Creator — in human form — proceeded to wash the feet of His disciples — specimens of creation. This was a tremendous overture of humility on the part of our Lord! Even more, Christ’s humility stood in stark contrast to the conniving arrogance of the apostles toward each other as they strove for opportunistic preeminence in what they incorrectly perceived as a budding, earthly organization. Demonstrating dissension in their loosely confederated apostolic band was

routine for them (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27). Especially two apostles were politically misaligned to such a degree that without the influence of Jesus, one might have well murdered the other. Matthew was a tax collector (Matthew 10:3) for the despised Roman government whereas Simon was a zealot (Luke 6:15), which animosity of that political party led to the ill-fated attempt of the Jews to overthrow Rome's rule; consequently, Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed in A.D. 70.



Repeatedly, our Lord had verbally addressed the jealousy among His disciples. Time after time, Jesus taught that servanthood was the correct path to leadership and greatness in His kingdom (Matthew 20:26,27; Mark 9:35; 10:43,44). Jesus Christ emphasized again and again that He, for instance, came to serve rather than to be served (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). Finally, in John 13, the Holy Christ — our Savior — acted out through washing their soiled feet what He had been teaching them orally, howbeit with apparently little success. The apostle Peter in particular was humiliated to have the Master stoop to the lowly position of servant of all to wash feet (John 13:6-9). None of the apostles had been humble enough to assume the role of washing the dirty feet of their fellows, but Jesus humbled Himself — making of Himself an object lesson that they could not overlook. Afterward, He gave the explanation and application (John 13:12-16).

In addition to the foregoing, did you ever pause to ponder that our Lord also washed the feet of the traitorous apostle Judas? Judas Iscariot left the gathering after Jesus concluded His living lesson about humility (John 13:26-30). Yet, Jesus Christ was well aware earlier in the evening that Judas had betrayed Him to His Jewish enemies (John 13:2,11). How could our Lord knowingly demonstrate such humility even to Judas? Jesus' humility knew no bounds! He had already humbled Himself upon laying aside the praise and honor due Him when He departed from heaven (Philippians 2:5-8) to be born of a virgin — born into a poor family (2 Corinthians 8:9) whereupon His first baby cradle was an animal's food dish! Finally, our Lord Jesus humbled Himself to be murdered on the cruel cross (Acts 8:32,33) by the very humanity He came to save.

As we imitate Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21), we need to learn humility. For you and me, too, serving others is the pathway to greatness in the kingdom of our Lord. We especially demonstrate humility when we lower ourselves to minister to others who ordinarily we might think (at least subconsciously) are less talented or gifted in some way than we are; it is less of a demonstration of humility when we yield ourselves to older, more experienced or renown brethren. However, can we muster humility toward those specifically offensive to us — for whatever reason or for no reason at all? The inspired apostle Paul taught:

“Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:16-21)

This Jesus did in so many ways so many times during His earthly ministry. Our Lord validated these virtues in His own life, among other times, when He washed the feet of Judas, His betrayer. What you and I need to do when our feelings are trampled upon is to go wash Judas' feet! When someone slights us or takes advantage of us, we ought to go wash Judas' feet! We might feel like getting someone's attention by rapping him or her on the noggin with a stick of lumber, but instead, we should go wash Judas' feet! We might find temporary, earthy satisfaction by letting the air out of all four tires of an adversary's automobile, but Jesus with more at stake than trifles washed Judas' feet. May we all humble ourselves and wash Judas' dirty feet! †

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“The Spirit Speaketh Expressly”

Bobby Duncan

In God’s great scheme for redeeming fallen man, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to make known the will of God to man. It is in connection with this work that miracles were performed. Those through whom the Spirit revealed the mind of God were empowered to perform miracles so there could be no doubting the source of the message being delivered. After giving the Great Commission, Jesus said, *“And these signs shall follow them that believe”* (Mark 16:17). He then enumerated a number of the different kinds of miracles that would be performed. Notice that He calls them *signs*, because they signified something. They signified that those performing them were true messengers of God, and that the message they delivered was genuine. And so, just three verses later, the record states: *“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following”*.

When the Gospel had been revealed in its entirety, then the work of revealing ceased. We now have a completed and perfected revelation of the will of God. Second Peter 1:3 says we have been given *“all things that pertain unto life and godliness”*. Jude 3 states that the faith has been *“once for all delivered unto the saints”*. Since the Bible contains *“all things that pertain unto life and godliness”*, then no additional revelation is needed. Since the faith has been *“once for all delivered”*, then it is not going to be delivered again. Those who claim the Holy Spirit is revealing things through them today are actually implying the Bible is not complete. The Bible *is* complete, and the work of revealing has ceased.

When the work of revealing ceased, then miraculous signs also ceased. Referring to miraculous signs, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 that they would fail, cease, vanish away *“when that which is perfect is come”*. The context shows *“that which is perfect”* to be the complete and perfect revelation of the will of God to man.

First Timothy 4:1 begins with the words: *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly”*. Observe this important fact: The Holy Spirit conveys God’s message to man by speaking to man. The Holy Spirit has never tried to lead man by causing him to have certain feelings, certain urges, or certain experiences. He has always conveyed God’s message to man by speaking to him. This passage says the Holy Spirit speaks *expressly*. The word *expressly* is translated from a Greek word which means “in express words” (Thayer), or in “stated terms” (Vine).

GOD

Did you ever hear someone say he just felt led by the Spirit to do a certain thing? Or have you ever heard someone tell about some of his experiences, and then say he thought God was trying to tell him something by those experiences? That is not the way God makes known His will to man. He makes it known by speaking to us in stated terms, or in express words. In the second and third chapters of Revelation there are recorded seven letters to the churches of Asia. In each of those letters there is the admonition: *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”* He did not say: “He that hath feelings, let him determine what the Spirit is trying to tell him by the way he feels.” He did not say: “He that hath experiences, let him interpret those experiences to determine what the message of the Spirit is.” What He did say is: *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”* What the Spirit said unto the churches was contained in the express words of those seven letters to the churches.

First Timothy 4:1 begins with the words: *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly”*. Observe this important fact: The Holy Spirit conveys God’s message to man by speaking to man. The Holy Spirit has never tried to lead man by causing him to have certain feelings, certain urges, or certain experiences.

Aren’t you glad the will of God is conveyed to us by the express words of the Holy Spirit? If we had to depend of our feelings, our urges, or our experiences, we could never know for sure what God expects of us. We would always wonder if we had correctly interpreted our feelings, our urges, or our experiences. But when we are told in stated terms or express words, there is little room for failure to know exactly what God expects of us.

Still there are some among us who have traded off the sure, explicit words of the Holy Spirit for some nebulous urge or feeling which they (mis)interpret to be the leading of the Spirit. As is true concerning every false religious doctrine, this idea slaps at the perfection and the reliability of the Bible.

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly”. Let us give careful heed to what He says. After all, it is by the express Word of the Lord that we will be judged in the last day (John 12:48). †

Bobby Duncan (1934 – 1999) was a highly respected Gospel preacher for many years, working especially in the state of Alabama, USA.

GOD

"GOD IS NOT A LEGALIST!"

Betty Burton Choate

Many people raise sincere objections to biblical teachings:

"But God is not a legalist. He wouldn't attach such importance to a little thing like baptism! You can't make me believe that only those who are baptized — buried in water for the forgiveness of sins, to enter Christ — that only those people will be saved."

"I know many righteous, God-fearing people who have never been baptized. Think of the ones through the centuries who died for their faith in God, but who were only sprinkled because that was what they had been taught. You can't tell me that such people are lost. Their faith and love were greater than any today. A little thing like baptism is of no importance compared to such dedication to God.

"God wants our hearts. He doesn't care about those little legalistic things, those laws you would bind on everyone."

Human Reasoning, Human Logic.

Who gave any man the right to measure sizes of things for God? Yes, baptism may seem "little" because *it appears to ask so little of us*, because it is so easily done.

But suppose God had stated His requirements for the forgiveness of sins in this way: "The wages of sin is death. Therefore, if one voluntarily dies for his sins — being willing to humble himself in obedience, to pay that physical price, in faith that I will raise him up to eternal life — then my grace will cover him and I will forgive his sins."

Suppose God had asked such a price, in order for us to receive His grace. Would we count physical death "a little thing"? If Mark 16:16 said, "He that believes and is killed shall be saved", would we lightly pass off the command as a trivial legalistic opinion we could choose to obey or ignore, at human will?

No — if the question concerned physical death, no one would have to convince us that the matter was the greatest question to be answered by man, the cutting edge between obedience and disobedience, the line of demarcation drawn between grace and damnation.

Either we would die and be saved, or we would ignore God's law and be lost. There would be no middle ground. There would be no "righteous" or "godly" disobedient person refusing to die but still sure that God's grace would ultimately

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save him.

And, yes, Mark 16:16 should have read that way because we humans are the sinners. Someone had to die for those sins. God's mercy longed to forgive, but His justice closed the doors of grace. The price had to be paid.

So, instead of demanding death of us, Jesus Christ was the one who voluntarily died in our place. Do we think that God did not long to show mercy to His own Son? But justice demanded that He could not.



Was it enough that Christ *overcame* the agony in the Garden, *humbling Himself* in obedience, *willing Himself* to die in our place? Did God relent, at *that point* of commitment in the Garden, and say, “Now that I know you will do it, it isn’t important that you go through the literal death. After all, *your heart is what matters*, not a legalistic custom of

actually paying for sin with death.”

But God didn’t say that. Commitment wasn’t enough. Nothing less than the binding of Christ with man in death was enough.

Is baptism a “little” thing in God’s eyes? No, it is as large as death, because it is the parallel in our lives to the death of His only begotten Son. In His justice, He required not only the commitment from Christ to die in our stead, but the binding with man in His literal death. In God’s mercy, He says we must obey “a form” of that Gospel — we must humble ourselves also in obedience **to die with Jesus in baptism** so that we can be raised to walk in the grace of God.

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism unto death ... dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:4). “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). “God be thanked that though you were the slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17,18). †

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Our King Is Coming

Bobby Key

While our Lord was yet among men, He promised, *“I will come again”*. Though many centuries have come and gone, this promise still echoes through the ages, bringing comfort to the suffering saints. *“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation”* (Hebrews 9:28). Over three hundred times in the New Testament our Lord makes the promise: *“I will come again”*.

Yes, our King is coming — not to be crowned and begin His reign, but rather to end His reign and receive His own! Let us notice some of the characteristics of His coming.

- **It will be majestic.** *“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory”* (Matthew 25:31).
- **It will be sudden.** *“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh”* (Matthew 25:13). *“Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”* (Matthew 24:44).
- **It will be the end of preparation.** *“And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25:32). *“These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”* (Matthew 25:46).
- **It will be the beginning of supreme joy for some.** *“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34).
- **It will be the beginning of great sorrow for others.** *“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25:41). †

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Our King Is Coming Again!

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God and Love

Greg Tidwell

“Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Love is not only one of the Christian virtues, love is the central principle of our religion.

Salvation is grounded on God loving the world so much that He was willing to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the atonement for our sins. We are forgiven because of God’s love for us. This truth, repeatedly emphasized in Scripture, is the ultimate assurance of our salvation.

God is love. To be godly is to think and act with His love guiding and directing every motive and desire. The law of God subsists in two commandments: Love God; Love each other.

All of us are mortal and prone to sin. We fail to do all the things we know we should, and we continually do things we know we should not. Beyond our sins, which are many, our humanity limits our understanding and leads us into honest, but hurtful, mistakes.

Continually we rely on God’s love to bring forgiveness for our sins and failures, and He has promised, in love, to forgive.

In the same way, His love should lead us to forgive those around us and to cover their shortcomings. There is enough wrong with each of us that we should each seek grace for all of us. †

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A Tree

Hugo McCord

Unconscious plant life commands respect, and it ought to turn men's minds to a power that can beget life. Such was its effect on Joyce Kilmer:

I think that I shall never see

A poem as lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,

And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear

A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;

Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,

But only God can make a tree.

The very existence of matter is inexplicable without assuming there was a maker. Kilmer's tree, however, adds more mystery if one does not assume a maker. The chemical elements constituting an apple did not create themselves. And the seed within the apple has something which analytical chemistry cannot locate. From some source the tiny seed has power to burst open and send roots deep within the soil. The roots have anchoring power and also ability to withdraw water and nutriment from the soil. From some source they have ability to turn in the direction where the most water can be found. The same little seed has power to send growth upwards, climbing out of the soil and into the sunlight, and to include in that upward growth canals for carrying precious and vital liquids against gravity to high limbs.

Some source gave that tiny, dry, hard apple seed the power to send forth leaves on the upper growth, and gave the leaves power to utilize sunlight as they operate a chemical factory extracting carbon from carbon dioxide. Some source gave the buds power to unite the freed carbon with soil chemicals to form the meat of the apples. Finally, the seed has inborn power to cause the apple meat to be packaged neatly and efficiently and to enclose new seeds for future orders from the apple factory. †

How much faith is required to believe that there is no God?

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Belief in God Is Not Enough

Kyle Butt

It is impossible to go to heaven without believing that there is a God (Hebrews 11:6). But a mere mental assent to the fact that God exists is not enough to save a person's soul. In fact, the Book of James says: "*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!*" (2:19).

Once a person opens up to the vast amount of evidence available to prove that there is a God, that person must follow up belief with a desire and resolve to obey the Creator. An email that came into our office illustrates this point well. After reading on our site an article that defends the existence of God, one gentleman wrote: "For many, many years I began to write off all religions as 'fake'. I'm not completely convinced still. However, after reading this article, I was faced with the absolute fact that not only does God exist, but that He is surely angry with me for disbelieving in Him." Acknowledging the existence of the Creator is the first step toward assuaging His anger, but it cannot be the last. In fact, the term "practical atheist" is applied to a person who technically acknowledges that there is a God but does nothing about that belief.

What, then, must follow a person's belief in the Creator? That individual must find God's message to His creation. An honest search for such communication will bring that person to the realization that the 66 books of the Bible are God's inspired Word to man (see Butt, 2007). "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Upon discovering that the Bible is God's message to humanity, a diligent study of the Scripture reveals that Jesus Christ is the prophesied Messiah and Son of God (see Butt and Lyons, 2006). "... *if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*' Then they said to Him, 'Who are You?' And Jesus said to them, 'Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.'

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“They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.’ As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”

By following the teachings of Jesus, the honest investigator realizes that Jesus has opened the door of salvation to all who will receive it as He has commanded (see Lyons and Butt, n.d.). *“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matthew 11:27-30).

At Apologetics Press, it thrills us to hear that a person has left false, atheistic views and embraced the idea of a Divine Creator. Yet, we know that such a mental shift is simply the first crucial step to eternal life. A penitent heart and faithful life of obedience to God’s commands must accompany that belief in order for it to be of any real, eternal value. The only thing that separates condemned demons that believe in God and saved humans is that the humans have translated that belief into obedient action. †

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The Old Testament Prophets



There can be no doubting the role Old Testament prophesy plays in helping one to understand and fully appreciate the New Testament, in general, and Jesus Christ, in particular. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill”* (Matthew 5:17). After His resurrection, He explained to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, *“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”* After helping them to understand more fully, the Lord went on to say, *“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:44-47).

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Modern man may have limited his view of prophesy to the books which were written by prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc. Clearly, the Lord did not see these as the only prophetic writings. Instead, His words indicate He viewed all of the Old Testament to be prophetic in nature (John 5:37-39). A full understanding of the writings of the Old Testament can only come to one willing to explore the meaning as revealed in the New Testament.

The Greek word “prophetes” means, “a proclaimer of a divine message” (W.E. Vine. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Nashville: Nelson, 1983). In a sense, any inspired writer could appropriately be described as a prophet. So, Paul could tell the Jews of Antioch of Pisidia, “*For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him*” (Acts 13:27). Because the Jews did not understand the meaning of words they read every Saturday, they crucified the very Son of God! Interestingly, their ignorance led, in part, to the fulfillment of the very prophecies they failed to understand (Acts 13:38). As a result, Paul was able to write, “*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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*” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

Peter confirmed the same when he told the people in the temple, “*But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled*”. He went on to say Jesus had been received into heaven “*until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*.” One of the prophets he was referring to was Moses, who foretold the coming of a prophet like himself. “*Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days*” (Acts 3:18-26; 26:22,23).

One of the most perplexing truths about prophecy is that those who spoke or wrote it may not even have been aware of the meaning of their message. Peter explained this to his early Christian readers.

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who as in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you

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through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Later, Peter answered the question which follows in many of our minds. That is, “How can someone write about things they do not even understand?” He said, “*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter 1:20,21). In other words, the words of the prophet were not a product of his own mind or invention. Instead, they were carried along in their message, much as a ship is carried along by the wind, by the Holy Spirit.

An excellent example of such a prophetic writing is found in Psalm 22, which may have been written by David during the time he was being persecuted by Saul. F. Delitzsch, in his *Commentary on the Old Testament*, plainly states that he knows of no historical time in the life of David which exactly coincides with the events described here. They were realized in some small degree in the life of David. He went on to say, “On the other hand, the first portion exactly coincides with the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and the second with the results that have sprung His resurrection” (Volume 5, 305). There can be no doubt that David was speaking in the spirit of God’s Anointed when he wrote this beautiful psalm!

The opening verse was quoted by Jesus as He hung on the tree (Matthew 27:46). The tragic agony of one being crucified is vividly pictured in verses 14-17. No wonder our Lord cried, “*I thirst*” (John 19:28)! Of course, someone might say Jesus was fully versed in Scripture and simply quoted the words of David. However, it should be observed that others who had no apparent thought of God’s Word also delivered lines from this prophetic psalm. Those around the cross clearly showed their contempt for Him with their mouths (verse 7). They also said, “*He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’*” (verse 8; Matthew 27:39-44). Though the soldiers who crucified the Lord had no known respect for the writings of the Old Testament, they did divide His garments and cast lots for His coat (verse 18; John 19:23,24). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews uses a quotation from verse 22 to portray the role the resurrected Lord would play among the saved (2:11,12). Interestingly, Jesus did call the disciples His “brethren” after the resurrection (Matthew 28:10; John 20:17). The closing verses of Psalm 22 are a beautiful depiction of the evangelistic thrust of Christ’s followers into all the world (verses 27-31). †

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The Greatest Need Among Us

Ken Tyler

Genuine Bible Study. This is it! When we do not study, we become ignorant. This is the reason many Christians do not know the answers to basic Bible questions. We are letting our society destroy us spiritually. Too much entertainment; too much responsibility; too much prosperity. We do not have the time. We do not feel the need.

When we come to worship, we think we have to be entertained. The preacher who is the best entertainer is the man for the job. We are competing with TV, computers, and satellites. When will we be able to see that what we really need is genuine Bible study? How long has it been since you studied a passage like Psalm 23? I'll tell you one thing, I know it had an impact on your life, an impact that the entertainment of this world cannot give.

