

VOLUME EIGHTY-THREE

V THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

Our goal? To help people along the road
that is illuminated with God's light...

John 3:16

The Gospel in Miniature

GOD:

The greatest lover.

SO LOVED:

The greatest degree.

THE WORLD:

The greatest company.

THAT HE GAVE:

The greatest act.

HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON:

The greatest gift.

THAT WHOSOEVER:

The greatest opportunity.

BELIEVETH:

The greatest simplicity.

IN HIM:

The greatest attraction.

SHOULD NOT PERISH:

The greatest promise.

BUT:

The greatest difference.

HAVE:

The greatest certainty.

EVERLASTING LIFE:

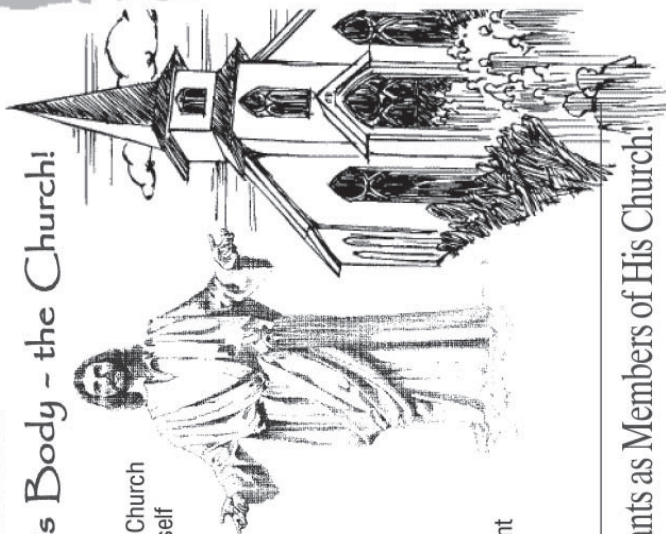
The greatest possession.

— Via Nettleton Church of Christ

Christ's Service for the Church

Ephesians 5:25-27

Christ Cares for His Body - the Church!



 **PAST:**
AT THE CROSS



- He Loved the Church
- He Gave Himself

 **PRESENT:**
ON THE THRONE



- He Sanctifies
- He Cleanses
- He Nourishes
- He Cherishes

 **FUTURE:**
AT HIS COMING



- He Will Present

May We All Be Faithful Servants as Members of His Church!

Bible Acronyms

B-A-P-T-I-S-M

“That they may SEE and KNOW, and CONSIDER and UNDERSTAND together . . .” Isaiah 41:20

B → **BURIAL** } ■ Romans 6:4 ■ Acts 8:36-39

A → **ADULTS** } ■ Acts 5:14 ■ Acts 8:12

P → **PENITENT BELIEVERS** } ■ Mark 16:16 ■ Acts 2:38

T → **TRINITY** } ■ Matthew 28:19

I → **INTO CHRIST** } ■ Romans 6:3 ■ Galatians 3:21

S → **SAVES** } ■ 1 Peter 3:21 ■ Acts 22:16

M → **MANDATE** } ■ Acts 10:47-48 ■ Mark 16:15-16



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



THE WORD OF THE LORD CONTINUES UNDER ATTACK

Byron Nichols

The Bible overflows with statements of faith, reverence, and thanksgiving from the lips of men of God throughout both the Old and New Testaments as they spoke regarding God's written Word, the inspired Word that we still have today, the Bible. More than any other writer, David wrote again and again of his gratitude for God's Word and of his desire to let that Word guide him through life.

Looking only at Psalm 119, let's notice just a few of David's remarks: *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You"* (verse 11); *"Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law"* (verse 18); *"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day"* (verse 97); *"How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I got understanding; therefore I hate every false way"* (verses 103-104); *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (verse 105); *"...my heart stands in awe of Your word. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure"* (verses 161-162).

David believed what he heard from God and what he read in the Scriptures. He expressed total confidence that it all came directly from the mind of God, without any changes or errors.

The Bible is the result of the direction (inspiration) given to about 40 different writers, spanning approximately 1600 years. God, through the Holy Spirit, breathed into the minds of these writers exactly what He wanted written in His Word. Like all other writers of the Bible, the apostle Paul wrote and spoke as he was guided by the Holy Spirit, including his words in 2 Timothy 3:16,17,

where he affirmed, *“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.”* Peter concurred totally, writing in 2 Peter 1:20-21, *“...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.”*

How sad it is that, with the passing of time, more and more people, even some who are religious leaders and regarded by many as fervent and faithful spokesmen for God have come to the conclusion that the Bible is not actually inspired, is not always reliable, and is not to be regarded as being a completely safe guide for man. Such thinking is obviously in direct conflict with such inspired passages as Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, *“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”*

Christians need to be aware of such heartbreaking information as I am about to share with you. A retired professor of religious studies at one of the universities in the central United States has recently written a book in which he makes statements that are clearly contradictory to what the Bible says. For example, he asserts that all we know about Jesus is what the men who wrote about Him thought about Him. He contends, *“Everything in the early Christian gospels is either derived from historical memory, or is borrowed or invented.”*

This uninspired man then affirms, *“In short, everything about Jesus in the gospels is at best hearsay.”* He further argues that even those sayings of Jesus that are more accepted by historians as being actually sayings of Jesus can only be regarded as historically probable rather than historically certain. This man goes so far as to brazenly state that the Gospels which were written several years after the lifetime of Jesus *“are seriously flawed as history, meaning they are not reporting what happened in an unbiased way.”*

Let me share this one additional quotation from this man’s own pen as he spoke of Jesus: *“He did not leave behind a code of conduct to be followed and simply omitted any practical guidance as to how his challenging ideas should be incorporated into daily life.”*

Perhaps you are by now asking yourself, *“How could any highly-educated professor who is supposed to be a Bible scholar possibly make such derogatory statements about the Bible, as well as about the very Son of God?”* He claims that some parts of the Word of God are more reliable or more acceptable than others. Why would a person want any part of the Bible if he believes that some parts of it are false and cannot be trusted?

This brings us to some questions that those who claim to be Christians need to ask themselves: Do we believe the Bible is what it claims to be, the inspired and infallible Word of God? Do we believe that parts of it are true and accurate, but that other parts are possibly, or even probably, untrustworthy? Dear Christian friend — these questions are very important. Some in the Lord’s church, even some men of prominence and position, find very little (if any) fault with the professor’s thinking. In fact, I personally know two members of the church who also were professors in that same department of religious studies with that professor — men who have publicly acknowledged their very high esteem for him and his scholarship and teaching.

The purpose for sharing these words is to alert the church to the fact that the prevailing convictions and practices *even in the Lord’s church* can and do change over time. This is not a new development — it has been occurring through the centuries since Christ brought His church into existence.