A Christian cannot live without the Word of God, just like a person cannot live without food. Have you quit eating? *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..."* (Hosea 4:6). This is a verse we must never forget. And here is another one: *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"* (Psalm 119:11). The Word keeps us from sin. Have we forgotten?

Brethren, genuine Bible study — that's the greatest need among us. It's not going to be easy in our environment, but the person with his head on right knows he cannot live without the Word of God. Pay the price! You won't ever regret it. †

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Do You Know?

1. What are the divisions of the Bible?
2. How many books are in the Bible?
3. Can you distinguish the books of the Old Testament from the books of the New Testament?
4. Can you quickly find book, chapter and verse?

**Understanding the basic layout of the Bible is
key to a comprehensive study of God's Word.**

The Importance of the Holy Scriptures

Wayne Jackson

The information contained within the Scriptures is important for so many reasons. Consider the following.

First, without a knowledge of the Bible, we have no detailed information of the character of our Creator. While something of the wisdom and power of God may be discerned from a consideration of the vastness and marvelous intricacies of nature, it takes concrete communication in the form of words to instruct us of Jehovah's kindness (Titus 3:5), mercy (Ephesians 2:4), love (1 John 4:8), grace (Ephesians 2:8), righteousness (Romans 1:16,17), etc. The divine book expands our perception of deity immeasurably.

Second, when the historical record of the Bible is dismissed, man is absolutely bereft of any knowledge of his origin. The confusing and contradictory theory of evolution is a pathetic substitute for the sublime Mosaic narrative which reveals the brilliance of Him who fearfully and wonderfully fashioned our mortal frames and endowed our spirits with

His own blessed image (Psalm 139:14; Genesis 1:26). Pity the man who ignorantly believes that he is but an evolved brute.

Third, the Holy Scriptures are essential to reveal our true spiritual status. It is doubtless true that mankind knows that something is wrong in the human condition. An ancient Chinese proverb says: "There are two good men: one is dead and the other is not yet born". The Roman philosopher Seneca declared: "We have all sinned, some more and some less". But how do we define the precise nature of what is right and what is wrong? Unbelief can supply no answer. Agnostic Bertrand Russell argued that the man who brings happiness to others is better than the man who brings misery, but he confessed: "I do not know of any rational ground for this view" (**Autobiography**, Vol. 3, 29). And then there is this question: how does man remedy this woeful condition? The myriad confusing human philosophies attempting, without success, to address this matter is evidence aplenty that

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divine revelation is needed if man is to properly focus upon his true moral and religious estate.

As a mirror that reflects the real nature of the human situation (James 1:23), the Bible benevolently, though bluntly, informs us that we, as rational human beings, have departed from a familiar relationship with God (Romans 3:10-18; 23). Sin has marred us and separated us from a warm association with the Author of our very being (Isaiah 59:1,2). Spiritually speaking, we are but corpses (Ephesians 2:1). The whole history of Scripture is a documentation of man's sordid journey away from the Source of all righteousness. As a consequence of our fall, this planet has been plunged into a state of distress that begs for relief (cf. Romans 8:20-23). Those who ignore the testimony of the Bible and who entertain the view that man, the "noble savage, is the measure of all things" (the philosophy of humanism) are destined to wander in a hopeless maze of spiritual and emotional confusion. The Scriptures drive us to our knees in recognition that we need a plan whereby reconciliation to the Creator can be effected.

Fourth, Jesus Christ is the very center of human history. Even unbelievers have paid Him tribute. Infidel philosopher John Stuart Mill said that Jesus of Nazareth must be placed in that "first rank of men of sublime ge-

nius of whom our species can boast" (**Three Essays on Religion**, 255). But what do we know of Christ apart from divine revelation? Granted, there are extra-biblical historical allusions to Jesus (e.g., Josephus, Tacitus, Seutonius, etc.), yet these reveal nothing of the character and redemptive work of our Lord.

The Scriptures are a gracious revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Therein we learn of His eternal existence as the preincarnate (before flesh) Word (Micah 5:2; John 1:1). Throughout the Old Testament there is a distinct thread of unfolding information that prepares the world for the coming of the Messiah. Strange appearances of deity in human form, recorded frequently in the Old Testament (cf. Genesis 18:1; 32:24f), prepare the mind for the eventual arrival of One who would become flesh and dwell among us (John 1:14). Christ is seen in the scores of Old Testament prophecies which herald, with graphic detail, His coming (Isaiah 53; Micah 5:2; Daniel 9:24f). He is previewed in bold types that condition the soul for acknowledging His mission (see Exodus 12:1f; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7). And so, after sufficient preparation, when the time was exactly right, God sent forth His son into this world (Galatians 4:4).

Fifth, without the New Testament, we would have no primary information about the ministry and message of Jesus

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of Nazareth. The Gospel writers, with varying emphases (yet with absolute harmony) record the works and words of the Son of God. His miraculous deeds, supporting His claim that He came from heaven to satisfy the spiritual needs of mankind (see John 6:33), declared him to be a man approved of God (Acts 2:22), qualified to accomplish this divinely appointed task. His elevating words brought comfort and hope into a world of decay and despair. Indeed, "*Never man so spake*" (John 7:46; cf. Matthew 7:28,29).

Without the New Testament record, we would not have an accurate knowledge of what happened in Jerusalem almost twenty centuries ago. We would have no facts concerning the atoning death of Jesus Christ, and of His grand resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). We would have no information regarding the theological purpose of His crucifixion — namely that it was an essential ingredient in the plan of God to offer ruined man a way of escape from the devastating consequences of his sin (Matthew 20:28; 26:28).

Sixth, without the biblical account we would be ignorant of the precious church which His shed blood was used to purchase (Acts 20:28). Apart from the light of the Scriptures, we would know nothing of how to enter into that sacred body of saved souls (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 12:13). And what

would we know of how to acceptably worship Jehovah? Utterly nothing.

Seventh, if we did not possess the New Testament, we would be adrift in a sea of confused immorality with no precise way to determine ethics and moral conduct toward our fellows. Each person would be a moral dictator unto himself. The moral hysteria that currently reigns is evidence aplenty of what happens in the absence of divine revelation (since the Scriptures have been rejected in a practical way by millions of this generation).

Next, if we had no Bible, would there be any ray of hope beyond the unfriendly confines of the grave? Hardly, for life and immortality have been brought to light through the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:10). What does the atheist know of existence apart from the environs of the earth? Not one thing. Would we know of man's ultimate accountability, and of the terror that awaits the disobedient (Matthew 25:46) but for the Bible? No, for only the Scriptures supply that information (Luke 16:30,31).

How grateful we are for the illumination of the inspired Word of God. Let us treasure this Holy Book. May we absorb its rich truths, and then, with grateful hearts, impart the message to others. †

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IT'S TOUGH TO LOOK UP WHEN THINGS ARE LOOKING DOWN

Fenter D. Northern

I believe every Gospel preacher has faced a moment in his calling that reflects the dispirited Elijah under the juniper bush, or Ezekiel, who viewed his task of preaching to impoverished Israel in Babylon as impossible. So, in the midst of routine church functions, we preachers might ask ourselves, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” Who has preached very long and not at sometime felt total inadequacy for his high calling, especially when trying to look up during the downside of dreary days that are thrust unforeseen into his life?

What helps through such hours, and I believe I speak for preachers of any long duration, is a refreshing resource of reserve power lurking in the soul, asking to be used; for deep in there is the love of God, the love for His Word and the blessed fellowship of the church. Such anchors remind us our task is not finished, and as in the case of Elijah, there are numbers unknown to us but surely to God, that have not bowed their knees to the modern Baal and his distorted religion. And, as with Ezekiel, the task of rousing the church from apathy may look as hopeless as it was to him. He viewed preaching to Israel in Babylon as futile as preaching to folks in a cemetery. It's hard sometimes to be on the upside of down. Should we pray for a miracle?

But God gave Ezekiel no miracle to remedy the dark situation; he just said “preach the word,” and while it took 70 long, toiling, aching, painful years of slavery, it worked. By preaching the engrafted Word, Israel was resurrected from her deadness in bondage to become again an organized, living people for the Lord (Ezekiel 37).

I have stepped from the pulpit when there were no responses with the haunting thought in my conscious, “Why didn't I get that message over better than that? Did I speak about blessed eternal things too matter-of-factly?”

We preachers should be strengthened with the thought that if we have done our best at the moment, the outcome does not rely upon our poor, bungling efforts, or upon polished rhetoric, or now even on the latest artistic graphics of PowerPoint, not that we should be without aids that edify, God forbid! However, we must never lose sight that the power to affect the heart does not lie in us, or our aids, but in the Gospel. A poor, stammering preacher is able to preach a better Gospel message than many want to live. All the efficient organization and spectacular edifice that cry out: “Hey, look what we've done,” is worth less than zero if not built upon love of the pure Gospel. ✠

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Romans 11:1-10

Jerry Bates

1. Has God completely cast away Israel? (v. 1)
2. From what tribe had Paul descended? (v. 1)
3. How does this prove God had not completely cast away Israel?
4. To what Old Testament text does Paul refer in 11:3?
5. How many men had never bowed down in worship to Baal? (v. 4)
6. Why did God say this?
7. What did Elijah think had happened to the entire nation of Israel?
8. What is the remnant to which Paul refers? (v. 5)
9. How had this remnant been chosen? (v. 5)
10. To what works is Paul referring in 11:6?
11. Why had the elect obtained what Israel was seeking? (v. 7)
12. What was Israel seeking?
13. What happened to the majority of Jews? (v. 7)
14. To what Old Testament text is Paul referring in 11:8?
15. What was the Old Testament context of that text?
16. To what Old Testament verse is Paul referring in 11:9,10?
17. Paul is suggesting in vs. 9,10 that what happened to David's enemies had already happened to the enemies of Christ. What had become a stumbling-block to the Jews?
18. Was the spiritual indifference of Israel a new thing?

(see the back cover for answer)

1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 “Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?” 4 But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” 5 Even so then, at this present time there is remnant according to the election of grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace; But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. 7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. 8 Just as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.” 9 And David says: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. 10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.”

NOTES: In chapters 9 and 10, Paul has painted a pretty dark picture of Israel. Based on that, some might think that Paul is saying God had completely cast away Israel, but such is far from the truth. The reason most of Israel were not being saved was not God’s fault; it was their own. They refused to believe in Christ, choosing rather to continue to trust in their own righteousness based on the law. However, their refusal was nothing new. Even in Elijah’s day, the majority were blinded and bowed down to Baal. Nevertheless, there was a remnant that had remained faithful (7,000). The same was true in Paul’s day. There was a small number of Jews (in comparison to the whole nation) that had turned to Christ and were being saved.

God’s election of Israel was due to His grace, not their works of righteousness. They had done nothing to deserve God’s blessings, and neither do we. Grace and works are mutually exclusive. Thus, Israel could not continue to trust in their own works and be saved. This does not mean that there are no works that we must do in order to be saved, as some falsely teach. The works to which Paul refers are human works of merit or works of the law. Grace does not exclude works of obedience done simply to obey God, of which baptism is one such work.



God on Baptism

Rick Cunningham

Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:16). *“Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the ‘Son and of the Holy Spirit’”* (Matthew 28:18,19). *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mark 16:16). *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins maybe forgiven”* (Acts 2:38). *“Those who accepted his message were baptized”* (Acts 2:41). *“When they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12). *“They came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’”* (Acts 8:36). *“Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him”* (Acts 8:38). *“Something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized”* (Acts 9:18). *“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?”* (Acts 10:47). *“So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”* (Acts 10:48). *“She and all the members of her household were baptized”* (Acts 16:15). *“Immediately he and all his family were baptized”* (Acts 16:33). *“The Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized”* (Acts 18:8). *“They were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus”* (Acts 19:5). *“Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name”* (Acts 22:16). *“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”* (Romans 6:3). *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:13). *“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ”* (Galatians 3:27). *“This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also”* (1 Peter 3:21).

That’s what God said about baptism. Who can argue with God? †

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SALVATION

I BELIEVE

Joe W. Nichols

What a wonderful consolation we have as Christians to be able to say, “I believe”. According to Scripture, faith has to do not only with an “*assurance of things hoped for*”; but also “*a conviction in things not seen*”. Another version renders the latter as, “*the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith therefore is not dependent upon the Word of God alone, but also “evidence” supporting those words.

God’s creation offers such evidence: “*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity...*” (Romans 1:20). Noteworthy is that “*the invisible things are clearly seen...through the things that are made*”. We therefore can see what otherwise could not be seen — the creation self-evidences God!

Furthermore, besides the evidence found in creation that reveals God, there are also the internal and external evidences that give credit to the Bible as being a revelation from God. These evidences are available to the diligent student of the Bible. The only conclusion to be drawn from such study, dismissing of course all assaults against the Bible, is that, “*all Scripture [is] given by inspiration of God*” (2 Timo-

thy 3:16). With such a faith, there is no stumbling blindly, no leap in the dark, no areas of doubt, and no skepticism. It is a complete and sustaining faith, which is able to carry the believer through this life to heaven above (Acts 20:32).

Paul, in writing to the Philippians, stated, “*So then my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:12,13). Christians notably have Scripture for what is believed and practiced — nothing is to be believed or practiced religiously without scriptural warrant! Jesus condemned the Jewish leaders because they were guilty of “*teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men*” (Matthew 15:9), and having “*made void the word of God because of [their] traditions*” (verse 6).

There is a consequential difference in applying faith to religion and mere human judgment. Faith in religion, we know, pleases God (Hebrews 11:6); but what can be said of forcing human judgment or tradition into religion? How comforting it is as Christians to readily apply Scripture to our religious beliefs and practices; thereby, we can confidently say, “I believe”. †

Joe W. Nichols is a Gospel preacher living in Bastrop, Louisiana, USA.

SALVATION

The Value of a Soul

Charles E. Burch

It is hard to truly realize the value of one soul. Yet, when one considers that every soul will live eternally in one of two places, it points to its importance. One can begin to comprehend its value when the purchase price is considered.

The apostle Peter wrote, *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Peter 1:18,19). Notice it took something far greater than silver or gold to redeem one soul. To multitudes there is nothing of greater value than silver and gold. Yet, Peter said “the precious blood of Christ” was far more valuable. Our Lord’s blood was the most precious thing the Father had with which to redeem the lost human race.

The word “redeemed” means to set free by payment of a ransom. It was frequently used in the days of slavery through the payment of a sum of money for their release. Speaking of Himself, Jesus said, *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give his life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28). Again we can see the purchase price of a soul, not just one soul, but every soul that is willing to surrender to the Lord’s will.

Another way to look at the value of a soul is to consider what God did in the beginning. It was God’s own will that He made Adam, and later Eve. But in so doing, God created them to live with Him eternally. Yet, when they sinned, they brought death upon themselves, both physical and spiritual. God could have simply destroyed them, but He didn’t! He began to set forth a plan whereby He could redeem the human race from sins. This is where the precious blood of Christ comes in. The Hebrews writer stated, *“...without the shedding of blood is no remission”* (Hebrews 9:22). Again he stated, *“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”* (Hebrews 10:4).

It also took something far more valuable than the blood of an animal, without spot or blemish. It took the most precious thing God could find to redeem the lost human race. God’s love and His effort to redeem the lost race, again point to the value of the soul. *“...not willing that any should perish...”* (2 Peter 3:9). With the soul so valuable, should we not be doing all to save a soul? †

Charles E. Burch is a retired preacher of the Gospel living in St. Elmo, Alabama, USA.

SALVATION

Something No Man Can Do

Bill Dillon

Man has always been capable of vast accomplishments. The world marveled when Tenzing Norgay and Edmond Hillary conquered the summit of towering snowcapped Mt. Everest. The world's tallest mountain felt the picks and footprints of human climbers at last. In July, 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon and, again, the world marveled in awestruck silence at the majesty of such an accomplishment.

Man can plumb the depths of the oceans or traverse the poles of the planet. Men can change their allegiance, as did the infamous Benedict Arnold, who after traitorous disloyalty, took refuge in England. Men can change their families, as is frequently the case in this day of disposable marriages.

Men can redirect the course of rivers, blast mountains from their places, and redraw the boundaries of nations; yet for all this, there remains one change no cleverness can ever produce: the salvation of the soul! Man is not saved by cleverness, but by Christ. Abraham Lincoln could free an entire race from slavery, but no son of Adam can ever liberate a soul from sin. All human efforts at redemption, apart from God, are a dismal wallowing in the slough of despond. For salvation man looks beyond himself and receives heaven's counsel. At the household of Cornelius, the heavenly messenger promised that Peter would come and tell Cornelius words whereby they could be saved (Acts 11:14). The emphasis is continually upon the importance of the Word in the saving



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of the soul. Paul wrote, “*the word is nigh thee*” (Romans 10:8). The Lord’s language in John 15:3 was, “*now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*”

God could have made man’s conversion a hard, complicated concern, but He loved us too much for that. His wisdom and love were married in the bringing forth of the plan of salvation. The only barriers that prohibit man from accepting God’s way of salvation are such things as pride, unbelief, and a love for the unholy.

It is a thankful matter that man, among his numerous other lofty and far-reaching achievements, also has the power to dethrone Satan from sitting in his heart. Man’s response to heaven’s grace is faith. Faith that turns from sin and speaks the good confession and acts by being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins is a faith that opens the door that makes deliverance from sin a reality. Man continues his journey of living by faith realizing that the life in Christ, despite its sorrows, is one hundred times worth the living. The journey ends in death; and death in Christ, even with its pain and parting, is ten thousand times worth the dying.

There is, therefore, something *no man* can do, but there is something *every man* must do to be pleasing to God. He must believe and obey (Hebrews 11:6). †

“Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bids’t me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

-- Charlotte Elliott

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Hear God’s Word (Romans 10:17)

Believe or have faith that Jesus is the Christ (John 8:24)

Repent of sins (Luke 13:3)

Acknowledge or confess Jesus as Christ (Matthew 10:32-33)

Be immersed in water for the remissions of sins (Acts 2:38; Colossians 2:12)

Be faithful even if it costs your life (Revelation 2:10)

Repent and pray for forgiveness for subsequent sin in one’s life (Acts 8:22)

SALVATION

Build Your Hopes on Things Eternal

Maxie B. Boren

In the latter part of the fourth century B.C., Alexander the Great led the Greeks on a world conquest. He was very successful, extending the influence, culture, and language of Greece widely. But now, centuries later, only remnant pieces remain to tell us of the grandeur that once was.

And preceding the Greeks were a number of others, such as Egypt under the Pharaohs. What enormous wealth was theirs! And the splendor of their kingdom was of great renown. But now, only museums filled with relics and the ingeniously built pyramids tell the story.