In the latter part of the 1800’s and the early part of the 1900’s J.W. McGarvey was commonly regarded as the most accomplished Bible scholar in the church. For many years he was the staunch and reliable leader of The College of the Bible in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. However, a liberal element, whose view of the Scriptures was much looser than that of McGarvey and many others, finally gained control of the school, resulting in an ongoing liberalism that has not ceased since.

Several years ago Charles Pugh III, a Gospel preacher, was visiting the school, and he asked the librarian, “Do your faculty members subscribe to a doctrinal policy regarding the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible?” The response was in the form of a shout, “No! There are things in the Bible that are not as true as things you read in Sears Roebuck Catalog!”

Dear reader, is this not the same basic philosophy as that of the professor mentioned above? Is it not very much like the apparent attitude of the fellow professors who have been so supportive of him and his beliefs which in effect have ridiculed the Bible, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the apostles, and the other writers of the Scriptures?

It would be wise for all of us to give heed to John’s admonition in 1 John 4:1, ***“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*** The basis for our testing of the spirits (teachers) must be the inspired and trustworthy Word of God. †



Reflecting the Trinity

Jerry Bates

Most Christians are familiar with the concept of the Trinity. Likewise, most Christians are familiar with the need for the church to be united. However, I believe few really consider the relation between the two concepts. I submit that the Trinity is actually a model for how we are to relate to one another. We should strive to be like God; therefore, we must be united. Jesus said that we are to be one, just as He and the Father

were one. *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent me”* (John 17:20,21). Thus, an understanding of the unity and oneness of the Godhead is necessary to understand exactly how we as His disciples are to relate to each other.

Firstly, all Christians should be regarded as equal in value. While certainly each has different talents, abilities and functions, nevertheless, we are one in value and worth to God. *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:27). Thus, any situation where one member dominates another, or a person is regarded as somehow lesser in value, is improper. Many problems have developed within the church where one person or group disregards the needs, situations, or desires of others, and power struggles have developed. One cannot possibly conceive of a power struggle within the Godhead; consequently, such a situation should not develop in the church either.

Secondly, no person should be exalted over another. Obviously, some members such as the preacher or leaders of a congregation have a more conspicuous role than others. Some have greater talents or abilities, and their public contribution to the church may be seen to be greater. Due to greater economic achievements, some are able to give more than others. In such situations, there is a natural

human tendency to value certain people more highly than others. However, such is not right in the sight of God. Two examples could be considered to illustrate this principle. The poor widow gave only two small coins, yet Jesus commended her and said that she gave more than anyone else. James, in chapter 2, condemns the showing of partiality or giving greater honor to the rich who might enter our assemblies. God regards all Christians as equal in value or worth, despite any external differences which might exist in our society, and so should we. There is no member of the Godhead that is more important than the others, and neither should any be considered more important in the church than other members.

The same principle can be seen with congregations. Often, the work of one congregation is done without any thought to the effect it might have on others. Churches are sometimes competitive with each other, each trying to be the biggest. Christianity is not competitive like businesses in which small ones are put out of business by larger ones. Rather, they should use their resources to aid others instead of keeping them strictly for their own use. Never can we imagine a scenario in which one member of the Godhead does His own thing without consideration of the effect upon the other members. Therefore, when we reflect the Trinity, congregations will be concerned for the welfare of other congregations.

This sad situation is sometimes seen in the mission field. Churches will begin a work in some foreign field in which the church already exists. Rather than endeavoring to work with the existing congregations, they begin a completely new work, sometimes within a very short distance from another. This is not only counterproductive to the growth of the kingdom, but it is very discouraging to the work that has already begun. Never would one member of the Godhead do anything that might somehow harm or discourage the others, and His church should reflect that same characteristic.

This same principle can be seen even in our families. No member, even little children, are to be seen as unimportant or of lesser value to the family. Likewise, no person should be lazy and contribute little to the welfare of the home. No one member should be served by the other members of the family. In the Trinity all are united and work together for one goal; therefore, when we reflect God in our lives, everyone in the home works together for the good of the family, rather than anyone selfishly seeking his own desires.

We have been discussing the difference that an understanding of the Trinity should make in our lives. God and Christ live in the lives of their servants. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:21, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...*" If God and Christ are to live through us, then we must understand the nature of God. How we are to act towards one another in every situation ultimately goes back to the unity and love exhibited in the Godhead. If we do not understand the Trinity, we remove the very foundation upon which we are to pattern our lives. †



THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Louis Rushmore

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the core of the Gospel message preached in the first century, and it remains the heart of the Gospel message throughout the New Testament. *“And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty”* (1 Corinthians 15:14).

One simply cannot overemphasize the significance of the resurrection of Christ. Among other considerations, the hope of our resurrection depends upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *“Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you”* (2 Corinthians 4:14). *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1 Peter 1:3,4).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, never to return thereto, is a critical aspect of Christianity. Had Jesus Christ not resurrected from the grave, there would have been absolutely **no hope for sin-laden, lost humanity!** Though Jesus Christ was the Son of God, without His resurrection human hopes would have been forever dashed. Though Jesus Christ was the long prophesied Savior or Messiah, without His resurrection He could have saved no one. Although Jesus Christ shed His precious blood on Calvary’s cross, without the resurrection its purchase price would have been ineffective. Though Jesus Christ had fulfilled all other prophecies, without the resurrection all of that would have been meaningless. Though multitudes of souls under Patriarchy and Judaism faithfully obeyed God, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ none of that would have gotten anyone closer to an eternity in heaven with God. All would be vanity without the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The church could not have been established without the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the ultimate climax of His mission to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Unlike others who had been resurrected from the dead, Jesus Christ did not die again. Other men's works cease at death, but not so with Jesus Christ whose work included His own resurrection from the grave. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the deathblow to Satan and the assurance that we will be resurrected from the grave someday. Failure to resurrect from the grave would have disproved Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and the Son of God. Simply put, **without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there would be no Christianity!**

Jesus Christ resurrected from the grave on Sunday, April 9, A.D. 30 (or A.D. 33 depending whether allowances are taken into consideration for an error in our calendar). Jesus Christ was crucified Friday, April 7. Many awesome events transpired that day: an earthquake, the veil of the Temple was torn in half, darkness engulfed the earth and dead saints walked throughout Jerusalem. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus hurriedly buried Jesus Christ before the Sabbath began that evening at 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 8, the Sanhedrin persuaded Pilate to seal and guard the tomb of Jesus Christ. The Jewish leaders did not expect Jesus Christ to resurrect, but they feared the disciples would steal the body of Jesus and claim that he resurrected. Pilate provided soldiers for the tomb to be guarded until after the third day.

Sunday, April 9, Jesus Christ arose! The world calls this day "Easter Sunday," but the Bible contains no religious instruction commemorating it as a holy day. An angel rolled back the stone sealing the tomb. The guards were frightened by the resurrection of the Lord but were bribed by the Jews to say Jesus' disciples stole his body while they slept. Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and other women went to the tomb while it was yet dark, but they found the tomb empty. They reported the empty tomb to Peter and John who ran to the tomb to see for themselves.