Perhaps the most famous empire of all time was that of the Romans. Truly it was a great one, lasting for some five hundred years! More than likely, the people who lived in the first century B.C., and in the first, second, and third centuries A.D. thought it would never end. But it did! Its glory faded. And all of its beautiful buildings, great theaters, stadiums, and statues and monuments began to succumb to the devastating ravishes of time. And today, we see only what is left...crumbled ruins!

I often reflect on the words of a well-known hymn (written by a faithful Christian, F. L. Eiland, who died in 1909) — “Time is filled with swift transition, naught of earth unmoved can stand...build your hopes on things eternal, hold to God’s unchanging hand!” How true, how true!

So many things upon which people place such importance in reality matter little. Over the “long-haul”, what difference does it make how fine a house we lived in, how much money we had in the bank, or what treasures we accumulated, ad infinitum? The only thing that matters, in the final analysis, is whether or not we have prepared for eternity by loving God and doing His will!

Brother Eiland penned words of wisdom when he wrote that beautiful song, “Hold To God’s Unchanging Hand”. His message in music was “right on target”! Thus, to all who may chance to read this brief article, may I remind that time is rapidly passing by, and we each are drawing nearer to eternity with every fleeting moment. *“Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Corinthians 6:2).



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SALVATION

A Green Jacket or a White Robe

Bob Plunket

I don't play golf, and I don't know very much about it. I thought pluses were good. I said nobody will ever catch up with him; he's plus twelve. Then my son told me that pluses were bad and minuses were good. I think it's the only place where pluses are bad and minuses are good. I wish my folks had known this. It would have saved me many a spanking. I had a lot of minuses.

I was in a meeting in South Carolina many years ago, and the preacher there was an avid golfer. He wanted me to play golf with him, and I told him I did not play golf. He said, "Oh, you can pick it up. It's easy." I hit so many of his golf balls in the ponds he started giving me balls with cuts and bruises. He didn't ask me to play anymore. He evidently did not even recommend having me back for a meeting. It doesn't seem fair, does it?

Sunday, I watched the last of the Masters and got to pulling for the underdog, Mickelson, who has never won a major golf tournament. He is usually second or third. I really got into it. I would move in my chair the way I wanted the ball to go. It seemed to really help him. It was so moving when his wife and children came out to embrace him for his victory. I had tears in my eyes. I had to leave for worship before he got his green jacket, but this must have been something. If only we could be as driven for a white robe as golfers are for a green jacket. If only we could see and desire the prize as they do. What a difference it could make!

It also occurred to me that so many had to lose for him to win. So many went home brokenhearted. I said to myself, "Is it not wonderful that I do not have to beat anyone to get my white robe?" We are not competing with each other. We are helping each other cross the finish line. We share our water. We encourage each other. We pray for one another. You don't have to finish first, just finish. The green jacket will fade. The moths might eat it. People will quickly forget, but the white robe is for eternity. We read in Revelation 6:9, "*And a white robe was given to each of them.*" Revelation 7:9 says, "...*I looked and behold a great multitude which no one could number ...Standing before the throne and before the lamb clothed with white robes...*" Now this will really bring tears of joy to your eyes.

Many of the best golfers will never get a green jacket. There is no grace in golf. No one ever said, "You did your best. You get a green jacket also." Thank God we can all have a white robe through faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. ✠

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Vital Signs of a Healthy Church

Clarence DeLoach

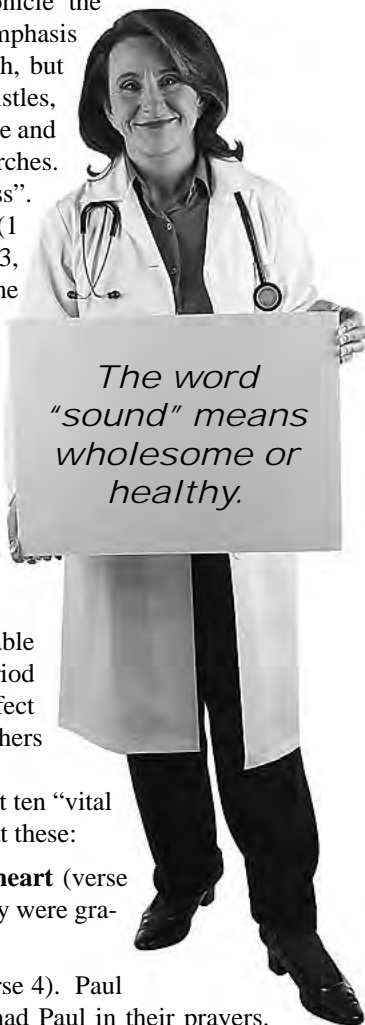
While the New Testament does chronicle the growth of the church in Acts, the overall emphasis in the New Testament was not upon growth, but the health that produces it. In the pastoral epistles, Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus to encourage and instruct them in their work with local churches. There was a major emphasis upon “soundness”. Sound doctrine, sound practice, and living (1 Timothy 1:10; 4:12-16; and 2 Timothy 1:13, 4:1-5). The word “sound” means wholesome or healthy.

It is not necessary to command a child to grow! If there is a proper atmosphere of diet, exercise, and health, the child will grow. In a local church where there is a balance of proper nourishment, spiritual exercise, and healthy environment, the church will grow. There is a greater challenge to provide such a balanced atmosphere than meets the eye.

One such church that had made remarkable strides of progress in just a short ten-year period was the Philippian church. While not a perfect church, this church was healthier than others described in the New Testament.

In the first chapter, Paul alludes to about ten “vital signs” of this thriving congregation. Look at these:

1. **There was a gracious and thankful heart** (verse 3). Paul was thankful for them, and they were gracious and thankful for Paul.
2. **There was a powerful prayer life** (verse 4). Paul was prayerful toward them, and they had Paul in their prayers.



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Prayer is vital to any church because it releases the power of God into our life and work.

3. **There was a radiant joy.** Paul was joyful even in prison, and the Philipians rejoiced in the midst of affliction. Their joy was an inside joy and was independent of circumstances.
4. **There was a deepening fellowship** (verse 5). In fellowship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, they shared with Paul in the Gospel. They had fellowship in difficulties and disappointments. It was a deep, spiritual fellowship.

It is not necessary to command a child to grow! If there is a proper atmosphere of diet, exercise, and health, the child will grow. In a local church where there is a balance of proper nourishment, spiritual exercise, and healthy environment, the church will grow.

5. **There was a growing confidence** (verse 6). They were confident in their own salvation and that God would complete His good work in them. A growing assurance is a vital sign of spiritual growth.
6. **There was a partnership in ministry** (verses 7,8). They were partners with Paul in the ministry of grace. They had sent gifts of support (4:15-17). They shared in his distress.
7. **There was a discerning love** (verses 9,10). It was not just a feeling or emotion, but it was a love based in knowledge and discernment. It was such a growing that *“approves the things that are excellent.”*

A thankful heart, a powerful prayer life, a radiant joy, a deepening fellowship, a growing confidence, a partnership in ministry, and a discerning love — these are “vital signs” of a healthy church. †

Clarence DeLoach has preached for many years in the State of Tennessee, USA.

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THE CHURCH GOD'S SECRET HAS BEEN REVEALED

Albert Gardner

“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25).

During all of human history from Adam to Christ, God had a plan, which Paul calls a mystery. It was not mysterious in the sense that it could not be understood, but it was a mystery in the sense that it had not been revealed.

Paul says the mystery was made known to him as an apostle. *“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words; Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy*

other ages. There are three ages in Bible history: Patriarchal (from Adam to Moses); Mosaical (from Moses to Christ); and Christian age (from Christ to the end of the world). During the first two ages, the mystery was not revealed, though angels wanted to look into it (1 Peter 1:12).

The mystery has been revealed by the Spirit to apostles and prophets. We usually say the New Testament was written by four apostles: Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul; and by four prophets: Mark, Luke, James, and Jude. This is the meaning of Ephesians

The New Testament was written by four apostles: Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul; and by four prophets: Mark, Luke, James, and Jude. This is the meaning of Ephesians 2:20, which says the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.” What we know of the church we learn either from an apostle or a prophet.

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corner stone.” What we know of the church we learn either from an apostle or a prophet.

What is the mystery? *“That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel”* (Ephesians 3:6). *“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27).

It was the plan of God before the foundation of the world for Jews and Gentiles to be saved in the same body (church) and have the same promises in Christ by the Gospel. The first part of the mystery is for us to be in Christ. The second part of the mystery is for Christ to be in us. The first part is

simple. Upon proper faith we repent of our sins, confess Christ, and are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). The rest of our lives we try to have Christ in us. We will try to develop the same attitude, motives, and values He had.

The reason Paul was a preacher was *“to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 3:9). That is also the duty of every Christian to the extent of our ability and opportunities, to tell people about the great mystery that has been revealed. †

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The Lord's Church is Divine in Origin

*“...might be known by the
church the manifold
wisdom of God, Accord-
ing to the eternal purpose
which he purposed in
Christ Jesus our Lord”*
Ephesians 3:10-11

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Must One Be in the Church?

(Answered in the Book of Hebrews)

E. Claude Gardner

“No, it is not essential to be in the church in order to be saved” is the answer often heard. This would be the position of the majority of religious groups worldwide. Denominations believe it is valuable for spiritual development to belong to a church, but it is not essential to salvation. The imperative is Christ and a personal belief in Him, and after this, the admonition is to join any Bible-believing church of one’s choice. The motto says it well: “Christ, yes, and the church, no.” Denominations do not teach that a person must be a member of their particular denominations. They work aggressively for membership increases, but the effort is not connected to salvation. Those who doubt this statement may choose to call the preachers for either a denial or confirmation.

Yes, it is essential to be a member of the church — the Lord’s church found in the Bible. It truly is not necessary to belong to any denomination, and one should not because no denomination is mentioned or described

in the New Testament. God’s church pictured in Scripture is not and never was a denomination. Today, the church is not “the invisible church” made up of thousands of visible churches.

The Lord’s church is the plan of salvation through Christ. This is clear from the first day the church began in Jerusalem in 33 A.D. After the death, burial, and resurrection were powerfully preached, the response was, “*What shall we do?*” To this Peter answered, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:38 KJV). About 3,000 “*gladly received his word*” and were baptized. Having obeyed the simple commands given by Peter, they received forgiveness of sins. These were “added” to the church which began on that day (Acts 2:41,47). On the birthday of the church, all who were saved by Jesus were also members of the church. In New Testament times, those who belonged to Christ also belonged to His church. If today we follow Peter’s teaching, we will be saved,

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and God will automatically add us to His church. In 33 A.D. in Jerusalem, every immersed believer who had remission of sins was also in the church.

The Book of Hebrews has passages which reasonably state that if one is a child of God, then such a one is in the church. Hebrews 2:12, "*Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*" This is a fulfillment of a prophecy in Psalm 22. In the form of parallelism, reference is made to "brethren" and the "church". Both of these refer to the same people. If one is a brother in Christ, he or she is in the Lord's church. If one claims to be a brother but not in the church, that individual needs to question the plan of salvation which had been accepted.

Hebrews 3:6 reads, "*But Christ is the son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*" Christians are the "house". Christ has His "own house", which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15). The "we" are saved ones who are in the church.

Hebrews 10:21 records, "*And having an high priest over the house of God...*" Christ is the high priest of Christians (Hebrews 4:15) but is said to be the high priest over the "house of God" (the church). If one is not a member of the church, he does not have a high priest who can "be touched with the feeling of our infirmities".

Hebrews 12:23 says, "*To the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven*". Those in the church have their names written in heaven. If a person does not have his or her name written in the "*Lamb's book of life*" (Revelation 21:27), there cannot be entrance into heaven. But those written in the book also are members of the church one can read about in the Bible. If one does not belong to it, then there should be real soul-searching and study on the Bible plan of salvation.

One consequence of accepting the theory of the non-essentiality of the church is in church attendance. If the church is not all-important, then it will be permissible to forsake the assembly if there are other priorities as recreation, sports, trips, family gatherings, business, and work. When one says, "The church does not save anyone — Christ is the Savior" the correct response is as follows: "Yes, Christ is the only Savior, but He has only promised to save the church". Paul says of Christ: "*He is the Savior of the body (church)*" (Ephesians 5:23; 1:22,23). †

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**1 Body of Christ =
1 Church of Christ —
1 Head, Jesus Christ**

THE CHURCH



Rise Up, O Men of God!

Stan Mitchell

When beginning a study of the biblical role of women in the church, it is easy to assume that the issue revolves around questions such as what leadership role can women take on; can they lead singing? preach? become elders? But I am convinced that this is not the pressing issue in the church at all. The real issue is the leadership of *men* in the church. Are men called on to lead in the church? If so, where are they? Why are they not taking the lead?

The Bible teaches the need for men to be the spiritual leaders, in the home and in the church (1 Timothy 2:8,11,12; Ephesians 5:22-24), yet many men are oddly reluctant to lead. Why is this the case?

Some, like Moses and Jeremiah, may declare that they are not good at expressing themselves (Exodus 4:10,11; Jeremiah 1:4-10). God, however, knew what He was doing when He placed men where He did. *“But in fact God*

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has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be” (1 Corinthians 12:18).

When I ask men to stand up and be counted, I am not suggesting that every man must become a preacher, a Bible class teacher, or a missionary. Imagine, however, what a difference it would make to the church if each man did two things each week to serve their congregation.

Other men claim they do not lead because they have been “put off” by hypocrites in the church (Matthew 6:5-8). Note, however, that though Jesus condemns religious hypocrites, He never suggests that their hypocrisy is reason enough to quit serving God ourselves. Hypocrisy is a constant factor in human existence, but the presence of hypocrisy is no release from our responsibilities! Real men do the right thing, regardless of what other men do!

Most men just feel they’re too busy. Understand that sin is not the only thing that prevents us from serving God. Often, we allow the affairs of life, such as work or recreation, things that are not bad in themselves, to crowd out our service for God (Matthew 13:22; 6:31,32). We must distinguish between the spiritual and the secular. We must develop proper and spiritual priorities.

Some will throw their hands up and cry, “I didn’t know I was needed”. We need to develop the ability to look out not only for our interests, but the interests of others (Philippians 2:2-4). Men, open your eyes! There are needs everywhere!

The biggest cop out of all, of course, is the excuse that “it’s not my job”. Like Cain’s casual dismissal of his brother (“*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” Genesis 4:9), we depend on the mythical “others in the church” to carry out responsibilities that are ours.

The Threat Has Never Been Greater

Men, think of our children. Has society ever been scarier? Have there ever been more drugs available, more worldliness, and more sexual promiscuity? Television and the Internet have taken over the task of raising our kids, forming their thinking and morals! When your kid comes home and tells you that you shouldn’t be “judgmental” towards gays and homosexuals because she was taught this by her non-Christian schoolteacher, what will you do?

The church is vulnerable, too. As an older generation slips into old age, as their energy and life ebbs away, who will take their place? Are we baby boomers going to be builders or detractors? We’ve been pretty good critics of what others have done. Are we willing to build, to lead, to provide the spiritual shelter our families deserve and need?

THE CHURCH

What Men Need to Do

We need to develop ourselves spiritually. Notice that God developed Moses forty years in Pharaoh's palace and forty years in the wilderness in order to lead Israel for forty years (Acts 7:23,30). Forty years in the wilderness. So God spent eighty years preparing His man for forty years of leadership. When God knew Moses was ready, He called him to lead.

Not everybody has the *right* to lead. It's our responsibility to lead, but not our right. Before you lead, develop yourself. Leading God's people is a privilege beyond compare, the most important thing you will ever do! Don't take it for granted! Don't presume upon God! Prepare your heart, your mind, and your character! There are many men in the church who chronologically should be leading, but who are not. "*By this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you...*" (Hebrews 5:11-14).

A young person cannot be mature. He can be mature for his age, of course, or mature beyond his years, but he cannot be mature in the way that an elder must be mature. On the other hand, being old does not guarantee maturity. There are some men who are elderly in chronology, yet childish in character. Leaders do not arise by accident. The church must develop leaders, and conscientious men must take steps to develop themselves.

Leadership begins with our families (1 Timothy 3:4,5). The system God set up, invariably wise, is that a man first leads his family as a proving ground, then the church. He must begin with a personal commitment to God, followed by a commitment to his God-given responsibility to lead his family and the church. †

Stan Mitchell teaches in the Bible Department at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, USA.

*"Rise up O men of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
To serve the king of kings."*

William P. Merrill

THE CHURCH

One Member

Justin Hopkins

“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body as it has pleased Him” (1 Corinthians 12:18).

It is a common practice among churches in America to keep a record of how many were in attendance at the various services that are held throughout the week. From these numbers, one can produce statistics concerning what percentage of the congregation attends regularly, sometimes, sporadically, or not at all. This can often be a useful indicator of the overall health of the congregation. However, we can also get caught up on these numbers and lose sight of the trees for the forest.

The Bible does address this forest, if you will. In John 3:16 we find that it was God’s love for the entire world that drove Christ to the cross. In Acts 20:28 the focus is “zoomed in” a little further as we find that Christ’s blood purchased the church specifically. Examining things even more closely, we read



THE CHURCH

in Revelation 1:5 that Christ loved and died for “us”, for you and for me on an individual basis. Yes, God loves the forest, but the forest that He loves is made up of many individual trees.

According to Amos 5:14,15, we should “...*hate the evil, and love the good.*” In other words, we should love what God loves and hate what He hates. That being the case, I want to direct our attention to the object of God’s love, which is the product of the entire scheme of redemption from Genesis to Revelation: the church.

Often the church seems to be thought of as some physical entity outside of the self, maybe as the building, or as some governing body by which we all seem to be affected, but of which nobody seems to be a part, like a homeowner’s association. Thusly, we stand on the outside looking in, finding things that are wrong, and wishing “they” would fix these problems. It can sometimes be hard to love such an ominous thing. The reality is that the church is a living, breathing organism, and as Christians, you and I make up her working parts. To love the church is to love ourselves and to love one another!

Paul makes the comparison between the human body and the church, with each Christian bringing a unique and valuable contribution. He says in Ephesians 5:29, “*For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord loves the church.*” Following that thought, I have absolutely no idea what my pancreas does. Regardless, I am glad that I have one and I would not part with it easily. I am certain that if it were to stop doing whatever it does, I would notice the loss and would seek immediate medical help. As Christians who love what Christ loves, we should have the same type of love and high regard one for another.

“*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it*” (1 Corinthians 12:26). When a Christian is absent from the assembly of the church, the other members of the body suffer because of it, and so they should do what they can to restore that one. No matter how unimportant any of us may feel at times, like the pancreas, we are loved and needed by the rest of the body. So let us love what God loves and help one another to grow so that we can help the church to become more like what she ought to be! ☩

Justin A. Hopkins is providing leadership in the development of Bible Class materials, “Into God’s World”.

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:23).

Quick Commentary On Crucial Verses

Psalm 133

Justin Hopkins

1 Behold, how good and how pleasant[Ⓢ] it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious ointment[Ⓢ] upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;[Ⓢ]

3 As the dew of Hermon,[Ⓢ] and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing,[Ⓢ] even life for evermore.

Mount Herman[Ⓢ], being both the furthest north and the highest point in Israel, was typically the source of any substantial rains that watered the land of Canaan. Here one can imagine the thick, heavy dew that would descend from the mount in the cool of the morning, thoroughly soaking everything around. Perhaps it was reminiscent of the dew that watered Eden.

Unity is no less refreshing. After experiences with strife and division, the unity that exists among brethren is refreshing and revitalizing for the soul.

ⓈThere are some things which are good that are not pleasant, and there are some things which are pleasant that are not good. Unity among God's people, however, captures both of these desirable qualities.

ⓈThis ointment was particularly precious, because it was by this anointing that Aaron was sanctified as a priest to God, thus giving Israel access to His throne through authorized sacrifice in the prescribed manner.[Ⓢ]

The ointment poured over the head dripped from his beard and came to cover him entirely. In the same way, unity in the Church renders the body pleasing and acceptable before God.

ⓈUnity in obedience to God's commands always brings blessings!

Resurrection – Our Hope

Hans J. Dederscheck

The fundamental teaching of the Gospel is the resurrection from the dead. Indeed, that's "good news". That's hope. Our end is not found in our tomb! There is life, life eternal. If the Christian doctrine would bring

people hope only for this life, then Christians would be the most pitiable people in the world, but there is more (1 Corinthians 15:19)! Paul is convinced: *"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting?"* (1 Corinthians 15:54,55). Christ said: *"for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that*

(John 5:26-29). Christ Himself gave us an example of resurrection.

God's new world will be established with those who are worthy of life eternal, those who obeyed Him in this life.

**The fundamental teaching
of the Gospel is the
resurrection from the dead.**

The apostles testified about Jesus' resurrection. Then He appeared to about 500 brethren at once; after this He was seen of James. Finally, the resurrected Christ was seen by Paul (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). All these men were

witnesses of the Lord's resurrection. John, Peter, Paul, and so on took the resurrection as an historical fact. They were eyewitnesses of His resurrection (Romans 1:4; Luke 14:14). Thomas was a witness

**The greatest promise
of the New Testament is
the resurrection from the
dead and life eternal.**

have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"

the resurrection (John 20:26-29). Paul said that there is a resurrection which he was preaching (1 Corinthians 15:13-16).

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY



Mary Magdalene did find His tomb empty (Mark 16:9,10). Christ appeared to His disciples three times (John 21:14). He also appeared to two men (Luke 24:13-27; Mark 16:12).

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:30,31). Christ will be the judge of this world.

Some people say it is impossible that a dead person may live again. The problem is a purely materialistic viewpoint of the world. Just think about the wonder of the birth of a human. How complicated is man’s physical body!

Why should it be impossible to give new life to those that died? It was possible for God to give us physical life on earth. Why shouldn’t it be possible for Him to give spiritual life after this life? The Lord resurrected Lazarus, who was dead already for four days. The Bible teaches plainly: *“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”* (1 Corinthians 15:26). Christ abolished death and *“brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:10).

Paul advised, *“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not”* (1 Corinthians 15:33,34). What Paul means is that people should think about spiritual things. God’s message, the Gospel, brings us the resurrection.

The greatest promise of the New Testament is the resurrection from the dead and life eternal. †

Hans J. Dederscheck is an evangelist in the country of Austria.

Jesus Was Coming.

Jesus Came.

***Jesus Is
Coming Again!***

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

God “*commands all men everywhere to repent*” (Acts 17:30 NKJV). Why? Because “*Unless you repent you will all likewise perish*” (Luke 13:3,5), and He is “*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9). What is repentance?

Gospel sermon, Peter exhorted, “*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...*” (Acts 3:19). The word rendered “converted” in this passage actually means “turn again” (ASV). It entails a change of heart or will. Peter was admonishing his hearers to turn *from* something, and

REPENTANCE

Kevin L. Moore

1. Repentance begins with godly sorrow. Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth saying, “*Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner; that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death*” (2 Corinthians 7:9,10). Godly sorrow is contrasted with worldly sorrow. In the world one is typically sorry for doing something wrong only if he gets caught and has to suffer the consequences of his wrongdoing. Godly sorrow, however, means that one is remorseful for the wrongdoing itself, having sinned against God, whether he is caught or not (Psalm 38:18; 51:3,4). This godly manner of sorrow leads to or produces repentance.

2. Repentance involves an inward turning. In his second recorded

consequently to turn *to* something else. He went on to say, “*To you first, God having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities*” (verse 26). Paul taught everyone “*that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*” (Acts 26:20).

3. Repentance is manifested through an outward change. Notice in the previously mentioned verse that one must “*do works befitting repentance*”. Repentance begins in the heart and expresses itself through one’s actions. John commanded his hearers, “*Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance*” (Matthew 3:8). If one is truly sorry for his sins and mentally turns from these sins to God, the next step is to exhibit repentance through his behavior. This involves cessation of sin (Romans 6:1,2), further acts of obedience (Romans 6:3,4,16,18), and

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

a reformation of life (Romans 6:5-15).

In the world one is typically sorry for doing something wrong only if he gets caught and has to suffer the consequences of his wrongdoing. Godly sorrow, however, means that one is remorseful for the wrongdoing itself, having sinned against God, whether he is caught or not.

Repentance is a necessary step in God's plan of redemption. A believer must repent in order to be a valid candidate for baptism and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). A baptized believer who sins must repent in order to have God's continued forgiveness (Acts 8:13-22). Repentance involves godly sorrow which leads to an inward turning from sin to God, and is demonstrated through an outward change. Are you in need of repentance? †

Kevin L. Moore is currently a missionary to New Zealand.

Repentance

Louis Rushmore

Repentance is first a decision to stop sinning. Second, repentance is the practice of righteousness instead of sin. Repentance, then, begins in the mind and afterward is demonstrated outwardly. However, repentance is neither a mental process alone nor is repentance only reformation of life. True repentance involves the combined reformation of mind and body. John the Baptist gave the following instruction to some who claimed to have repented. *"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance"* (Matthew 3:8). He called upon those to whom he preached to repent not only in word but also in action.

Repentance is essential to obtain the forgiveness of sins; those who do not repent will be lost. *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:3). Repentance and baptism will take away sins. *"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."* (Acts 2:38). Since "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23), all must repent (Acts 17:30). God does not want anyone to be lost, but He desires everyone to repent. Though God patiently waits now, someday time will cease and judgment will begin (2 Peter 3:9,10).

Study of God's Word produces **faith** (Romans 10:17). Faith leads one to **repent** (Acts 2:36-38). Repentance is followed by **profession of Christ** to others (Matthew 10:32,33). Finally, **baptism** takes away sins (Acts 22:16). **Dear Reader, have you repented? Repentance is part of God's plan to save us.** †

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Abraham Lincoln, a Cow, and a Spiritual Lesson

Charles Pugh III

The story is told of a friend of Abraham Lincoln who loved to argue, but when he could no longer deal with the issue squarely, was given to compromise. On one occasion, after a heated discussion, Lincoln's friend began to look for a loophole. In order to block what he knew was coming, Lincoln



suddenly turned to his friend and said, "See that cow yonder? How many legs does she have?" "Four, of course," answered the friend. "But suppose we call her tail a leg, how many would she have?" asked Mr. Lincoln. "Why, five" said the man. "Not so," said Mr. Lincoln. "Just calling her tail a leg won't make it so."

This anecdote illustrates an important lesson in religion. A number of religious beliefs and practices are often called what they simply are not. We need to learn that calling a belief or practice something does not make it so. For example, the religious practice of sprinkling is often called baptism by many religious groups. However, calling sprinkling baptism does not make it baptism. The **Bible** says that **baptism** is a **burial** (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). **Sprinkling** is not a **burial**. *Therefore, sprinkling is not baptism.*

Let us make sure that when we say that something is the case in religion that it really is the case. Jesus said it is the truth that makes people free (John 8:32). Peter wrote, "*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God*" (1 Peter 4:11). Remember — calling a tail a leg won't make it so. †

Charles Pugh III has a writing ministry and resides in Vienna, West Virginia, USA.

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

When Jesus Comes

Owen Cosgrove

Recently, I found at a garage sale a little book entitled *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Come in 1988*. “The Rapture” is a term not found in the Scriptures. It was invented by men to describe what Paul wrote of in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 about Christians being caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air when Jesus comes again.

Through the ages, many have tried to guess when the Lord will come again. One of the more noted (or should we say notorious) ones was William Miller (1781-1849) who persuaded thousands of people that Christ would come between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. When that prophecy failed, some of his followers asserted that the event would happen on October 22, 1844. When that failed, another disciple of Miller set the date for 1852. When that did not work, a new prediction was made for the autumn of 1853 or the spring of 1854. Wrong again.

Finally, one of Miller’s followers named Ellen G. White claimed that in one of her trances, God called her up into the third heaven, and she saw a halo around the Sabbath commandment of the Old Testament. Mrs. White became the leading figure of the followers of William Miller, and out of her efforts grew the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The apostle John commanded us to try the spirits and see if they are of God (1 John 4:1ff). Deuteronomy 18:22 warns of people whose predictions are false and which do not come true. So when someone tells 88 reasons why “the Rapture” could come in 1988, it makes him look just a little bit foolish years later.

The Lord said that no one would know of that time except God. Not even the angels know. Jesus does not know (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). Even those “signs” so often alluded to, “wars and rumors of war”, are not signs at all. Jesus said that some would attempt to use such as signs to deceive the people (Matthew 24:3ff).

Matthew 24 predicts the destruction of Jerusalem in that generation (verses 34,35), but it also warns us to live in a state of spiritual readiness, for we know not the hour when Christ will return (verses 42-51). When anyone predicts the time when the Lord will come, either he does not know what Matthew 24:36 says, or he does not care. “*Watch therefore; for you know not what hour your Lord does come*” (Matthew 26:42). †

Owen Cosgrove (1932 – 2011) was involved in printed evangelism in many countries and lived in Waxahachie, Texas, USA.



How Do You Measure Up?

Isaiah 48:12 “Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last.

13 “Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; When I call to them, They stand up together...

16 “Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit Have sent Me.”

Isaiah 49:1 “Listen, O coastlands, to Me, And take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name....

5 “And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength),

6 “Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Isaiah 48:12,13,16; 49:1,5,6

**The Word (who became Christ)
speaking prophetically of Himself!**



IN SAVING OTHERS

Jerry A. Jenkins

Many years ago, I read a story of a man making his way across a mountain in a terrible blizzard. As time passed, the blizzard worsened. He became colder and weaker with each step. His body ached and numbness set in. Again he stumbled, and failing to stop his fall this time, he said, “This is the end”. As he fell, his hand struck the prostrate form of another man who had fallen in the storm. He arose to his knees and began to rub the hands of the unconscious man until he revived.

He saved another’s life, but in doing so, he saved his own. The exercise kept life in his own body, and both survived. How many Christians are there who are freezing to death spiritually?

How many who could save themselves by saving others? We are saved to save others. It has been said that no one will be able to enter heaven alone. When we endeavor to save others, we save ourselves or keep ourselves saved. In ministering to others, we are benefited as much as are they, perhaps even more so. David sought forgiveness and stated, *“Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee”* (Psalm 51:6-12).

Unless we are truly concerned about the lost and want them to have forgiveness, peace, and hope, there is every reason to question our own condition. As Christians, we should be sowers who sow the Word of God in the hearts of men and women. As Christians, we should go out into the “streets and lanes of the city” and out into the “highways and hedges” and constrain lost souls to come to the feast of God’s kingdom. Christians are those who come to Christ and learn of Him, and who then go and tell others of the Lamb of God.

Jesus said to Peter, *“...and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren”* (Luke 22:32). Paul told Timothy, *“...for in so doing, thou shalt save thyself and them that hear thee”* (1 Timothy 4:16). †

Jerry A. Jenkins (1936-2010) was preacher for many years for the Roebuck Parkway Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama, USA.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM AND BLACKBERRIES

T. PIERCE BROWN



Last year, I was picking blackberries when an inspiration for an article came to me. Today, however, I went again and was again inspired. It was not the kind of inspiration that Paul had, but it may be worth considering.

As I picked berries, the thought occurred to me that there are many lessons that relate to principles of personal evangelism. **First**, if you are more concerned with being bitten by chiggers, stung by yellow jackets, scratched by briars, or other trivial things than you are with picking berries, you will never be a great berry picker. If anything is more

important to you than glorifying God by being a fisher of men, you will never be a great soul winner.

Second, you may find them where you least expect. If you are really interested in picking berries, you will discover them by the side of the road or in little patches hidden here and there in the field. It does not really matter if you are ready. First Peter 3:15 says, *“But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear.”*

Third, you either get them when they are ripe and ready or you do not get them. In my 50 years of experience in trying to do personal evangelism, I have noted two significant things, both of which are bad. There are those who are always procrastinating. They plan to try to win some soul for the Lord when the time is ripe. The time never gets ripe, and those who would obey the Gospel if it were presented to them are forever lost. On the other hand, there are those who are so eager to get someone baptized that they “pick them while they are green”.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

A person who “obeys from the heart the form of doctrine which is delivered unto him” (Romans 6:17,18) and then is made free from sin must first be taught. It is true that he does not need to know all that he will learn in the next 50 years, but he has to understand the facts of the Gospel and realize what it means to accept Jesus as Lord. In the 50 years I have been picking blackberries, I never remember picking a green or red one that ever ripened properly. I doubt that I could find many persons who were baptized without having been taught properly who have ever matured properly.

A **fourth** lesson came to me as I was leaving one clump of vines. I had picked all I saw as I was going in, but as I was coming out, I saw almost as many more. The principle is: If you think you have done all the good you can do by using one approach, and have not been very productive, it might be worthwhile for you to look at things from some other angle. This applies not only to the methodology by which you set up a Bible study, but the techniques by which you study with an individual.

Fifth, occasionally I found a whole bunch that was ripe, and it appeared they could all be picked with one clutch of the hand. Many times when such is tried, half of them are dropped, and many mashed into a pulp. It is generally better to pick one at a time, so individual attention can be given to its welfare.

Sixth, learn to stick to one bush until you get the maximum good done. If you are always looking around to find more likely places to find berries, it may be you will cover half an acre and not get a bucket full. There are preachers who almost always think the grass is greener or the field is more productive on the other side of the fence, but one needs to try to finish what he starts to the best of his ability before flitting around.

Seventh, be gentle and careful. It is possible that if you step on all the briars that get in your way, or jerk and slash unnecessarily, you will not only destroy many future plants that would be productive, you will actually shake off many berries you could be picking now. Another interesting side effect may be that one of the briars you jerk around may slip loose and slap you across the face with its sharp thorns. Colossians 4:6 says, “*Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one.*” There are many other references that teach the same principle. Many of us feel that most of our remarks to those of other religious persuasions should be seasoned mostly with pepper. †

T. Pierce Brown (1923-2008) lived and preached in Cookeville, Tennessee, USA.

Not Far from the Kingdom

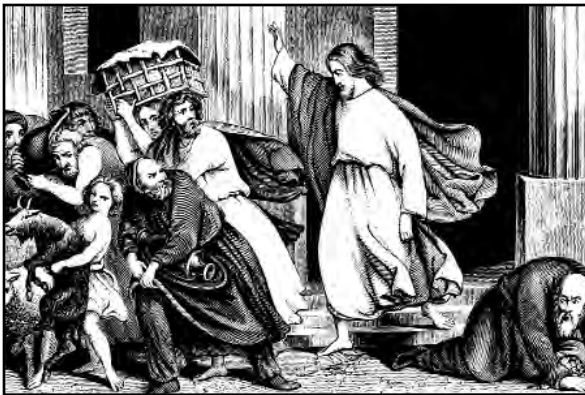
Neal Pollard

Jesus told a scribe whom He had masterfully answered and who had replied to Him with admiration, "*You are not far from the kingdom of God*" (Mark 12:34). This unnamed man seemed to have some appreciation for what the kingdom of God would be about in its nature and intent. Did he ever make Jesus King of his life? The Scriptures give absolutely no indication. Who has not read this, hoping that the scribe did?

Today, there are all around us a great many who are not far from the kingdom. There are good, moral people, those who dedicate themselves to serving others and honoring institutions

like marriage, parenthood, and civic duty. There are those in the denominations who believe in Christ and wish to please Him in so many ways. There are those who are devout members of world religions who have become sterling humanitarians, peacemakers, and community builders. There are those who are almost persuaded to follow Jesus, who have at least a somewhat convicted faith, but who are letting something or someone keep them from taking the big step. You can no doubt think of others, men and women, who are "close".

But let us prayerfully remember that "close" and "not far" are not the same as "there". Let us be motivated to urgently and compassionately reach out to them. How tragic for someone not to be far from the kingdom, yet not be a part of the blessings and protection of the King! †



Neal Pollard is the preacher for the Bear Valley church in Denver, Colorado, USA.

Is Eating the Lord's Supper a Command?

Glenn Colley

Several years ago (1968), my father, Gary Colley, was having lunch with Foy Wallace, Jr. (who is now deceased), and they began discussing what the Bible has to say about the Lord's supper. The conversation came around to the best way to answer this question: "Is the eating of the Lord's supper today a command?"

Brother Wallace was a deep and brilliant Bible student. In my personal library, I have several books which he authored. He had a great mind. At that lunch table that day, on the back of a scrap of paper, he wrote out seven points to prove that we are commanded to eat the Lord's supper today. On his paper, he did not write out each verse referred to, he just put his point and where the verse was found. I am offering it today with the full verses to make it more useful for your consideration. The approach used here with reference to the Lord's Supper would be useful in other matters as well.

THE LORD'S SUPPER A COMMAND

- 1. Early disciples were commanded to eat the Lord's supper.** (Matthew 26:26-28). *"And as they were eating, Jesus took break, and blessed it and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:26-28). *"Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse"* (1 Corinthians 11:17). *"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup"* (1 Corinthians 11:28). *"Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another"* (1 Corinthians 11:33).
- 2. They were commanded to assemble.** *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25).

WORSHIP

3. **They ate the Lord's supper when they assembled.** *"Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse" (1 Corinthians 11:17). "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28). "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another" (1 Corinthians 11:33).*
4. **They assembled to eat the Lord's supper.** *"Wherefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, tarry one for another" (1 Corinthians 11:33).*
5. **They assembled on the first day of the week.** *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:2).*
6. **They assembled to break bread.** *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).*
7. **Commandment of the Lord.** *"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you" (1 Corinthians 11:2). "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37). "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).* †

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Duty, certainly, but more so, it is a wonderful privilege to worship Almighty God in His own appointed way, acceptably, with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28).