The resurrected Christ made several appearances on the day of his resurrection. Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ (Mark 16:9); Jesus had cast seven demons out of her. She told the apostles but they did not believe her (Mark 16:10-11). A group of faithful women also saw the resurrected Lord (Matthew 28:9-10). Jesus Christ appeared to two disciples as they walked in the country, but they were not believed when they told other disciples (Mark 16:12-13). Jesus Christ appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34). Jesus appeared to ten of the apostles (John 20:13-23). Judas who betrayed Jesus Christ was already dead, and Thomas was not present with the rest of the apostles (John 20:24).

The resurrected Christ showed Himself alive for 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). On April 16, Jesus Christ appeared to the remaining eleven apostles, including Thomas (John 20:26-28). Later, Jesus appeared to seven apostles at the

Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23). Another occasion of a great catch of fish occurred. Jesus impressed Peter with the need to be loyal and humble by repeatedly asking Peter if he loved Christ. Jesus Christ appeared to the eleven apostles at the Ascension (Luke 24; Acts 1). Obviously, the candidates for an apostle to replace Judas had seen the resurrected Lord as that was one of the requirements to be an apostle (Acts 1:21-23). Over 500 brethren at one time saw the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:6).

The resurrected Christ appeared to some after his Ascension. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, saw the resurrected Christ just before Stephen died from stoning (Acts 7:55-56). Saul of Tarsus (the apostle Paul) saw the resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26; 1 Corinthians 15:8).

The death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ was prophesied. Jesus Christ took the form of flesh, lived on the earth, died and was resurrected. The enemies of Jesus Christ tried in vain to keep Him in the tomb, and they could offer no evidence that He had not resurrected, which most certainly they would have done from Pentecost forward when Jesus Christ was preached that He arose from the grave (Acts 2:24, 31,32; 3:15; 4:10, 33; 5:30-32; 10:40,41; 13:30-34; 17:2,3,31; 26:23; Romans 1:4; etc.). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was proved by appearances in which He appeared at different hours of the day and on several different days. Jesus walked, talked and ate food with his disciples.

The disciples who had mourned His death and were skeptical concerning His resurrection were convinced that He resurrected, and they were willing to die torturous deaths if necessary while defending the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Over 500 brethren had seen the resurrected Christ at one time, a sufficient body of witnesses to satisfy any judge and jury.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ became the basis for the promotion of Christianity. Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity would be empty and useless (1 Corinthians 15:19). The heart of Christianity is contained in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4! ***“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. 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.”***

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for you and me, and He resurrected so that your sins and my sins could be remitted. ***“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”*** (1 Corinthians 15:17). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is meaningless to anyone who either has become an erring child of God or has never been baptized for the remission of sins (Romans 6:23; 1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:26; Acts 2:38). †

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Angels

Betty Burton Choate

We speak of “angels” in various senses of the word: “You’re just an angel!” means that some human has done an exceptionally sweet thing for us.

Biblically, “an angel” has reference to a created spirit being. We read of angels that are the host of heaven surrounding the throne of God, but we also read of “fallen angels” who followed Satan in his rebellion against God.



Another reference is to “*the Angel of the Lord*”. Careless reading might result in the conclusion that this is a created spirit being, perhaps with wings, but according to the context, “*the Angel of the Lord*” is One of the Godhead, One who served as messenger and mediator between God and man, particularly during the Old Testament period. Evidence shows that this One was the Word who was ultimately born as the Son of God and the Son of man. For further study on this point, compare the following passages: John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Exodus 3; John 8:58,59; Exodus 14:19; 23:20; 33:2-5;14; Joshua 5:13,14; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.

Of course, we relish having good people around us who are supportive in every way. We thank God for these, since many of them are in our spiritual family, the church. But of consideration in this study is the created spirit beings who are called angels. The word itself means “messenger”. Created by God, intended to be “ministering spirits”, angels ultimately were divided into two camps: the obedient and the disobedient. Sadly, according to Jesus’ own words, those humans who fail to obey God will also suffer the fate of the disobedient angels: “*Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:’*” (Matthew 25:40-42).

GOD

But what of the obedient angels? What is their task? Do they spend eternity surrounding God's throne and praising Him? Or is there other work assigned to them?

Since the very idea of angels falls into the realm of the supernatural, and since we understand from Scripture that the miraculous age has ended (1 Corinthians 12:30,31; 13:8-13), some among us would say that any activity on the part of angels would be miraculous — so they do nothing among humans today. The Scriptures, however, tell a different story.

Are there angels among us? Are they involved with the affairs and activities of humans? Let us consider the information in these passages of the Bible, defining the ongoing work of angels:

Daniel 10:18-20: "... the one having the likeness of a man touched me... Then he said, 'Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come.'"

The appearance of the angel, speaking to Daniel and telling him what he was doing, would be counted as "of the miraculous age", but of the conflict itself no historical record hints of miracles or visions of angels in these battles for supremacy. To humans looking on, it was no more than human conflict. However, this passage, as well as others, including 2 Kings 19:35,36, show that angels can be directly involved in human struggles for power.

Acts 12:23: "Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died."

The historical record of Herod's end makes no mention of anything miraculous; he simply died a horrible death. But Scripture informs us that the cause of his death was his evil life and God's direct punishment at the hand of an angel.

Acts 8:3: "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert."

Again, the appearance of this angel and his message to Philip would be counted as in the age of miracles, but even today God does bring the messenger of salvation to those who are searching for the Truth through providential connections. Often, in biblical accounts, angels in the ordinary form of men, spoke unrecognized to people.

GOD

Luke 16:22: “So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.”

This Scripture pulls back the curtain of that eternal world for us and allows us to know that the soul, leaving the dead body, is carried away by angels.

Matthew 18:10: “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”

Sometimes people speak of a person’s “guardian angel”, based on this verse of Scripture. Whether or not each one of us has our own guardian angel, we would agree that in some sense — according to this Scripture — angels are entrusted with the care of humans, and evidently particularly of children.

Revelation 16:1: “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.”

Exactly what is literal and what is figurative in the book of Revelation may be up for debate, but the entire book is filled with movement and involvement of angels in the affairs of earth. This passage seems to be saying that God will send angels to bring calamity on those nations that are flagrantly evil.

Hebrews 1:14; 13:2: “Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”

What a clear and reassuring message is contained in these verses! They show that even today, during the non-miraculous Christian Age, angels are God’s servants, working on behalf of His children. Hebrews 13:2 even says that there can be angelic appearances — looking like ordinary humans — in our own lives!

Truly, as Jesus promised, He does not leave us in this alien world as helpless orphans (John 14:18)! Every needed tool is available to Him, and He will be involved with matters as great as nation building or demolition, or as insignificant as the individual needs at any given moment in the life of one of His children — or in the life of some isolated soul seeking Him. As He said, *“Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”* †

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NEVER MAN SO SPAKE

Wayne Jackson

At the conclusion of the feast of the tabernacles, the Lord Jesus had stood and cried, ***“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink”*** (John 7:37). What a controversial invitation that was! There is little wonder that it caused such a stir among the people, some affirming that Jesus was ***“the prophet”*** (Deuteronomy 18:15-19), others alleging that He was the Christ, and some denying both, so that a division arose among the multitude concerning Christ. The chief priests and Pharisees sent a group of deputies to arrest the Lord, but they returned empty-handed. When these officials were pressed as to why they had failed in their mission, they replied, amazingly, ***“Never man so spake”*** (John 7:46). Their answer deserves careful analysis. **No man ever spake as He, for He was more than man; He was deity in the flesh** (John 1:1, 14).

First, they acknowledged, ***“Never man so spake.”*** “Never” is an awfully long time! These officers were undoubtedly sincere, and they told the truth as they felt it, but the fact is, they told far more than they knew. For never, neither before nor since Christ, has any man spoken as He did. Demosthenes is characterized as the greatest speaker of the ancient world, yet who can quote one line from his famous speech, “On the Crown”? Cicero was the most famous speaker of ancient Rome, but his orations lie buried in the dust of antiquity. Daniel Webster has been called “the greatest orator that ever lived in the Western Hemisphere,” yet few can specifically cite any of his words, though he has been dead only slightly more than a century. However, the words of Jesus’ great sermons roll from the tongues of kings and commoners alike. And His words change the lives of multitudes. Truly, there was never another like Him!

Second, the officers stressed, ***“Never man spake so.”*** There is meaning in that emphasis. These auditors of the Lord were suggesting that Jesus did not speak as a mere man! His words could not be explained in terms of mere human brilliance. His message pointed to a higher source! The Master Himself had repeatedly observed that one who is of the earth speaks like one of the earth, but one ***“from above”*** will speak as from above, so ***“he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God ...”*** (John 3:31). When the Jews marveled at His teaching, observing that He was not university-educated, the Lord plainly told them, ***“My teaching is not mine, but His that sent Me”*** (John 7:15,16). No man

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ever spoke as He, for He was more than man; He was deity in the flesh (John 1:1,14), speaking a message ordained in heaven!

Third, it is interesting to note that the temple officers acknowledged that the power of the Lord's influence was in His speaking, i.e., His words. How very different from those vain philosophies, both ancient and modern, which assert that truth is to be found within man so that each person discovers his "own" truth, so that what may be "truth" for you, may be something entirely different for me.

No, Christ came to reveal the mind of God by means of those vehicles of communication that we call "words." In the commencement of John's Gospel account, Jesus is called the divine "Word" (logos). The Greek term suggests that Christ is "the representative and expression of what God has to say to the world, in whom and by whom God's mind and purposes towards the world find their expression" (*Cremer, Biblico-Theological Lexicon of NT Greek* 396). Though in former ages the Father spoke to the patriarchs by the prophets in different ways (e.g., dreams, visions, etc.), now He has spoken through His Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2). The Lord declared, "...***the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life***" (John 6:63). How very urgent it is to know those words which He spoke!

Fourth, there is significance in that the officers announced that "***Never man spake so.***" The adverb hints of a uniqueness that set Christ's teaching apart. Consider the following: (1) Jesus was the only person to exist before His own physical conception (John 1:1,14; 8:58). He knew of the glory He shared with the Father before the world existed (John 17:5). Again, we are reminded that He claimed to be "***from above***" and thus His teaching was consistent with what He had both "***seen and heard***" before His birth (John 3:31,32). No one ever spoke like that! (2) His speaking was authoritative. The scribes of Jesus' day could hardly say "boo" without quoting a dozen rabbis of the past to buttress their assertions, but the Saviour employed no rabbinical crutches. In fact, He contradicted their legal interpretations and even dared to assert that His teachings went beyond Moses' teachings (Matthew 5:21,22,27,28,31,32,33,34,38,39,43,(44)).

It is thus no surprise that when Christ had concluded His great "Sermon on the Mount" that the multitudes "***were astonished at His teaching: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes***" (Matthew 7:28,29). (3) With wisdom divine the Lord combined tenderness and firmness; note His dealings with honest sinners (John 8:1ff) and hardened rebels (Matthew 23:13ff). No teacher had ever been so fair in His teaching. (4) In His discourses Jesus was

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able to happily combine the most profound of spiritual truths with the simplest language of expression. His parables, for example, are masterpieces in conveying truth on a level where all can understand.

Yes, those officers were quite accurate when they exclaimed, *“Never man so spake!”* †

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The Incarnation

Glen Walton

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The literal meaning of “incarnation” is to be “infleshed”. It is used in describing the coming of the Eternal Word to abide in human flesh. Among the other blessings of the incarnation, it testifies to the special way that Jesus relates to the common difficulties of humanity.

We experience thirst, hunger, sorrow, love, anger, pity, etc. He was subject to all the trials and tribulations of human life, and thus has perfect sympathy and understanding for His people. The Hebrews writer stated it this way: *“For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:15,16). Never be afraid to approach the Lord in time of trouble, because He understands.

He is also familiar with joy, and His people can share with Him in their happiest hours. Friends and loved ones sometimes fail to appreciate the delight that floods the soul of a Christian. When there is no rapport with earthly associates, there can be a marvelous fellowship of joy with the Son of God.

One of the greatest messages of the incarnation is that Jesus identifies with us in our sorrow and joy! †

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Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?

Dan Wheeler

Sarah's reluctance to believe in the prediction of her bearing a child brought a rhetorical rebuke: ***“Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son”*** (Genesis 18:14 KJV). The Word of the LORD came true just as He had said, and Isaac was born the next year. Abraham became the father of a great nation, even though he was childless when this promise was first made (Genesis 12:2; 15:3,4).

Others found out the answer to the question. If you doubt it, just ask...

- Noah after his family was saved in the ark (Genesis 6-8)
- Joshua after the walls of Jericho fell (Joshua 6)
- Naaman the leper, cleansed after washing seven times in the Jordan (2 Kings 5)
- The people who saw Jesus do ***“all things well”*** (Mark 7:37)
- Martha and Mary after their brother was raised from a putrid grave (John 11)
- Peter after Jesus forgave and restored him after his denial (John 21:15-17)
- The brethren who saw Christ resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)
- The multitude who heard the Gospel, each man in his own language (Acts 2)
- The apostle John after seeing the revelation of the holy city (Revelation 21)

God can even make hell-bound sinners (e.g. ***“fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners”***) able to inherit the kingdom of God through the work of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). He does this when we obey the Gospel by repenting and being baptized (Acts 2:38) for the remission of our sins.

If God is so powerful, why doesn't He do for us what we want, just like the feminine Arabian bottle dweller in “I Dream of Jeannie”? Why won't our problems go away? The prophet Isaiah told a complacent people, ***“Behold the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear”*** (Isaiah 59:1,2). God is not a wish-granter. However, we have many blessings, more than we can count, and in the long run, we know that ***“all things work together for them that love God”*** (Romans 8:28). †

Dan Wheeler preaches for the Concord Street congregation in Orlando, Florida, USA.