How Are You Worshipping?

Bonnie Rushmore

While endeavoring to acquaint Churches of Christ with our mission efforts, Louis and I visit one or two different congregations each Lord's Day. Thus, we have opportunities to see firsthand how the Lord's church worships throughout this country and abroad. One of the things I have noticed is the lack of interest in worship among some of those in attendance.

The old adage that "actions speak louder than words" certainly is evident during our worship to God. When we pass notes, send text messages, talk, fail to sing, and habitually sleep during the assembly, we portray an attitude of disinterest in worshipping our Lord. This behavior exhibits "going through the motions," rather than a desire to worship our Heavenly Father.

John 4:24 states, "*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*" The word "worship" means "to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literally or figuratively) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)" (*Strong's*). When we prop-

erly worship God, we show reverence, respect and adoration to our Creator! The word "spirit" means "mental disposition" (*Strong's*). We may worship in truth, but if our attitude is not correct, our worship is unacceptable to God. What are our actions during worship showing? Are they showing an attitude of indifference, I really do not want to be here, I am bored, or can those who observe us see we that we are worshipping God "*in spirit and in truth*"?

It is disturbing to watch adults exhibit such a lack of interest in worshipping our Lord. However, the children's behavior is more unsettling than the adult actions. As the mother of three children, the worship service was often a stressful time when the children were young and energetic. Just trying to keep them quiet and not disturbing others was a challenge. However, at some time in the life of a young child, parents need to be less concerned with the quietness of the child only and more concerned about the child learn-

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ing to worship God properly during the assembly. Listed below are a few suggestions for teaching our children to worship God.

- Encourage them to hold the song-book and sing each song during the assembly. Most children love to sing, and even toddlers can learn to sing during worship.
- Instruct the child to fold his or her hands, close his eyes, and bow his head during prayers. This also should be taught at an early age. We teach our children to pray for our meals and should expect the same behavior during the prayers at the worship assembly.
- Encourage your child to contribute during the collection. Children should be taught from a young age that all our blessings come from God, and we need to return some of our blessings to God during the collection part of our worship.



Young children can be given two equal amounts – one for God and one for them. If a child receives an allowance, earns money for odd jobs, receives money for birthdays, or other special occasions, and any receipt of money, he should be encouraged to contribute a portion during the Lord's Day worship.

- Have young children follow along in the Bible during the Scripture reading. As the child matures, help him find the verses in his own Bible and follow along.
- Older children (those of school age) can take notes during the lesson. This will help them keep their minds focused on the lesson. Note taking can be as simple as marking on a piece of paper how many times keywords are used. As the child matures, he can write down the Scripture references, and then with more maturity, more details can be recorded. Most preachers are happy to give a few keywords that will be used

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during the lesson if you explain what you are doing.

- Until children have learned to worship God properly, they should sit with their parents so they can be taught. Allowing other children to sit with them is often a distraction and should only be allowed if they understand they must follow

Yes, young children need quiet toys, books, or paper and pencil to keep them quiet during the assembly. However, these items should be used only during the aspects of worship in which the child cannot actively participate. We often satisfy ourselves that as long as children are quiet and not disturbing others, all is well. This is comforting,

When we pass notes, send text messages, talk, fail to sing, and habitually sleep during the assembly, we portray an attitude of disinterest in worshipping our Lord. This behavior exhibits "going through the motions," rather than a desire to worship our Heavenly Father.

the same rules during worship. When our children are permitted to sit with others, they should sit in front of us with the understanding that if they are not participating in the worship service, you will make them return to your seat and sit with you.

- Leaving the assembly should only be for emergencies and to correct misbehavior.
- Sit where children will not be distracted by others. Sitting in the front of the auditorium and making our children face forward eliminates the observance of others misbehaving.
- We must teach our children not only how to behave during the assembly, but also why we worship God!

but when will the child learn to worship God? Perhaps one of the reasons adults are inattentive during worship is that they have neither learned how to worship nor do they understand the importance of worship.

We must worship God "*in spirit and in truth*". This can only be accomplished when we understand why and how God wants to be worshipped. †

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What a Horrible Dream!



Ken Tyler

I dreamed that the Lord took my weekly contribution to the church, multiplied it by ten, and turned this amount into my weekly income. In no time, I lost all my furniture and had to give up my automobile. Why, I couldn't even make a house payment.

This amusing little story should cause all of us to do some serious thinking. Suppose the Lord took your offering and multiplied it by ten and made that your weekly income. How much would you earn? Most families today are living off the income of both husband and wife. Let's suppose that you and your spouse are giving \$50.00 a week. Multiplied by ten your weekly income would be \$500.00. It doesn't take a lot of examination to see that most families are not giving ten percent of their income. According to one reliable source, it is in the two to three percent range.

The Jews were required to give ten percent, and the Christian system is far superior. I wonder what our contribution would be if we started with ten percent. I think we would all be amazed! Remember, Paul said, "*He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver*" (2 Corinthians 9:6,7).

I challenge you to examine your percentage of giving. Is the Lord getting His part? It is possible to rob God (Malachi 3:8-10). I pray we are not guilty. †

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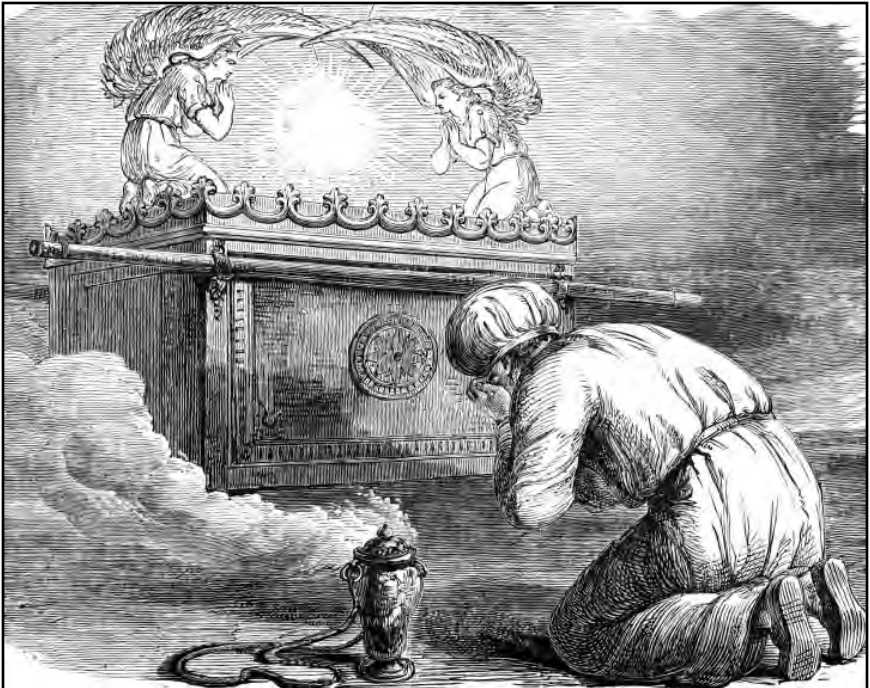
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Accept Our Praise!

Dan R. Owen

Today, as people have done for centuries before us, we come together to worship God, our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Judge. In both the Old and New Testaments, God commanded His people to worship Him and only Him. Acceptable worship has always involved humble submission to the commands of God. When people did not do that, God did not accept their efforts to worship Him according to their own systems.

When He led His people from Egyptian bondage, God commanded them to make Him a special place of worship. He stipulated everything about the sanctuary, gave exact specifications for every piece of furniture, and precisely described all that He wanted done in worship. Even when David built the permanent Temple in



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Jerusalem, God gave him the exact plans for the massive, glorious structure. He chose special individuals to worship Him in the sanctuary and refused all others. He described special garments that He wanted those special priests to wear when they worshipped in the sanctuary. God even gave the priests the recipe for the holy oil and the holy incense that He wanted used. Any deviation from God's commands was met with His anger. God described all of the sacrifices He wanted offered, and He ordered special music to offer wonderful singing in the temple worship. As worshipers made their way to the temple mount with their sacrifices, there was a sense of grandeur and awe. The air was filled with the smells of incense and burning flesh. There were the priests in their beautiful garments and the breathtaking beauty of the Temple itself. The sweet singing of the Levitical choirs filled the air as God's priests offered worship for God's people.

When the Jewish Temple was destroyed, all of this worship ceased. The Temple singers hung their harps on the trees in Babylon and said, "How can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?" People began to meet in synagogues for Scripture reading and prayer, but the sacrifices, the incense, the priestly garments, and the music were not found in the synagogues. Only when there was a Temple in Jerusalem were these things employed according to the law of God.

Jesus came to build a new temple of living stones. He came to be the sacrifice that ended all other sacrifices. He made everyone purchased by His blood a priest and enabled them to come before God in worship. Jesus ordained no special garments or incense or offerings. Instead, every person baptized into the spiritual temple is clothed with Christ. We offer the sweet incense of our prayers, and the spiritual sacrifices of our praise, "*the fruit of lips which make confession to his name.*" In the pure, spiritual worship of Jesus' church, we "*sing and make music in our hearts unto God.*" Our God is not interested in spectacle and pageantry. He is not as interested in the clothing on our bodies, but the clothing of our souls. He is tuned to the submissive hearts of those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. He has directed His holy priests today to pray, sing praise, share in the Lord's Supper, feed on His Word, and give offerings from their prosperity to His work.

May we do these things today with all of our hearts and with complete submission to His will. Only as we do these things will He accept our worship. †

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Worship His Majesty

Compiled by Darla Rosinski

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4).

“And she brought forth her first born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Ephesians 2:5-8).

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting, for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him” (Matthew 3:13-15). (Have you ever wondered if Jesus wanted to be baptized because He knew He would soon be wearing my sins and your sins?)

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (Matthew 20:25-28).

“...I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” (John 13:16).

“Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray me’” (Mark 14:18).

“Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in you; that they also may be one in

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Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me’” (John 17:20,21).

“Then He came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.’ When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head” (Matthew 25:29,30).

“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him” (Matthew 27:42).

“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’” (Luke 23:34).

“And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46).

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again’” (Luke 24:5-7).

“...to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward Heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9-11).

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Worship His majesty. We are the creation of the Word, Jesus the Christ. We chose sin and death. Our Creator came to this earth to live a life without sin so that He could be the perfect sacrifice to save us from our own choices. No one who chooses His way is barred from the benefits of the sacrifice He made. **Worship His majesty.** Be a part of His church; He died for it, and three days later, He was alive again. He won! We must joyfully accept His gift, His way. ✠

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5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY THE GREAT LIGHT

Paula Bates

1. For you were once darkness, but now you are _____ in the Lord. Walk as children of _____. Ephesians 5:8
2. Therefore He says: "Awake you who sleep, Arise from the _____, and _____ will give you light." Ephesians 5:14
3. And so we have the _____ word confirmed which you do well to _____ as a _____ that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your _____. 2 Peter 1:19
4. The people who sat in _____ have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has _____. Spoken by Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 9:2 also found in Matthew 4:16
5. Your word is a _____ to my feet and a light to my _____. Psalm 119:105
6. At midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from _____, brighter than the _____, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. Acts 26:13
7. But if we _____ in the light as He is in the _____, we have fellowship with one another, and the _____ of Jesus Christ His Son _____ us from all sin. 1 John 1:7



- Answers:**
1. Light, light
 2. Dead, Christ
 3. Prophetic, heed, light, hearts
 4. Darkness, dawned
 5. Lamp, path
 6. Heaven, sun
 7. Walk, light, blood, cleanses

Defining Love

Bill Nicks

In the Old Testament, the word “hesed” means “steadfast love, loving kindness, grace, mercy, faithfulness, goodness, or devotion” (Vine 142).

In the New Testament, the word: 1. “Agape” and the verb “agapao” are used to describe (A) the attitude of God toward His Son (John 17:26), toward the human race generally (John 3:16; Romans 5:8) and particularly toward those who believe in Jesus Christ (John 14:21). (B) to convey to His children His will concerning their attitude one toward another (John 13:34) and toward all men (1 Thessalonians 3:12), and (C) to express the central nature of God (1 John 4:8) (Vine 381).

2. “Phileo” — more nearly represents ‘tender affection’ is used for love of the Father toward the Son (John 3:35; 5:20); for the believer (John 14:21; 16:27), and of Christ’s love for a certain disciple (John 13:23; 20:2). The distinction between “agape” and “phileo” are seen in John 21 in the esteem and value of love (Revelation 12:11), whereas Peter’s reply shows the use of “phileo”. The Lord’s third question shows the value of the constancy of love, conveying the thought

of cherishing the object above all else. “Phileo” may be thought of as friendship as one would have toward his tennis or baseball partner.

3. “Philostorgoi” is a family love which we are to have in tender affection toward all members of the church, and toward our own family. Neither of the above words describes sexual relations, which, unfortunately, the world regards as the meaning of love (Romans 12:10).

We are impressed with the words used by the Holy Spirit to describe sex relations between a man and a woman. The words are found in Hebrews 13:4 as the “marriage bed”, and it is to be held in honor by all. In Romans 13:13, the word “Koite” (bed) is translated “chambering” in the KJV, and “lewdness” in the NKJV, referring to illicit sexual relations.

How wonderful are the ways of the Holy Spirit to describe a relationship which the world has defined as ugly and sensual rather than beautiful and holy! †

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Strength and Hope Through Tribulation

Wayne Barrier

Every Christian should desire to be strong and competent to accomplish the work that God offers each of us to do to build up and grow the kingdom (Ephesians 4:12-15). We pray for God's help. We ask for strength, wisdom, and guidance. We may not recognize God's answer to these requests. Several passages of Scripture that address this subject teach that we are strengthened through tribulation. We may be asking for tribulation when we ask for strength. Consider the teaching of Romans 5:1-6, *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."* Paul taught that strength and hope come through tribulation.

Paul stated in 2 Timothy 3:12, *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* Paul was giving instruction to Timothy for use in preparing others to be effective preachers and teachers of the Gospel.

Also, consider the words of James in James 1:2-4, *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."* Our prayer to be better servants with greater competence in doing God's will may be a request for trial. God knows what we need, and we must trust Him to answer our prayer as needed. We can ask for wisdom, which will help us better understand our circumstances and needs. James 1:5 states, *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"*.

We need to be strong to be effective and productive. The path to strength is through persecution, trials, and tribulation. †

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Do Yourself No Harm!

Barry C. Poyner

More people in the US die from suicide than homicide. Approximately 30,000 people each year commit suicide compared to 16,000 that are murdered. You should be more afraid of yourself than an unnamed killer! Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among young people ages 15-24, especially young white males where suicide is seen as a solution to stress, confusion, and depression. In the last 20 years, the largest increase in suicide rates occurred among Americans 65 and older, especially those divorced or widowed, with men accounting for 84% of all suicides in this category. We may be living longer, but not necessarily better. It takes a man, it takes a woman — and I'm

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persuaded God's man and God's woman — to be faithful until death, to trust God's timing.

The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:23-34) could have ended his life, but was stopped by the apostle Paul. *"Do yourself no harm, we are all here."* And that's true today, we're here to help you. The Roman penalty for letting capital offense prisoners escape was death. The keeper was ready to take his life. Asleep earlier when Paul and Silas were singing and preaching, he asked what to do, and followed through. God can forgive you from attempting suicide and from other destructive sin patterns in your life.

Sadly, many people are more afraid of living than they are of dying! Jesus came to give us abundant life (John 10:10). He gave us the church as a support group and family to help us. He does not spare us from persecution, troubles, or illnesses. He does give us a perspective that looks beyond the physical realm and a way to cope that the ungodly do not have.

There are five cases of suicide in the Bible. Each case is sad. King Saul at one time had everything, but he spared King Agag and left God's plan. God determined to remove him as king. Rather than accepting his punishment, Saul clung to power. His vain attempts to retain power made him paranoid (distressed spirit), make rash promises, turn to attempted murder, and even to witchcraft. In the end, badly-wounded Saul asked his armor bearer to assist him in death. The armor bearer declined, so Saul fell on a sword, and the armor bearer died similarly (1 Chronicles 10). He died without God and without hope.

Ahithophel was a counselor of King David, but sided with Absalom's rebellion. He counseled Absalom to violate David's concubines and demonstrate his power in a despicable act (2 Samuel 16:21-23). Ahithophel further advised an immediate pursuit of David. When he saw the strategic maneuver to capture David had been forfeited, he resigned himself to ultimate defeat. He calmly put his house in order and hanged himself (2 Samuel 17:23). Suicide, like rebellion, is a selfish act. Ahithophel was a pragmatist, concerned only with his own career, and not God's plans.

The kings of north Israel were ruthless idol worshipers. Zimri illustrated that those that live by the sword die by the sword. He had killed Elah, the son of Baasha. Then as soon as he could, he killed all the descendents of Baasha. Zimri was to rule North Israel for one week! His rule was rejected by the

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people, and Omri was authorized to apprehend him. When Zimri saw his doom was in sight, he burned his palace and himself (1 Kings 16:15-20). He died without God and committed suicide to escape the judgment of man.

Judas is the 5th case of suicide. One of the 12 apostles, Judas served as treasurer. He was critical of ointment poured on Jesus, and his love for money led him to steal (John 12:4-6). This same love for money led him to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16). Greed was his downfall. When he saw that Jesus was condemned, he became remorseful, recognized his money as blood money, threw it at the Jewish leaders, then hanged himself (Matthew 27:1-9; Acts 1:17,18). Judas had remorse, but it was a worldly despair. He was sorry for his betrayal, but did not turn back to God. Godly sorrow turns to repentance, not despair (2 Corinthians 7:8-11).

The word “suicide” does not appear in the Bible. God’s value on life makes it unthinkable. It is forbidden under the commandment not to murder. Is it unforgivable? In these cases, it does seem so. One may have moments to repent after the act, and illness may impair judgment that God will overlook. But why take a risk and forfeit life to come? As Jesus resisted the temptation to hurl Himself from the temple pinnacle, He answered, “*You shall not tempt the Lord your God*” (Matthew 4:5-7).

Some argue that Samson committed suicide in Judges 16:29,30. However, suicide is a selfish act. Samson died as a military hero, having destroyed more in the end, and is listed among the faithful (Hebrews 11:32). Others have even suggested that Jesus committed suicide by knowingly going to the cross. Such is a misunderstanding. He heroically gave His life — willingly and sacrificially.

People may legitimately long for death and not be suicidal. Those to be punished may long for it (Revelation 9:6; Jeremiah 8:3). Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Job (Job 3), and Jonah (4:8) longed for death when in dire situations. Simeon felt his life was complete and thought he could now die (Luke 2:29). Paul knew that to die was to gain (Philippians 1:20-23). But none of these godly people sought to end life.