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The Miracle Spaghetti

Bob Plunket

After Christmas with the delicious ham, turkey, dressing, and cranberry sauce, I thought some spaghetti would be nice. Jan made up a big pot of spaghetti and meatballs (it was actually noodles and meatballs). We ate spaghetti for days, and every time it seemed to grow bigger. I know it must swell when you warm it up. That's why I called it "miracle spaghetti". I would ask, "What's for supper?" She would say, "How about spaghetti...you wanna spaghetti, you gotta spaghetti." She speaks a little Italian. Then I came up with a great idea of putting it in a fancy bowl and melting cheese over the top and having all the kids over. I figured it would take about twenty-seven to clean it up. We never got them together.

This reminded me of the manna in the wilderness. It came with the dew every morning. However, they were to get just enough to last that day. Those who tried to hoard it found it spoiled the next morning. This is where Jan made her mistake. She tried to make enough for the whole winter.

I know this wasn't miracle spaghetti, but I declare, it looked bigger every time we warmed it up. This reminded me of God's gifts. You do not use up the sun that warms us. It just keeps shining even when the clouds are over it. The moon does not stop its reflective glory. We take enormous amounts of water from our rivers and lakes, but they just keep on giving us more water from the good rain that falls on the earth. How is it that the ground, year after year and generation after generation, keeps giving us food? The air we breathe is not used up with all the billions that breathe it. This is no mere accident, this is according to natural law set in motion by God in the creation.

But even greater are the spiritual blessings. We cannot exhaust the love of God. In spite of our weaknesses and failures, God still loves us. God's love is patient. He waited in the days of Noah while the ark was preparing, for men to change. The prodigal did not exhaust the love of God. When he repented, God met him with open arms. His forgiveness cannot be exhausted as long as His children can repent. The Psalmist says in Psalm 86:5, ***"Thou Lord are good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee."***

No wonder Jeremiah says in Lamentations 3:23, speaking of the mercies of God, ***"They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness."*** †

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REASONS FOR BELIEVING THE RECORD

Ardron Hinton

Some consider anyone gullible and unenlightened who actually believes the New Testament record of events relating to Christ. The reported circumstances concerning His birth, the reports of His miracles, reports about His death and what it accomplished, and the report of His resurrection are all denied by many who consider themselves too enlightened to believe reports that are so contrary to the conclusions of modern materialistic intellectuals. They conclude that such things cannot happen, therefore reports such as those in the New Testament cannot be correct and should be dismissed without further consideration.

Is this sweeping negative reaction to the New Testament reports justified? Is the supporting evidence really non-existent, or is it being ignored? Let's look at some facts relating to the case.

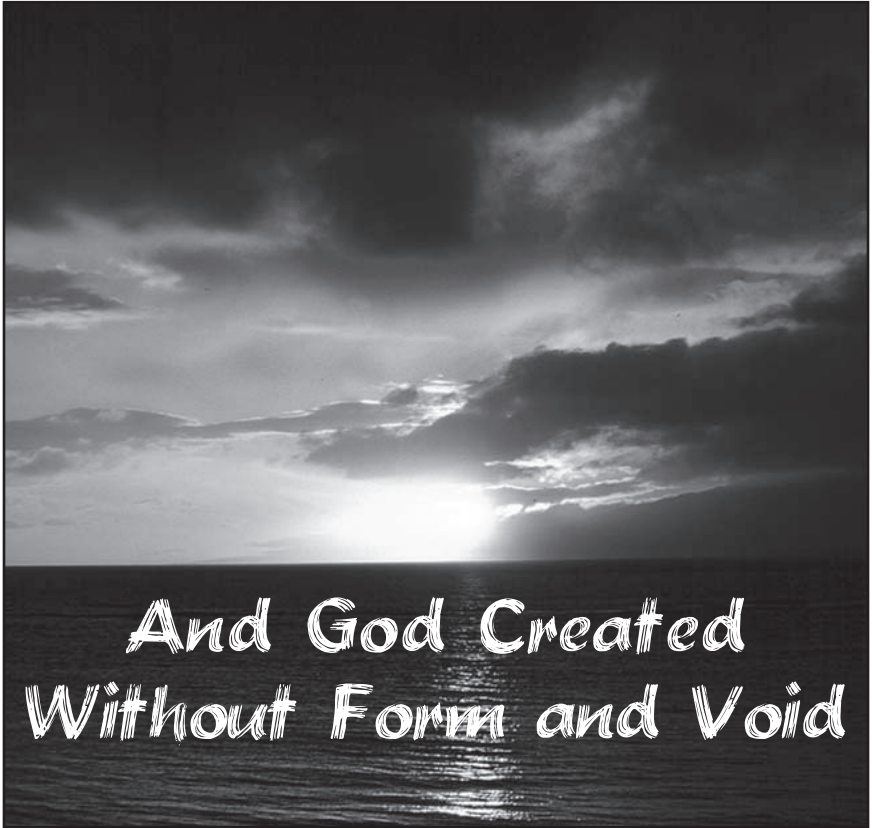
1. As the New Testament describes the church in its beginning, it was a spiritual institution ruled over by Christ from heaven. It had no earthly headquarters, no political alliances, and no military arm. In spite of its physical limitations, it spread steadily and widely from its beginning. Paul declared in Romans 1:8, ***“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”*** In contrast, Islam, for example, was imposed on people through the use of military might and political control, while Christianity achieved its growth through the power and influence of its message. This message is unique, able to transform entire ethnic groups into nobler and more caring people. Its basic beliefs inspire high standards and personal liberties in nations. It contains teachings that will revolutionize society to the degree that they are practiced. If Bible information is not to be believed, how do you explain the marvelous “fruit” it has produced?
2. Jesus made bold claims concerning Himself. He claimed to be divine and to be exercising all the authority of the Godhead. There can be no middle ground here. He is, or He is not. If He is not, the doubters are left with only two choices: (1) He really believed this claim, so He must have been crazy. (2) He knew it was not so, thus He was a liar and a fraud. Weighing evidence, who can believe either? Can an afflicted brain produce such a marvelous code for right living? Is a dishonest person likely to do so? On the other hand, if Jesus is who He claimed to be, then His work as the Great Teacher is not at all surprising.

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3. Paul made the resurrection of Christ the main proof of His genuineness (1 Corinthians 15). In verses 3-8, He listed some of the witnesses: ***“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, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.*** Several hundred people who knew Him well verified that the same teacher who had been killed at the insistence of Jewish leaders was indeed alive among them after being entombed. Paul wrote this while most of these witnesses were still living. Two leading Jews had buried Jesus. They had wrapped and anointed His dead body. Roman guards were posted. Yet He was seen alive again by reputable witnesses who risked their lives to affirm this. It is an undisputed fact that first the Jews and then the Romans tried to suppress this new religion with violence, yet there is no evidence that they were able to disprove the resurrection.
4. The reports of miracles by Jesus and His associates as evidence of the supernatural origin of their message have been rejected by materialistic worldly minds of our day. As Paul said to Festus (Acts 26:26), ***“These things were not done in a corner.”*** His enemies did not deny the miracles, they simply closed their minds to their significance. These were not tricks or staged performances. They were openly done under varied circumstances that allowed no sleight of hand and that left no doubt concerning the miraculous nature of the event. Thousands of people who heard the message when it was first delivered and who saw it confirmed by these signs (Hebrews 2:1-4) lived until the second century. These miracles did not do away with natural law, but momentarily suspended it.
5. The written material available on the early history of the Christian religion is tremendous. No other religious movement from so far back in history can produce such evidence concerning its beginnings and the reliability of its message. Extensive writings by men eighteen and nineteen centuries closer to the events attest to the validity and reliability of the Bible record. Unbelievers can reject this fact, but they cannot deny its truthfulness. †

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EVIDENCES



Dave Everson

“And the earth was without form, and void: and darkness moved upon the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2).

In verse two of the Book of Genesis, we are given by God details about the early moments of creation. The earth that had been created is now described. God says that it *“was without form, and void.”* The Hebrew words here are “tohuw and bohaw” and *Strong’s Greek and Hebrew Dictionary* gives several concepts for the definition. It denotes the idea of “a worthless thing, an empty place, confusion, a desolation, to lie waste, and an indistinguishable ruin.” The *King*

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James translation of something without form and empty is a good and accurate rendering of the original words, from everything I can read.

The reason that this is such an important point is the fact that this is a verse to which some in the world and even some in the church turn to support their ideas. They go here to provide time for events that the scientific community says had to happen for the earth to form. When one looks at the earth, it appears to be old. It is said coal takes millions of years to form; the fossils of fish, plants, dinosaurs and other life forms make it look like the earth is of great age. These facts and others are interpreted as being proof of a vast age for the earth. There are some who want to believe that the Bible account is true and that God did create the world, but they also want to agree with the “scientific” opinions popular today. So, they go to the Bible and try to find a possible place to have these events occur.

It is felt that in verse one the earth described here is a fully functional one with plants, animals and natural processes occurring that were to prepare the world for man’s habitation. Those who hold this view believe that a great, undetermined period of time passed, millions if not even billions of years before verse two occurs. It is here that those who hold this view must take liberties with the original words, for they need to have the word “was” in verse two to be “became”. They need the world to be destroyed in some fashion, which then requires a “re-creation”. This, they say, allows time for gas, oil and coal formation, the formation of fossils, and the reign of dinosaurs, among other things. This is just speculation on the part of those who hold this view and is a desire to bend the inspired Word of God to the interpretations and opinions of worldly scientists.

If we carefully read Genesis, verses one and two, we can see that there does not appear to be any amount of time that passes. It reads as if the events of verse one happen and then immediately more details are given in verse two of the process to fashion and form an unfinished product. The final phrase in that verse gives more clues to that original earth: ***“and darkness was upon the face of the deep”***. The early earth of verses one and two of Genesis was not a place where the animals and plants that God created could exist, so he continued to mold and shape the earth for our use. It was a dark, formless structure, void of anything other than the most fundamental of frameworks, and God proceeded to make those changes to it all in day one of the creation week! We cannot add millions and billions of years to the inspired Scripture by playing word games with the passages in Genesis 1:1 and 2! †

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Lord, Clothe Me in Your Truth

Randall Caselman

Truth is defined as that which is real, genuine, certain, valid, and factual. Truth is actuality, that which can be trusted because it is reality. In the Bible, truth is spoken of as an attribute of God. Twice Isaiah tells us that God is the God of truth, ***“So that he who blesses himself in the earth Shall bless himself in the God of truth...”*** (Isaiah 65:16). Titus 1:2, in speaking of our hope, describes it as the ***“hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began...”***, contending with these words that God cannot lie. So, that which is revealed by God, inspired by God, and breathed by God is truth and can be trusted as genuine and valid. Note some truths about truth:

Truth Can Be Known

Jesus said, ***“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (John 8:32). There is a truth we can know! His truth is found in Scripture, the inspired Word of God. John wrote, ***“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”*** (John 1:14). Jesus plainly stated that He was the truth in John 14:6: ***“I am the way and the truth and the life.”*** Do we know truth? Are we searching for truth, which is both the written and living Word?

Truth Obeyed Sanctifies

Jesus prayed, ***“Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth”*** (John 17:17). As we respond to the guidance of the Spirit, we are cleansed by truth. Paul tells us as much in Ephesians 5: ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”*** (Ephesians 5:25-27). You see, guilt has no place in the life of God’s children or God’s church, because obedience of truth sanctifies.

Truth Sets Us Free and Apart

What is sanctification? It is being freed from sin and the eternal consequences of sin. Sanctification sets us free and sets us apart. When we are washed with

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water by the Word, we are raised to walk in a newness of life (Romans 6:4). Paul goes on to say that we become instruments of righteousness, living sacrifices (verse 13). Peter says we are a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9). As we allow the Spirit of truth to lead us, as we keep in step with Him, we produce His fruit: *“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”* (Galatians 5:22-26). Indeed, His fruit sets us apart from the world. Right?

Truth Should Set Us Ablaze

Remember Jeremiah? *“His Word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot”* (Jeremiah 20:9). If and when we are genuinely convinced that we have the truth of God in us, we cannot hold it back. Like Jeremiah, we are forced to practice and proclaim His truth before others. His truth sets us ablaze in another way also: It keeps us from sin. David wrote, *“I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You”* (Psalm 119:11). Truth hidden in our heart regulates our attitude, our disposition, and daily behavior.

Truth Must Be Contended For

Jude 1:3 instructs us to *“contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”* The faith refers to that body of truth once delivered. This truth is not only to be practiced and proclaimed, it is to be defended. Why? Because it is the good news of the Gospel that saves. In Colossians 1:5 Paul speaks of *“the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the Word of truth, the Gospel.”* Indeed, we must contend for the faith, stand up for truth, fight the good fight, keep the faith — because we are the pillar and ground of the truth.

What is truth? What is our relationship to truth? Do we know it? Do we know Him? Are we being led by His Spirit? Are we bearing His fruit? Are we obeying and proclaiming truth? Are we walking in the light of truth? Have we been clothed with His truth? I pray that we are. *“So if the Son sets you free... You will be free indeed”* (John 8:36). Indeed! †

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Disputing the Lord

Carroll Sites

I read of a preacher who delivered a sermon on the subject of eternal punishment. The next day a young man came to see him to dispute what he had heard preached concerning hell. As he spoke to the preacher he said, "I believe that there is a difference between what you and I believe about eternal punishment. I came here today in order to settle this difference."