Circumstances can put us in tailspins, and we may be tempted to sin by ending life. The jailer could have ended his life, but he heeded God’s Word. Allow your sorrow to turn to repentance. Participate in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection to gain the ultimate victory. Do yourself no harm! †

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No Longer Pilgrims?

Mike Ireland

The apostle Peter, when warning against those things “*which war against the soul*,” appealed to his readers in this way: “*Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims...*” Evidently, he wanted them to have a certain mind set about themselves as they grappled with the issues of life. According to some, ***it is a mind set in danger.***

“As a culture, present-day Christianity has redefined spiritual maturity. The reformers knew we were saved to glorify God. We moderns live to be blessed. The mature among us are now thought to be the successful, the happy, the effective people on top of things and doing well. We’re so committed to discovering and applying God’s principles for making life work that we no longer value intimacy with God as our greatest blessing. We’re more attracted to sermons, books, and conferences that reveal the secrets to fulfillment in everything we do than to spiritual direction that leads us through affliction into the presence of the Father.

“It seems that our highest ambition has been lowered to producing people whose circumstances are pleasant enough to make it easy for them to praise God. We no longer identify ourselves as a community of visibly broken saints, men and women profoundly grateful for grace, knowing we’re dead without it; existentially dependent on the Spirit, knowing we won’t keep on without Him; and stubbornly hopeful in the sometimes dim light of eternity, knowing that blessings in this life come and go.

“We seem more interested in managing life into a comfortable existence than in letting God spiritually transform us through life’s hardships. Divine encounter, spiritual community, and soul transformation, the three primary goals of a pilgrim, are not what we’re after. We’ve settled down in this world and are doing our best to make it a comfortable home...

“We haven’t seen the danger...” (Larry Crabb in *The Pressure’s Off*)

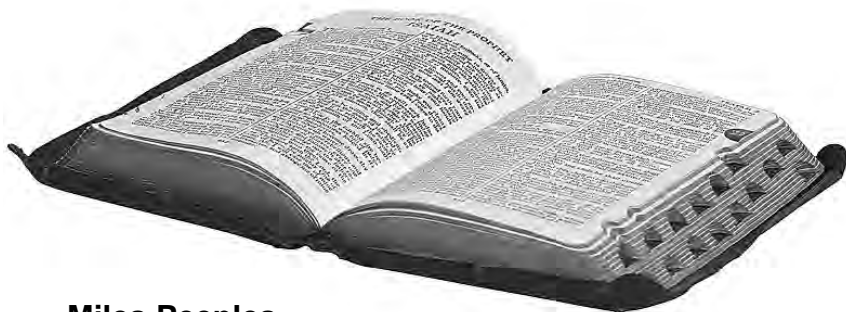
I’m thinking Peter would agree.



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“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, pause you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:2,3).

Resolve to Grow in Knowledge



Miles Peeples

At the beginning of a new year, people sometimes make resolutions. For example, they resolve to lose weight, to spend more time with the family, or to simplify their lifestyle. Making resolutions is a good thing because to *reach* a goal, we must *have* a goal. New Year's resolutions, however, are often tossed aside by the time spring arrives.

Permit me to offer a resolution, which we need to make and to keep. Let's resolve to increase our knowledge of God's Word by setting aside a regular time to study the Bible each day. While studying the Bible in classes is important, my proposed resolution has to do with studying the Bible in our homes on a regular basis. We need continually to grow in knowledge. If we are not moving forward, we are going backward.

Paul said he did not cease to pray for the brethren in Colosse. In his prayers, the apostle asked that they might be "*filled with the knowledge of His [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*" (Colossians 1:9). They were filled with knowledge in order that they could be equipped to walk worthily before the Lord and to be fruitful in every good work (verse 10). Increasing their knowledge of the Word of God was not an optional matter; it was absolutely essential.

In addition, the apostle Peter concluded his second epistle with these words:

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“...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever” (2 Peter 3:18). Peter commanded those to whom he wrote to grow in knowledge. What was said by both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter is applicable to us as well. We must grow in our knowledge of the truth (the Gospel; the Faith).

There is not any easy shortcut to growing in knowledge. It requires diligent study. Peter said we are to give all diligence to add to one's faith virtue and to one's virtue knowledge (2 Peter 1:5). Please note the phrase “all diligence”. We are to put forth whatever effort it may take in order to grow in our knowledge of the will of God. Laziness will never get the job done.

Therefore, let's resolve to study the Bible in the privacy of our homes on a regular basis. Because of our hectic schedules, this will not be easy, but we need to put forth the necessary effort. Please allow me to suggest that we set aside a certain period of time each day, Monday through Saturday, for Bible study. In addition, I recommend the same time of the day, if possible.

When we engage in our Bible study, let me suggest we focus on around 10 verses each day. It is my opinion a few verses explored more in depth is better than reading hurriedly three or four chapters. On a daily routine, it seems to me that quality is better than quantity. My brother or sister in Christ, will you join me in making the resolution to study the Bible privately at home? †

Miles H. Peeples works with the church in Claxton, Georgia, USA.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 1 Peter 3:15-16

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Keeping On

Rex Banks

In the shade of a juniper tree a leather-girded prophet of God poured out his heart in prayer. *“It is enough, now O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers”* (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah was deeply distressed, hardly surprising in view of the fact that the bloodthirsty Jezebel had a band of cutthroats on his trail. And if we recall that Elijah had just enjoyed a great victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, his distress is even more understandable. I mean, God had empowered Elijah, given the enemy into his hands, elevated him in the sight of all the people! What a letdown, what a disappointment now to be a hunted man when the Lord had seemed so near just a few hours before.

Maybe the prophet felt a little like the Israelites of Moses’ day. God had promised to redeem them *“with an outstretched arm and with great judgments”* (Exodus 6:6), and it had happened. Ten plagues upon Egypt had demonstrated the power of Jehovah against the so-called “gods” of Egypt: Apis, Hapi, Hathor and others, and about three million Israelites were set free. The Pharaoh’s army perished in the sea, and Israel and the nation exalted, *“Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, majestic in holiness”* (Exodus 15:11). Israel was on a high, then three days later in a hot, arid wilderness the thirsty multitude came to a pool and its waters were bitter (verse 23)! Undrinkable water and three million thirsty people! Where was God who had just recently performed such wonders on their behalf? Only days earlier the very forces of nature had served them, and now they couldn’t get a drink! So, out goes the victory song and in comes the grumbling against God’s appointed leader (verse 24).

Maybe, like me, you recognize yourself in the prophet under the tree and among the thirsty multitude at the waters of Marah. How many of us come out of the waters of baptism “on a high” and secretly think, “Well, from now on it’s plain sailing. If God loved me enough to send Jesus, then He loves me enough to deal with life’s trials and tribulations. Now I will bask in the sunlight of His blessings and in sweet serenity grow into a wise, spiritually mature saint, before ascending to the Lord in clouds of glory.” Then a friend (a Christian brother or sister) breaks our heart, or the mind-numbing, will-sapping routine of daily existence just drags

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us down into the pit. And under our own juniper tree we protest: “But Lord, I thought my Christian walk would be a victory parade. I began with such plans.” At our own bitter pool we grumble, “It’s just not what I expected! After all the promises about the abundant life, peace, and joy, I’m disappointed and hurt and angry!” And sadly, some of us renounce the God who seemed to promise so much, but who simply did not live up to our expectations. We’ve seen it happen. What is the solution?

Brethren, let’s get it right. God did not promise a rose-strewn pathway through life. What He promised us is the strength to deal with life’s problems in such a way that they become blessings to us, increasing our endurance and perseverance (Romans 5:3ff; James 2:2ff). Look, God didn’t desert Israel in the wilderness. In fact, His servant Moses “led” them to Marah (Exodus 15:22), and “...there He tested them” (verse 25). God’s purpose was “to know what was in their heart” (Deuteronomy 8:2). Doesn’t it make a difference to know that He is in control, even in the down times? Doesn’t it make a difference to know that how we deal with problems reveals something about our hearts (trust or unbelief)? Listen, Elijah’s distress was not proof of God’s absence. The God of creation sent an angel with a bread cake to feed the depressed prophet (1 Kings 19:5,6).

Problems are not proof that God no longer numbers the hairs of our heads (Matthew 10:30); they are proof that God is molding us, strengthening us, and maturing us. That’s what fathers do (Hebrews 12:1). Never give up because problems come! Never, never see problems as proof that God has deserted us! Life may not be fair, but in Christ it is a prelude to joy inexplicable. Never give up! †

Rex Banks works with the church in Hamilton, New Zealand.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”
(Hebrews 12:1-2).

Endurance

Jack W. Carter

The wisdom to carefully plot the course, the relentless determination to stay on track, the ability to adapt, to ward off the blows, to heal, to have the spunk to start again, and to never stop believing that there is a finish line is the spiritual assignment of every Christian.

I have lost count of the number of Christian people I have known who have fallen somewhere along the way. The reasons for their falling are myriad and the result constant. But, to fall along the way is to fail, and unless there is enough of a spark to rise again, the failure is final.

Failing to reach a goal is something all of us do within the span of our lives. But, to even imagine that we might fail to reach THE goal must be something our minds will not tolerate for a moment.

Every reason humanity has offered for spiritual failure is unacceptable to God. God expects us to succeed — He has seen to it that every provision for our success has been supplied. Every trial, every blow, every obstacle, every insult, every confrontation with misdirection is absolutely invalid as an excuse for failure.

We entertain a lot of silly notions in our lifetime, but the notion that spiritual failure for any reason is justifiable has to be the most absurd notion of all.

There is no second place trophy.



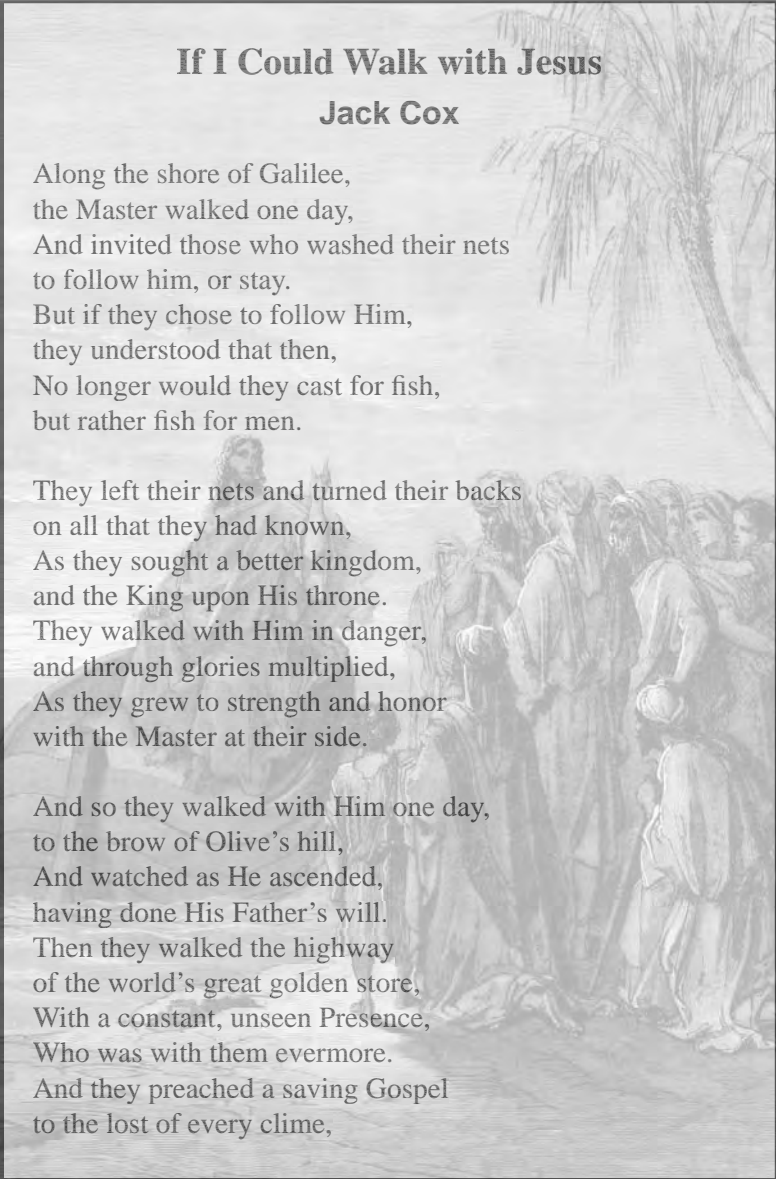
Jack W. Carter is a preacher living in McAlester, Oklahoma, USA.

*“Blessed is the man who
endures – when he has
withstood the test he will
receive the crown of life”
(James 1:12).*



If I Could Walk with Jesus

Jack Cox



Along the shore of Galilee,
the Master walked one day,
And invited those who washed their nets
to follow him, or stay.
But if they chose to follow Him,
they understood that then,
No longer would they cast for fish,
but rather fish for men.

They left their nets and turned their backs
on all that they had known,
As they sought a better kingdom,
and the King upon His throne.
They walked with Him in danger,
and through glories multiplied,
As they grew to strength and honor
with the Master at their side.

And so they walked with Him one day,
to the brow of Olive's hill,
And watched as He ascended,
having done His Father's will.
Then they walked the highway
of the world's great golden store,
With a constant, unseen Presence,
Who was with them evermore.
And they preached a saving Gospel
to the lost of every clime,

As Jesus walked among them —
He was with them every time.

When James bowed before the axman,
and his spirit fled away,
He just walked away with Jesus,
to a better place and day.

And 'twas on the isle of Patmos,
on the Lord's Day, we are told,
John turned to see his Jesus,
clothed in robes of shining gold.

And when his work was finished,
and his tasks on earth were done,
He just took the hand of Jesus
and kept walking with the Son.

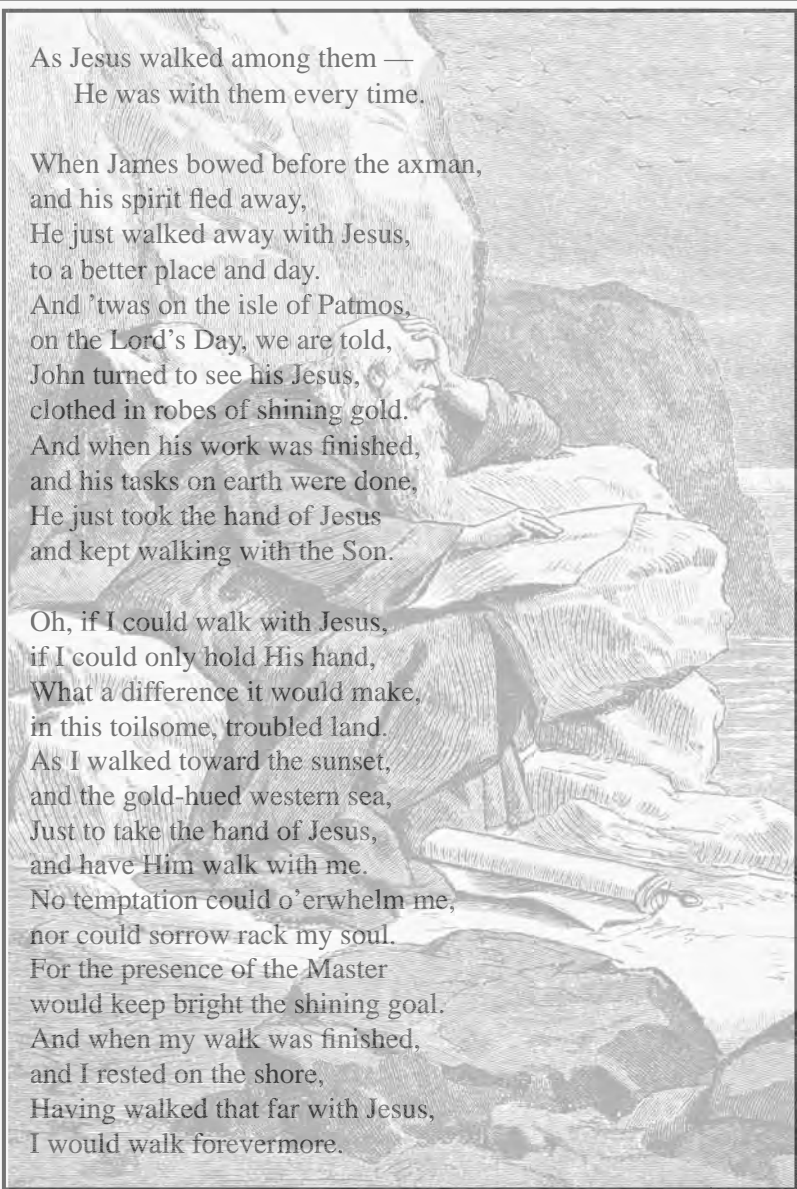
Oh, if I could walk with Jesus,
if I could only hold His hand,
What a difference it would make,
in this toilsome, troubled land.

As I walked toward the sunset,
and the gold-hued western sea,
Just to take the hand of Jesus,
and have Him walk with me.

No temptation could o'erwhelm me,
nor could sorrow rack my soul.

For the presence of the Master
would keep bright the shining goal.

And when my walk was finished,
and I rested on the shore,
Having walked that far with Jesus,
I would walk forevermore.



A Father's Shoes

Bobby Dockery

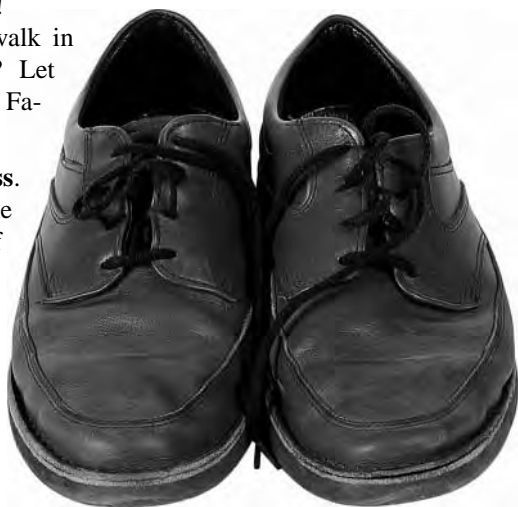
A local store advertised a “Father’s Day Shoe Sale”.

It occurred to me, however, that there is a sense in which a father’s shoes are not bought and sold — they are handed down from one generation to another! We often speak of a son “walking in his father’s shoes” when we mean that he is following his father’s example. The Bible says of Jehoshaphat that, *“He walked in the way of Asa his Father and did right in the sight of the Lord”* (1 Kings 22:43). On the other hand, it was said of Ahaziah that, *“He walked in the ways of his Father [Ahab], and so, did evil in the sight of the Lord”* (1 Kings 22:52). Both men walked in their father’s shoes. One father influenced his son for good, and the other influenced his son for evil!

Fathers, if your children walk in your shoes, where will they go? Let me suggest some places where a Father’s shoes should lead.