The preacher thought for a few moments and then turned to the young man and said, "There is no dispute between you and me. If you will turn and read Matthew 25:46, you will find the dispute is between you and the Lord Jesus Christ. He clearly said, *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* I advise you to go immediately and settle it with Him."

When a preacher preaches truth and someone disputes it, the dispute is not with the preacher, but with God's truth. For instance:

1. The Bible says God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The atheists say He did not. **Their dispute is with God.**
2. The Bible says that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). The Jews say He is not. **Their dispute is with God.**
3. The Bible says without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). The Universalists say everyone will be saved, regardless. **Their dispute is with God.**
4. The Bible says faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Many religious people just say, "Trust your feelings and everything will be OK." **Their dispute is with God.**
5. The Bible says there is one church, and the Lord adds the saved to it (Ephesians 4:4; 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18, 24; Acts 2:47). Denominationalism says there are many — pick one and join it. **Their dispute is with God.**
6. Jesus said all of His people are to be united together in one body and to speak the same thing (John 17:20,21; Ephesians 2:16; 1 Corinthians

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1:10). Denominationalists say, “Let’s all be divided up in many religious bodies, speaking different things.” **Their dispute is with God.**

7. Jesus said to believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). Many say baptism is not necessary to salvation. **Their dispute is with God.**
8. Jesus says to be faithful until death and receive a crown of life (Revelation 2:10). The Calvinists say it is impossible for a Christian to be lost, whether faithful or not. **Their dispute is with God.**

Friend, what do YOU say? When we dispute what the Bible plainly teaches, we are not disputing what some preacher says — we are disputing with God who gave the Bible to us! †

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Man’s Needs

Perry N. Hall

Everything God has made is essential. He made food, air, and water; man needs all of them. We can’t live without them. We do not hear people calling any one of them “non-essential”. We would not want to be forced to choose to leave off food, air, or water, for we know that we could not live long in so doing.

Jesus said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4). Yes, God gave man the Bible, because it meets a need that is as definite as the need for food, water, and air. The Bible is the only book that saves man from sin and gives him spiritual life (James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:22-25). When the pagan world did not want to retain God in its knowledge, it fell into all kinds of vices (Romans 1:18-32). There has never been a people that escaped destruction when they forgot God; condemnation awaits all who deny Him. The Bible is the light that guides men to the immortal port of eternal peace, and it is never dimmed for those with eyes of genuine faith (Ephesians 1:18f). †

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Don't Corrupt God's Word

Ken Tyler

The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:17, ***“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God...”*** From this verse we see that there were many people in Paul’s day who were corrupting the Word of God. I wonder what he would say today if he lived in our world which is filled with religious division, evidenced by thousands of different churches. With the passing of centuries and population growth, the departure from God’s Word has increased more and more. I am amazed that people believe they can do just about anything in the name of religion. The fact is vivid when you think about the killing and tormenting taking place throughout the world because of erroneous religious beliefs.

The words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:17 need to ring long and loud in our ears today. Like Paul, we must not corrupt God’s Word. Yes, many may be doing it, but Paul said, ***“...we are not as many which corrupt the word of God...”*** What we need are people who believe God’s Word and are not ashamed to stand where it stands. Homosexuality and lesbianism are trying to take over our society. It is unbelievable that some who claim to be religious do not believe this conduct is wrong. Paul, in speaking of the sinful practices of the Gentiles, plainly condemned homosexuality and lesbianism in Romans 1. Notice carefully verses 26 and 27, ***“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”*** These statements should settle the matter.

Isaiah spoke some words a long time ago that plainly describe our situation today. He said, ***“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter”*** (Isaiah 5:20)! The prophet was speaking of those who have their values all messed up. They were calling the evil good and the good evil. How true this is today!

I pray all of us will stand right where God’s Word stands. We must respect it, study it, and obey it. Don’t corrupt it, don’t bend it to fit your particular problem or situation; just do what it says. I promise you, you will be glad you did. ☩

Ken Tyler is a Gospel preacher working with the church of Christ in Arab, Alabama, USA.



1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Jerry Bates



1. Who wrote 1 Corinthians? (v. 1)
2. How did Paul become an apostle? (v. 1)
3. What were the Christians in Corinth called? (v. 2)
4. To whom does the church in Corinth (and everywhere else) belong? (v. 2)
5. For what was Paul always thankful? (v. 4)
6. With whom do Christians have fellowship? (v. 9)
7. For what did Paul plead in verse 10?
8. Christians should be “perfectly joined together in the same _____ and in the same _____”. (v. 10)
9. How had Paul heard that there were divisions in the church at Corinth? (v. 11)
10. After what four names were the Corinthians calling themselves? (v. 12)
11. Why should they be united only in Christ? (v. 13)
12. Who had Paul personally baptized? (vs. 14, 16)
13. Why was Paul glad he had not baptized very many? (v. 15)
14. For what purpose did Christ send Paul to Corinth? (v. 17)
15. Why did Paul not preach with great wisdom? (v. 17)
(see the back cover for answer)

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. 16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

NOTE: This epistle was written to the church in Corinth. This church had several problems that Paul addressed in this letter. The first problem was one of division. Division has always been a problem in the church; nevertheless, it clearly is not in accordance with God's plan. This unity is not just some external unity, or a false unity obtained by simply ignoring our differences, but a unity of our hearts and minds as the one body of Christ.

In this section Paul said that he was thankful he had not baptized many people. This is not reducing the importance of baptism, as some claim. Some in Corinth were apparently basing their allegiance to whoever had personally taught them or baptized them. This contributed to the division of the church, which was wrong. It does not matter who teaches or baptizes, because we are to be united in Christ. All men are merely servants of Christ. Christ is the one who died for us and saves us, not any man.

Our Eternal Reward

Danny Boggs

Born to parents who were part European and part Sac and Fox Indian, young Jim Thorpe suffered the prejudice of being regarded as an Indian. He struggled to stay in school, and both of his parents died by the time he was fifteen. But for three days in 1912 Jim Thorpe valiantly proved true to his Indian name, “Wa-Ho-Thuck,” which means “Bright Path.”

In 1912 Jim made the U.S. Olympic Team. At the Games in Stockholm, Sweden, he completed the one-day, five-event pentathlon and the two-day, ten-event decathlon. He captured gold medals in both events by wide margins. Jim scored 8,412 points in the decathlon, more than double the total of his closest rival. His mark was not topped for 36 years.

Upon his return to the United States, Jim was greeted with a victory parade on Broadway in New York City. President Taft told him, “You are the highest type of citizen this country can produce, and we are proud of you.” In 1950 a group of writers named Jim the outstanding all-around athlete of the first half of the twentieth century.

After the Olympics, Jim starred in football and baseball, but his fortunes soon reversed. It became known that prior to the Olympics Jim had been paid to play semipro baseball in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Olympic standards did not allow an athlete to be paid to play one sport and remain an amateur in another. Only amateurs were allowed in the Olympics.