1. Into Paths of Righteousness.

In the beloved words of the 23rd Psalm, David spoke of being led in paths of righteousness by his Father in heaven (Psalm 23:3). A Father needs to watch his habits, guard his speech, and control his conduct to provide an example which he will not be ashamed for his children to follow. As one father said, “I want to live in such a way that when people tell me my son is like me, he’ll stick out his chest and not his tongue.”



- ## 2. Into Places of Honest Toil.
- The Jews had a proverb: “The father who fails to teach his son to work, teaches him to steal.” Blessed is the son who can walk in his father’s shoes to shop, factory, field, or office where an honest day’s work is given for a day’s pay! The Bible commands that *“if any should*

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not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The father whose example teaches the necessity of honest labor contributes not only to the well-being of his child, but also to the well-being of the nation.

Fathers, if your children walk in your shoes, where will they go?

3. **Into The House of Worship.** There are many fathers who prefer a Sunday game of golf or visit to the lake to worshipping God. Jesus said: *"Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not..."* (Matthew 19:14). But if they are to come, mothers and fathers must bring them by their example instead of keeping them away.

Live in such a way that when people tell me my son is like me, he'll stick out his chest and not his tongue.

4. **Into Fields of Service.** Christianity is service. Jesus said, *"I am among you as the one who serves..."* (Luke 22:27). He also said, *"My Father works and I work..."* (John 1:17). More young people need the example of a father who will sing the words of the old song and mean it: "I want to be a worker for the Lord!" Young people need a father's example of faithfulness, dedication, and involvement to prepare them for service in the Lord's kingdom. The Scriptures say, *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord..."*

Young people need a father's example of faithfulness, dedication, and involvement to prepare them for service in the Lord's kingdom.

(Psalm 37:23). Only when we walk like this can we pass shoes on to our children, in which we will not fear for them to walk! †

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Heirs Together of the Grace of Life

Dwight Fuqua

Our marriages are under fire. The pressures of modern society are bombarding our homes. Established moral landmarks are being moved. The national divorce rate has reached epidemic proportions. Even Christian homes are feeling the strain and some are breaking up. It has touched all of our lives.

Christian couples should have everything going for them. Bible study, prayer, and religious discussions in our homes should be a daily boost to our spirituality. Involvement in the work of the church should give us mutual purpose. Public worship should instruct in and strengthen our commitment to Divine values. Our relationship with God should solidify our relationship with each other.



Our homes should not only be a haven from the storm, but a spiritual launching pad. In their most intimate of relationships, husband and wife can help each other serve the Lord. Adam needed a *“helper comparable to him”* (Genesis 2:18). When God created Eve, He did so with the intent that they help each other in every area of life — especially the spiritual.

The same is true in your marriage. Christian couples should be *“heirs together of the grace of life”* (1 Peter 3:7). This objective requires more than just living together. It requires love, honor, submission, understanding, forgiveness, and hard work. Your marriage is a covenant between the two of you, and the very foundation of your relationship is commitment — your commitment to God and to each other.

Your love for each other is to be like Christ’s love for the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). It is to be sacrificial and enduring. Keep your love flowing. Look for (make) opportunities to show your love. Do not allow daily distractions to keep you from expressing your love. Never stop loving, growing and serving together. After all, you are *“Heirs together of the grace of life.”* †

Dwight Fuqua preaches for the Findlay congregation in Sparta, Tennessee, USA.

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“O Absalom, My Son, My Son!”

Jim Howard

One of the saddest stories in all the Old Testament is that of Absalom, son of David, who led a powerful rebellion in attempting to tear control of the kingdom from his father. It was a bitter and sorrowful moment when, following the young man's death, David cried, *“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son”* (2 Samuel 18:33).

Are there any clues in the biblical narrative to explain this tragedy of a son so violently and hatefully turning against his father? Perhaps some principles may be discovered in this story to help current-day fathers and mothers avoid the same mistakes in raising our children.

First, one gets the impression that David was so busy with the responsibilities of being king that he had little time for shaping the character of his children. Absalom was a handsome but spoiled brat. Even though he needed discipline, I don't doubt that David maintained essentially the same relationship with Absalom as he did with another rebellious son, Adonijah, characterized by the statement, *“His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘What have you done thus and so?’”* (1 Kings 1:6). Effective parenting means taking the time to get involved in our children's lives and correcting them when necessary, even if the job is unpleasant.

A second observation is along the same line. After Absalom had murdered his brother Amnon, rather than punishing him immediately, David ignored Absalom, allowing him to live in self-imposed exile for three years. How many parents in today's world, watching some sinful habit or negative attitude develop in their children, choose to ignore that fault, hoping it will magically disappear? Of course, the bad gets worse, until it's too late to avoid tragic results.

Finally, one must ask what would cause a son to become so rebellious and perverse that he would actually attempt to destroy his own father. In the case of Absalom, apparently David failed to instill in his son even one ounce of loyalty or gratitude for what his father had done for him. Contrast the attitude of Jonathan who, in spite of his great love for David, still chose to die with Saul on Mt. Gilboa because of his great loyalty to his father (1 Samuel 31). The lesson here is that great character is never developed accidentally. If we would pass on to our sons and daughters the highest spiritual values, that is an urgent task to which we must give ourselves unreservedly. †

Jim Howard preaches for the church of Christ in Madison, Mississippi, USA.

The Worst Child Abuse of All

Wade Webster

As one reads the Bible, it becomes clear how much Jesus loved children. On one occasion we hear Him saying, *“Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 19:14). Children were precious in the sight of Jesus then, and they are precious in His sight now.

In the Old Testament, we find that children were just as precious to His Father. When God was about to destroy the great city of Nineveh, the children of that city were on His mind. We read, *“And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle”* (Jonah 4:11). God didn’t want the children of Nineveh to suffer when Nineveh was destroyed.

Today we can be certain that God is still very concerned about children. No doubt, He is troubled about the condition of the helpless in many places. Children are being abused physically, mentally, and sexually every day. While these kinds of abuse are terrible and need to be corrected, there is even a more serious type of child abuse occurring in our world. Children are being neglected *spiritually*. They are growing up without a knowledge of God and His Word. Spiritual abuse has to be the worst kind of all because of the following three reasons:

First, spiritual abuse is the worst kind of child abuse because it neglects the most important part of his being. Spiritual abuse neglects the soul. In physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, the child’s physical and mental needs are neglected. These areas of neglect are terrible and need to be corrected. Yet, spiritual abuse is far worse than these abuses because it neglects the **souls** of children. Jesus said that the soul was the most valuable thing in the whole world. We read, *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26) Later in discussing the importance of the soul, He said, *“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28). Many parents care for their children physically and emotionally, but then leave off the spiritual care that they need most of all.

Second, spiritual abuse is the worst kind of child abuse because it leaves children open to the greatest enemy of all. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse leave children open to a host of problems. We often read of

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the many problems that abused children suffer emotionally and physically. Yet, spiritual abuse leaves children open to the greatest enemy of all, the devil. Peter wrote, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8).

In the parable of the tares, Jesus said, *“The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels”* (Matthew 13:39). The devil would like nothing better than to enslave our children as soon as they reach the age of accountability. Parents must make sure that they properly train their children spiritually to resist the devil. They *must* teach them the Word of God. It was through the power of that Word that Jesus overcame the devil (Matthew 4:1-11), and it is with God’s Word that we will overcome Satan, too (Ephesians 6:10-17).

Third, spiritual abuse is the worst kind of child abuse because it may affect a child for the longest time of all. While physical and mental abuse can affect a child for a lifetime, spiritual abuse can affect him for eternity. Failing to provide for a child physically and emotionally may lead to a premature death. Certainly, it is sad when children are not cared for physically here on this earth. Yet, how much more sad it is when children’s spiritual needs are not met. The spiritual neglect may not only cause the children to suffer now, but also may lead to eternal suffering. Children who are not taught God’s Word often do not obey the Gospel when they reach the age of accountability. While not all of the blame can be placed at the feet of parents who fail to give their children spiritual training, it is certain that much of the blame must apply to them. God expects parents to give the spiritual training that their sons and daughters will need to stay faithful throughout life (Proverbs 22:16; Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:7; 2 Timothy 3:15). As children reach the age of accountability, they will begin to make choices on their own. Parents must guide them in making the right decisions by giving them the training that they need from God’s Word.

It has not been my purpose in this article to downgrade the seriousness of physical, sexual, and emotional child abuse. These abuses are terrible and need to be corrected at once. Yet, we must not forget that children can also be neglected spiritually. It is spiritual abuse that may not only rob children of their happiness now, but may also contribute to robbing them of their happiness in eternity.

“...Do not sin against the child...” (Genesis 42:22).



Wade Webster preaches for the Southaven Church of Christ in Southaven, Mississippi, USA.

PROVERBS 17:22



After a recent college basketball game, the coach spotted a cell phone lying on the floor. He picked it up and handed it to one of the referees and said, "Here's your phone."

"What makes you think it's mine?" the referee asked.

"Easy," said the coach. "It says you missed 13 calls."



The children begged for a hamster, and after the vows that they would care for it, they got one. They named it "Danny". Two months later, when Mom found herself responsible for the creature, she located a prospective new home for it.

The children took the news of Danny's imminent departure quite well, though one of them remarked, "He's been around here a long time. We'll miss him."

"Yes," Mom replied, "but he's too

much work for one person, and since I'm that one person, I say he goes."

Another child said, "Well, maybe if he wouldn't eat so much and wouldn't be so messy, we could keep him."

But Mom was firm. "It's time to take Danny to his new home now," she insisted. "Go and get his cage."

With one voice and in tearful outrage the children shouted, "DANNY? We thought you said 'DADDY!'"
(from House to House/Heart to Heart)



The vice president of a company died. Early the next morning an ambitious junior officer of the company came to see the president and said, "It certainly is sad about our company's loss, but I'm sure you feel that everything should keep going. I don't want to seem presumptuous, but I would like to talk to you about my taking his place."

His boss never hesitated a minute. "That's fine with me if you can work it out with the funeral director."



Little Johnny was in church when the Lord's Supper was being observed. When each emblem was passed down his pew he wanted to partake, but his mother leaned over and told him that

PROVERBS 17:22

he wasn't old enough to partake of the Communion.

When the collection basket was passed around she leaned over once again to tell him to drop his money in, but Johnny firmly held his money in his hand and said, "If I can't eat, I won't pay!"



A guy was invited to an old friend's home for dinner. His buddy preceded every request to his wife with endearing terms, calling her "Honey," "My love," "Darling," "Sweetheart," etc.

The guest was impressed since the couple had been married almost 70 years. While the wife was out in the kitchen he said to his buddy, "I think it's wonderful that after all the years you've been married, you still call your wife those pet names."

His buddy hung his head and whispered, "I forgot her name about ten years ago."



Now I realize that every generation of adults thinks that children just aren't as obedient, grateful, respectful, or industrious as they were when WE were growing up.

However, I truly believe that there would be fewer problems with children

of today if they had to chop wood to keep the television set going.



Jimmy was having problems in English class, so his teacher decided to stop by on her way home to speak with his parents. When she rang the bell, Jimmy answered.

"I'd like to talk to your mother or father," said the teacher.

"Sorry, but they ain't here," he told her.

"Jimmy!" she said. "What is it with your grammar?"

"Beats me," Jimmy replied, "but Dad sure was mad that they had t'go bail her out again!"



The first-time father, beside himself with excitement over the birth of his son, was determined to do everything right.

"So, tell me, nurse," he asked as his new family headed out the hospital door, "what time should we wake the little guy in the morning?"



How is it that we put man on the moon before we figured out it would be a good idea to put wheels on luggage?

A Childlike Faith

Alex Gibson

Have you ever wondered about faith, that belief in something that is unseen or felt, but that you know is there? Isn't it strange how complicated our answers can be when we are asked about such a thing? Or perhaps you shy away from the subject. Or maybe you try to answer with all the evidence you think is out there.

But today I wanted to take a look at what Jesus said about children. I'm thinking about the time when the children were coming to Him and He said that we should believe as children do. *"But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:14-16).* So what does that imply? I mean children believe almost anything you tell them, and with alarmingly little evidence sometimes. Surely this can't be what Jesus was meaning, because we are also told to always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks about the hope that is alive within you (1 Peter 3:15). Yet I believe it is just that simple.

A good child will usually hold his parents, in particular the father, as all-knowing and able to do anything. How many times have kids said, "My Dad's the strongest man in the world!" or "My Dad can do anything!"? They'll even get into fights with other kids, saying, "My Dad's better than your Dad." Is this not a blind faith in someone, with no real basis in reality? I mean there may be lots of strong men out there, but how many are really the strongest in the world? Or there may be some fine men out there, but there's always someone better to be found in the more adult sense of things. But that doesn't matter to the kid one bit. His dad is the strongest and best of the best, and that's all there is to it.



HEY YOU KIDS!

So how would this relate to our heavenly Father? Is our relationship with Him not described as between a father and children? Of course it is, and that fact alone is enough to connect the concepts here. But I'll go further into it. In the Christian creed, we believe in only one God, and while we call Him by several names, we know that He is One. Yet, there are other creeds in the world and multitudes of people who believe in the gods of those religions. Now I'm not here to debate if there are other gods out there and that the One we believe in just happens to be the best, or if there's just our God and a bunch of evil spirits assuming those roles in the other religions. But I will say that the concepts about those entities is less important here than our line of thought. While we cannot choose our physical parents, you see, in the spiritual sense, we can pick our Father. And naturally we hold up the One we pick to be the best. And so when we pick the Bible as our guide for life, we also conclude that our Father is the best around.

So what about the people who think all religions are the same and that we all get to God one way or another? Well, they should study about the religions they are lumping together before speaking in ignorance. Actually, with careful analysis, we can see that all religions are mutually exclusive and think they are right and everyone else is wrong, to some degree. Followers of each religious belief think that theirs is the best, and that their god is the best — that's just human nature, as we noticed the natural pride and loyalty of a child toward his physical father. Spiritually, the Christian in particular does this because we are so proud of our Father. We are convinced that He's the biggest and the best and able to do anything, and that anyone who says differently is just wrong. Does that sound childish to you? Perhaps, but it is the sort of zeal that Christians should have, because it is just that — childlike faith.

Good children who know they are loved tend to understand that the rules are set by the parents, and that's that. They may understand some of them, but not all of them. Yet, they will try to abide by the rules because they were set by their parents. We, as Christians, should do the same in our spiritual relationship. We do not understand why God set up all of His rules, but we follow them anyway, even if we don't understand why, believing that our spiritual Father knows what is best. Again, it's that childlike faith expressing itself. †

For feedback email Alex Gibson at zex1@hotmail.com or PO box 1111, Oak grove KY 42262, USA.



Stewardship

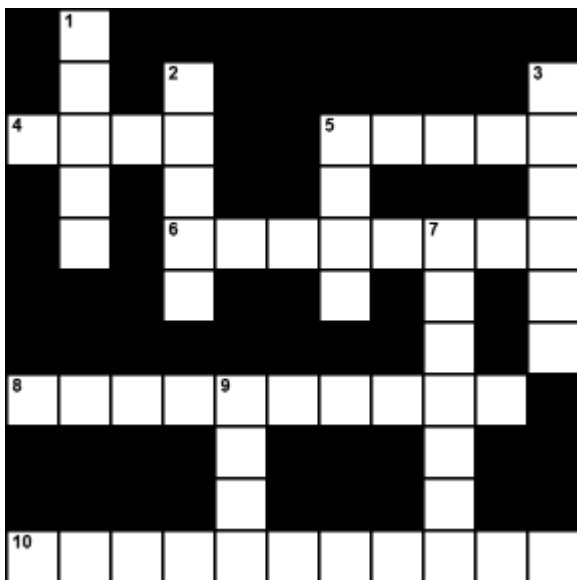
Bonnie Rushmore

Across

4. Freely you received, freely _____. Matthew 10:8
5. Cast not your pearls before _____. Matthew 7:6
6. Unto to whom is given much, of him much is _____. Luke 12:48
8. One who fails to provide for his own is worse than an _____. 1 Timothy 5:8
10. Godliness with _____ is great gain. 1 Timothy 6:6,7

Down

1. If any provide not for his own, he has denied the _____. 1 Timothy 5:8
2. Where your treasure is, your _____ will be also. Matthew 6:21
3. _____ to Caesar his things and to God the things are God's.
Matthew 22:21
5. What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his _____.
Mark 8:36
7. It is more
blessed to give
than to _____.
Acts 20:35
9. The root of all
evil is the _____
of money. 1
Timothy 6:10.



Sarah Makes It Real

John Gipson

Sarah was young and beautiful, and she was going to die if she didn't get help. That's why her parents brought her from Los Angeles to the Mayo Clinic. She had cancer, and the only alternative seemed to be a hemipelvectomy, in which the entire leg and half of the pelvis would be removed — a horrible procedure. The doctor looked upon this 18-year-old beauty with a perfectly proportioned body and "eyes that radiate innocence and trust". Those eyes seem to say, "You will cure me". Dr. Michael J. Collins knew what a mutilation lay ahead and with only a 5 percent five-year survival.

He finally managed to haltingly say, "Sarah, I, well, I'll do everything I can for you". Sarah said, "I know you will. Thank you."

In his book, *Hot Lights, Cold Steel*, Dr. Collins describes the horrible operation. It was long and bloody. It was Sarah's post-op stormy. She ran a fever for four days. But the thing that impressed everybody at the clinic was how Sarah kept thanking everyone for what they were doing and apologizing "for being such a bother". Her nurse related that Sarah was sad about losing her leg, "but she says it's made her realize how many things she hadn't lost. She says it's like a millionaire who loses a thousand dollars; he's sad, but he's still not that bad off".

With that attitude and spirit of thankfulness, Sarah was adored by everyone at the Mayo Clinic. Sadly this lovely girl died within the year. There is a picture of her hanging in the clinic. It is taken from the back. She is standing on a hill looking forward.

Now, what was it I was complaining about? The Bible tells me, "*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*" (1 Thesalonians 5:18).

Yes, the Bible says it, but Sarah makes it real.



John Gipson works with the Windsong Church of Christ in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA.

TEXTUAL STUDIES

The Parable of the Net

Charles Box

Matthew chapter 13 contains several of Jesus' parables. One of them is "the parable of the dragnet." *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the*

bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:47-50). In this parable, let us observe:

THE DRAGNET WAS CAST INTO THE SEA. God's net is cast into the great sea of humanity. There are multitudes of people, young and old, good and evil. The net gathers *"some of every kind."* The Gospel is publicly proclaimed to all, and when this is done the Gospel net draws all kinds.

THE DRAGNET EXPLAINED BY JESUS. Jesus gave the time when this separation would take place. It will take place at the end of the world. He was very clear in identifying the agents by which this would be accomplished. *"The angels will come forth and separate the wicked from among the just"* (verse 49). Jesus also pictures the doom of the wicked. *"Cast them into the furnace of fire"*.

LET US LEARN FROM THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET. (1) A net is the instrument to catch fish. The Gospel is the only instrument with which to catch men. (2) The net must be cast into the sea to be useful. The Gospel must be preached to sinners before it can draw men to shore. (3) When fish are caught they are removed from the water. When men are caught by the Gospel they are removed from sin and wickedness. (4) Each time the net is cast the fisherman hopes for a catch of fish. Christians should hope and pray for souls as the Gospel net is cast. (5) Sometimes the net is drawn in empty. Christians may not see immediate fruit. But, never become so discouraged you stop casting the Gospel net. (6) When the net is full it brings in all kinds of fish. The Gospel net brings in all kinds of people. Let us work to try to see Christ formed in them (Galatians 4:19).

You are encouraged to become a Christian today (Acts 2:36-41). As a Christian, cast God's Gospel net (2 Timothy 2:2). †

Charles Box preaches for the Walnut Street congregation in Greenville, Alabama, USA.

TEXTUAL STUDIES

Lessons From Jonah

Jack Harriman

The minor prophet with whom we are most familiar is Jonah. I believe it is correct to say the little book of Jonah provides more relevant lessons than any other of the minor prophets. The following are some of those.

First, it is obvious that God has always loved everyone and wanted everyone to be saved. Of course, Israel was a special nation in God's scheme of things, but even then, God loved all nations and desired their salvation.

Second, God is actively working to give all nations an opportunity to hear the Gospel. He gave Nineveh one last chance. God is opening doors around the world in ways we may not be able to identify, but be assured, He is doing so.

Third, sometimes God has to convert a preacher or a church before He can convert a nation. Jonah was God's spokesman, but God had to convert him first. Chapters one and two are all about Jonah's conversion. When Jonah finally got to the place God wanted him, he did a great job. But people died lost in Nineveh while Jonah struggled against God's commission.

Fourth, Jonah's greatest success was away from home. His preaching converted a whole city and it stood 150 years longer than it would have otherwise.

Fifth, why would God send Jonah to Nineveh? One reason is the fairness of God. The late Jimmy Lovell used to say, "Every person has a right to hear the Gospel once before anyone hears it twice." Another reason is the principle of receptivity. This principle was a feature of the Limited Commission (Matthew 10:4) as well as the Great Commission (Acts 18:6).

Sixth, meanwhile back in Israel, times were very good. God had blessed them greatly, materially speaking. But they sank deeper and deeper into sin. They ignored Jonah's call for repentance. But if he could go home and describe to them fire and brimstone falling on Nineveh, they would repent. (Sounds like the rich man in Luke 16). But Jonah did not believe the goodness of God would lead them to repentance. What will it take to bring the nations to repentance today? His goodness does not seem to be working. Perhaps His severity? †

Jack Harriman is a Gospel preacher living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA.

It is obvious that God has always loved everyone and wanted everyone to be saved.

The Need of Courage

J.C. Choate

Acts 28:15

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Courage is needed in every walk of life.
- B. Police must have courage to back law.
- C. Soldiers must have courage to protect their country.
- D. Must have courage to enter business.
- E. Above all, need courage in religion.

DISCUSSION:

I. Some who had courage:

- A. Noah.
- B. Abraham.
- C. Moses.
- D. Daniel.
- E. John the Baptist.
- F. Saul.
- G. The church.

II. Must have courage to become a Christian.

- A. To love the Lord (Luke 9:23).
- B. Put God first (Matthew 6:33).
- C. Give up sin and worldly life.
- D. Leave behind family and friends (if necessary).
- E. Leave denominational churches.

- F. To change religions.

III. Must have courage to live right.

- A. To be honest.
- B. To treat others right.
- C. To live a godly life.

IV. It takes courage to condemn sin (2 Timothy 4:20).

- A. To condemn the doctrines of men.
- B. To tell people they are wrong.
- C. To show members their need of repentance.

V. Some sources of courage.

- A. Facts, or truth.
- B. Faith in God.
- C. Christ being with us.
- D. Prayer.
- E. Association with the righteous.
- F. Faithfulness.

CONCLUSION:

- A. How much courage do you have?
- B. Those who have courage to obey God will be saved. †

J.C. Choate (1932-2008) was the founding Editor of *The Voice of Truth International*.

He Was Manifested to Take Away Sin

J.A. Thornton

Introduction:

- A. He came to seek and save (Luke 19:10).
- B. Christ came to save (1 Timothy 1:15).

I. He Came to Take Away Sin (1 John 3:5,8).

- A. The lamb of God (John 1:29).
- B. He came to die (Hebrews 2:9).
- C. By His own blood He atoned for sin (Hebrews 9:12-14).
- D. He offered one sacrifice for all time (Hebrews 10:12).
- E. He became the propitiation for all (1 John 2:1,2).
- F. He gave Himself for us all (Titus 2:11-14).
- G. He came “for this cause” (John 12:26-28).
- H. Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6-9).
- I. God sent His own Son (Romans 8:1-4).

II. He Sinned Not (in Him Is No Sin)

- A. No unrighteousness in Him (John 7:18,19).
- B. No one could convict Him of sin (John 8:45,46).
- C. He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- D. He was tempted but did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).
- E. Holy, harmless and undefiled (Hebrews 7:26).
- F. He did no sin (1 Peter 2:21-23).
- G. The thief recognized His goodness (Luke 23:41).
- H. Isaiah prophesied this (Isaiah 53:9).

III. Those Who Abide in Him Sin Not (v. 6-10)

- A. It follows that if Christ sinned not, then His followers should abstain from sin.
- B. To abide suggests to settle down as in one’s permanent home. That is whosoever keeps on abiding in Him sinneth not, e.g., does not keep on

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

sinning.

- C. One cannot be righteous without doing righteousness (v. 7; cf Acts 10:34,35).
- D. He that doeth (practices) sin is of the devil (v. 8; Romans 6:12-14).
- E. He cannot sin, e.g. practice, because he is begotten of God and the seed (word) keeps him from it (v. 9).
- F. This does not mean he cannot commit a single act of sin, for this would contradict 1 John 1:8-2:2.
- G. You can tell the children of God from the children of the devil (v. 10: John 8:44).



J.A. Thornton was a longtime preacher in the state of Mississippi, USA.

THE MATHEMATICS OF SALVATION

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16 NKJV).

1 + 2 = 3 (TRUE)

BELIEF + BAPTISM = SALVATION (TRUE)

0 + 2 = 3 (FALSE)

UNBELIEF + BAPTISM = SALVATION (FALSE)

1 + 0 = 3 (FALSE)

BELIEF + NO BAPTISM = SALVATION (FALSE)

Aristobulus' Household and Herodion

William Woodson

Romans chapter 16 contains names of friends Paul had known for many years. He sent greetings to men and women who had been a blessing to the cause of Christ. After the strangeness of the names is overcome, one gains an appreciation for these perpetual portraits from so very long ago. Among these names are two of unusual interest: the household Aristobulus and the man named Herodion.

In his superb commentary of Philippians, J.B. Lightfoot has very interesting comments on the biblical information about these and other individuals who are named in this chapter. From these comments the following facts have been gathered concerning these men (Romans 16:10,11).

Lightfoot cites information from cemetery inscriptions in Rome referring to various slaves of different wealthy Romans, along with members of the court of the emperors. Many names identical to most of those listed in this chapter are preserved. Lightfoot reasons, convincingly, that these listed were indications of wealth and regard for the slaves noted. It seems clear that the individuals named in the chapter were in most instances slaves of one or the other owner.

The household of Aristobulus belonged to the grandson of Herod the Great. Along with his brothers, Agrippa and Herod, he had been educated in Rome. Aristobulus remained in private life while his brothers became kings in Judea and Chalcis. He was a close friend of the Emperor Claudius, who, likely, at Aristobulus' death, at about 43 A.D. or later, obtained the slaves. Among the number, apparently, was one, whether slave or freeman is unknown, named Herodion.

Consider for a moment something of the meaning of the individuals named. The Gospel had penetrated even the Jewish royal family household, i.e., Aristobulus, and Paul was mindful of it. The family name, hated among the Jews, had not prevented those within it from becoming Christians. The embarrassing namesake, Herod, had not kept Herodion from becoming a fine man and a Christian. Scattered among various Gentile names, the other Jewish names, in addition to those noted, indicated that in Christ the barriers and antagonisms of racial differences had been transcended. The men and women listed in the chapter had so endeared themselves and gained such honor as Christians that the inspiration of God guaranteed they will remain in memory forever. †

William Woodson (1931 – 2010) was an author, preacher, and chairman of Bible Departments at Freed-Hardeman University and Lipscomb University in Tennessee, USA.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

Lot's Fall

Tom Kelton



The Scriptures clearly indicate the downward steps of Lot: “...*he lifted up his eyes, and beheld*” (Genesis 13:10); he “*chose him all the plain of Jordan*” (verse 11); he “*separated*” from Abraham — from spiritual fellowship (verse 11); he “*dwelled in the cities of the plain*” (verse 12); and, finally, he “*sat in the gate*

of Sodom” [a position of great importance] (Genesis 19:1).

Lot became one of the city councilors, and his daughters married Sodomites. At first he only looked, but at last he was an official in a wicked city. The Scriptures refer to Lot as “*just*” and as “*that righteous man*” (2 Peter 2:7,8), but he was dragged downward by his appetite for the things of the world.

The psalmist was well acquainted with the way sin can drag man down a step at a time. He wrote: “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*” (Psalm 1:1). Notice the three steps: walking, standing, and sitting. First, it is the counsel of the ungodly, then it is the way of sinners, and finally it is the seat of the scornful. This is the downward road of sin, and the psalmist said that the man who does not go this direction is blessed. The Christian who avoids the downward path of sin finds that “*his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper*” (verses 2,3). Whereas Psalm 1:1 shows the path that led to Lot’s fall, verses 2 and 3 show the path we Christians should take. Which path are you taking? †

Tom Kelton preached for many years in Pharr, Texas, USA.

Who Am I ?

Rebecca Rushmore

Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. If you guess my name after the first clue, give yourself a score of 100 points. If you know who I am only after the fifth clue, your score is 60, etc. When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of Scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's Word.

1. My father was Amoz.
2. I was married and had two sons.
3. The name of one son means "a remnant shall return".
4. I probably did my work between 758 and 698 B.C.
5. I did my work during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.
6. God called me to be a prophet to Judah and Jerusalem.
7. My name means "Salvation of Jehovah".
8. I wrote a book of the Old Testament.
9. Chapter 53 is well known by many people.
10. I am called the Messianic Prophet.



See answer on inside back cover

My Score: _____

Water Salvation

Owen D. Olbricht

Can water save? No, of course not, but can we be saved without water?

Water cannot cleanse a leper or give sight to a blind man; however, Naaman was required to dip seven times in the Jordan River before he was healed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:10-14). After spitting on the ground to make clay, which He put on a blind man's eyes, Jesus told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He washed with water and came seeing (John 9:6,7). Is the water of baptism also a requirement before God will grant the blessing of salvation?

What About Baptism? Peter wrote, "*baptism now saves us*" (1 Peter 3:21). Such a short statement does not tell the whole story, for Peter was making a comparison. He wrote that in the ark "*eight souls were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism*" (NKJV).

Type and Antitype. What is an "antitype," Greek *antitupos* (a compound word, *anti* and *tupos*)? It is an exact corresponding representation of which something is a "type", Greek *tupos*. Thomas desired to see the "print", *tupos*, the representation of the nails that had been driven into Jesus' hands and feet. Moses was a "type of Christ" (Romans 5:14), who is the "antitype".

The Old Testament provided types of New Testament realities. The snake that Moses lifted in the wilderness for Israel to look at to be healed was a type of Jesus being lifted on the cross (John 3:15). Animal sacrifices were a shadow of Jesus' true sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-4). Normally, a reality exists before the shadow, like a tree exists before its shadow, but in the case of Old Testament types, they existed before the realities of the New Testament.

Baptism Prefigured by Noah. In like manner as Noah's family, a type, needed water to float the ark to safety from the destruction of a wicked world, the water of baptism is needed for our salvation, which is brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Peter 3:21). His death and resurrection are the *means*, while baptism is the *agent* required before salvation is granted. Baptism is not a type of Noah's deliverance through water. Instead, Noah's family being brought to safety in the ark through water is a type of baptism, "the antitype", that now saves us. Water does not save, but we cannot be saved without the water of baptism. †

Owen D. Olbricht is a writer living in Sherwood, Arkansas, USA.

BIBLE QUESTIONS

What About Bible Authority?

Jimmy Young

What about Bible authority? Can one know Bible truth? Is it really important that we know Bible truth? These are fair questions. The answer to these and other questions about Bible truth are contained in the Word of God itself.

Some have the idea, and even teach, that Bible truth is relative or subjective. What are they saying? That truth to one person is not necessarily truth to another. What this philosophy teaches is that you can do, believe, and practice whatever you desire, and God will accept it.

If this is the case, there can be no false belief, teaching, or practice. If the Bible is relative or subjective, why did Jesus say, "*Beware of false prophets...*" (Matthew 7:15)? How can we "*try the spirits...*" (1 John 4:1)? How could we all "*speak the same thing...*" (1 Corinthians 1:10)? Would it be possible to do all this if the Bible is relative or subjective? The fact is, these verses cannot be obeyed without believing and understanding the Bible alike, and the truth is that Bible truth is absolute and objective.

Some would have us to believe it's impossible to fully understand and follow Bible truths. Can we all attain Bible truth? Jesus says we can (John 8:32). Yes, truth can be known. Not only *can*

one know truth, one *must* know it in order to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). If truth isn't attainable, why is study required (2 Timothy 2:15; John 5:39; Acts 17:11; Psalm 1:1,2)? The fact is, Bible truth can be known; that is, it is attainable.

Bible truth is all-important, for Jesus said, "*ye shall know **the truth**...*" (John 8:32). In knowing and obeying truth we receive freedom from our sins (Romans 6:23). This freedom keeps us from the vengeance of God (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). If we plan to go to heaven, we must prepare properly — we must know and obey the truth (Matthew 7:21-23).

How can we know what is right or wrong, truth, or error? We will not find this in politics, preachers, popularity, power, position, pleasing self or others. But, it is found in the Word of God.

We must have Bible authority for all we believe, teach, and practice (Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17). Authority cannot be overlooked. Truth about right or wrong, truth or error is found in Scripture. Thus, Bible truth is authoritative.

It is not enough to know that the Bible is ABSOLUTE, ATTAINABLE, ALL-IMPORTANT, and AUTHORITATIVE. All this is right and good, scripturally speaking, but something else must take place. **From the heart, Bible truth must be accepted** (Romans 6:17,18; James 1:21,22). †

Jimmy Young works with the Nettleton congregation in Jonesboro, Arkansas, USA.

What Does It Mean to Call Upon the Name of the Lord?

Bruce Buckley

“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

This was not new with Paul, as he was repeating a statement of the prophet Joel (Joel 2:32).

There is much said today in the religious world about “calling upon the name of the Lord”, but unfortunately most of it is unscriptural, like saying “just fall down by your radio or TV and say, ‘Lord, save me’”, with the idea that such is all that is necessary to be saved. To some, that is “calling upon the name of the Lord”, but in reality it is far from the truth.

It is true that all may pray to God, regardless of race, color, social, or political standing. However, before one can effectively call upon Him, he must first have a knowledge of Christ. No one can call upon the name of a Lord whom they do not know. Paul made this clear to the Athenians.

One must know that all are lost and need to be saved, and that salvation is from God, Who wishes that all be

saved. If all are either saved or lost by predestination, as some teach, there would be no need to call upon the name of the Lord.

Calling upon God’s name includes the willingness to obey Him. There is no need to call upon the name of the Lord unless one is willing and anxious to obey His commands. This is made clear by the words of Christ Himself. ***“And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”*** (Luke 6:46). This is in the form of a question, not to gain information, but to emphasize a truth.

Calling upon the name of the Lord with obedience promises that one **shall be saved**. May all call upon His name, as the practice in the Scriptures serves as our example in our approach to our Heavenly Father. †

Bruce Buckley (deceased) served many years as an elder in the Chapel Avenue church in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.

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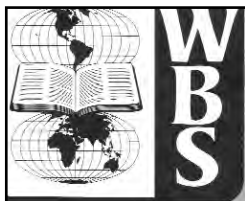
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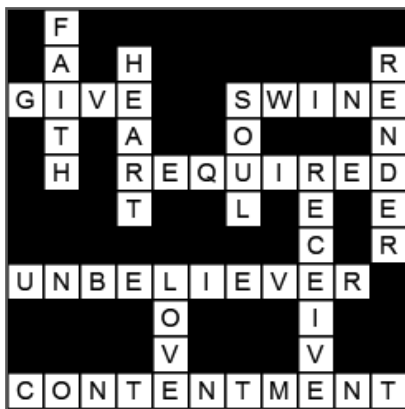
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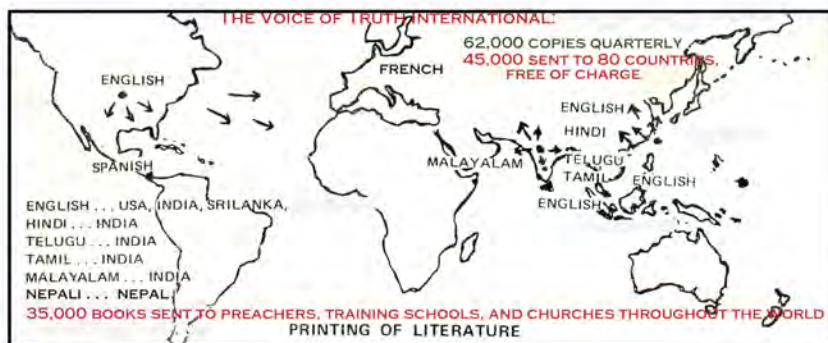
Verse Search (page 30)

- Who Am I?** (page 105)
Answer: Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1;
6:1-13; 7:3; 8:3)

Bible Find (page 96)



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:



PREACHING THE WORD

Jesus' life and death were the culmination of God's eternal work to provide salvation for all who would accept it. That treasure — the message by which people can learn how to have their sins forgiven — has been entrusted to Christians: to you and to me. If we fail to be His voice, the masses will die without hope.

So,

How do we go? Through our prayers and genuine concern for the lost of the world.

How do we go? Personally: to our neighbors, to another city, to another country.

How do we go? Congregationally, as churches send the workers and provide the tools for evangelism.

How do we go? Through mass media: radio, television, the Internet, the printed page.

The Voice of Truth International is a busy tool. It is printed in English, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Nepali, Manipuri, and Spanish. Of approximately 62,000 copies printed each quarter, 45,000 are sent free of charge to 80 countries. American Christians make this work possible.