Jim wrote a letter to the Amateur Athletics Union saying that he didn’t know he was doing anything wrong. However, the AAU declared that Jim had been ineligible for Olympic competition because he had been a professional athlete. He was stripped of his gold medals, and his name was erased from the record books. Jim spent the rest of his life drifting from job to job and through several failed marriages. During the Great Depression he worked with a pick and shovel for \$4 a day. Jim Thorpe died in 1953, a penniless alcoholic.

More recently we have seen athlete after athlete forced to forfeit medals because of knowingly not playing by the rules.

Praise be to God that once *our* race is run, *our award is unalterable*. God **“will render to each one according to His works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life” (Romans 1:6,7)**. Our prize is **“imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in**

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heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). Once we receive it, it will be ours forever.

Paul exhorted, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified”* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). We know the rules. According to John 12:48, the Word that Jesus has spoken will judge us on the last day.

Let’s press toward the prize like Paul did. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7,8). †

Danny Boggs preaches for the Hillcrest church of Christ in Neosho, Missouri, USA.



SALVATION

THE BEST FOR LAST

Bill Dillon

The ruler of the marriage feast stated a far-reaching principle when he said, *“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now!”* (John 2:10).

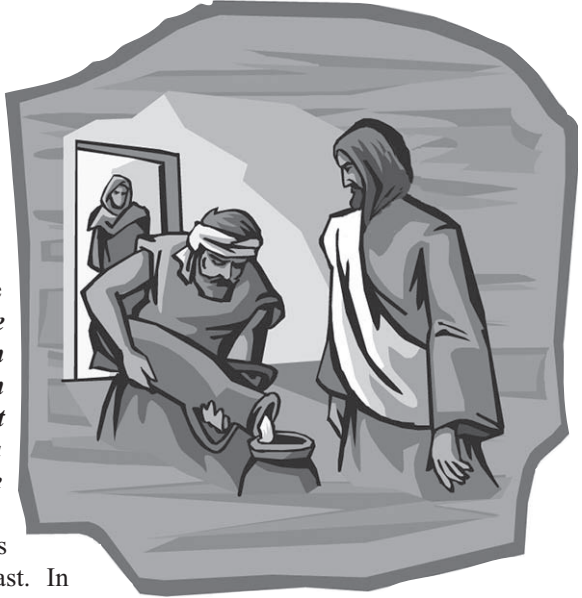
God’s way has always been to save the *best* for last. In creation, after all other things were formed, God fashioned man on the sixth day. Man was the jewel in the crown of creation (Genesis 1:24-31).

Satan’s way is to reserve the *worst* for last. Years of tobacco smoking pleasure eventually give way to a picture of an operating room with blood oozing from capillaries while the surgeon labors to remove a cancerous growth from a lung. The pleasurable ways are offered first, without warning of the lethal consequences which will follow. Life’s greatest enjoyments endure but for a breathtakingly brief time, then the worst comes last.

In Luke 16, Abraham said of Lazarus, *“Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented!”*

Friend, have you your “good things” now? Apart from Jesus Christ, your life now, however pleasurable, will eventually sour in death!

By contrast, the life of faith in Jesus Christ enters that ceaseless journey of eternity after this life is over. By faith we press on with joy unspeakable, knowing God will save the best for last. †



Bill Dillon preaches for the Lord’s church in Cotter, Arkansas, USA.

SALVATION

When Was Saul Saved?

Raymond Elliott



Luke, the inspired historian, records the conversion of Saul in Acts chapter nine. In chapters 22 and 26, Paul reviews his conversion while making a defense of his character and work. When someone is asked when Saul was saved, a typical response is, “When he saw the Lord on the road to Damascus.” A famous country singer released a song during his life entitled, “I Saw the Light.” No doubt many have claimed to have “seen the light” while asserting that they were saved at that moment in time. But, was Saul really saved when he saw a light on the road to Damascus? You are urged to read again these three chapters in the book of Acts to learn the truth of the matter. Please study carefully the following observations:

1. If Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, he did not know it because he asked, **“Lord, what do You want me to do?”** (Acts 9:6). There is no denial that Saul, at this time, became a believer in Jesus Christ, but, was he saved? If so, what was the significance of the question, **“Lord, what do You want me to do?”**
2. If Saul was saved when he saw the Lord on the Damascus road, the Lord Himself did not know it because He told Saul to **“arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”** Certainly, this would have been the

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opportune time for the Lord to have informed Saul of his salvation if he had been saved at this point in the process of his conversion.

3. Further, if Saul was saved while on the road to Damascus, the disciple Ananias, whom the Lord had sent to Saul, did not know it, for he said to Saul, ***“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”*** (Acts 22:16). Saul had believed in Christ. He had been a penitent person, as indicated by his actions, ***“And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank”*** (Acts 9:9). In verse eleven of the same chapter, we read that during this period of time Saul was constant in prayer. Yet, when Ananias came to him, Saul was still unsaved. We know this because Ananias instructed him to ***“arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins...”*** (Acts 22:16). How could sins be washed away if there were no sins? It would have been completely unnecessary to tell a person to obey a command in order to have his sins forgiven if in fact his sins had already been forgiven.
4. Finally, Paul did not understand his sins had been remitted on the road to Damascus, because he obeyed the requirements given by the Lord through Ananias. How do we know this to be true? Later, when Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome, he said, ***“Or do you not know that as many of us [plural pronoun, including himself] as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we [plural pronoun, including himself] were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”*** (Romans 6:3,4). When was Saul baptized ***“into Christ Jesus”***? At the time when he was instructed by Ananias to do so. It was then that his sins were washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29; Revelation 1:5).

It is very interesting to note that neither faith nor repentance was mentioned in this example of a person’s conversion to the Lord, but both prerequisites were necessarily implied; yet, the very command that was given by Ananias — that is water baptism — remains controversial in the religious world today. Also, there were other reasons why the Lord appeared to Saul as he traveled to Damascus, namely, that He was going to send him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles and that Saul was going to suffer for the name of the Lord. †

Raymond Elliott preaches for the Capitol Heights church in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

SALVATION

“If a Man Die...”

Dean Fugett

To say that man is, and has always been, interested in eternal life in one form or another is an understatement. Whenever he has not been able to discover an organized religion that promised this life as he dreams it, he has summarily made one up! Many existing religions are testimony of man's interest in eternity. The great pyramids of Egypt show us the lengths to which some would go to insure happiness after life here on earth.

We do not base OUR hopes of eternity on cunningly devised fables of men, nor on the great monuments of finely decorated tombs. Our hope is based upon the promises of Christ and an empty tomb near Jerusalem. The promises of Christ are securely tied to His conditions of discipleship. To remove the conditions of discipleship severs the covenant of the promises. The raising of Christ from the dead was in answer to the prophets (Acts 2:30,31). Our being raised from the dead will be in fulfillment of a promise of the Lord which will be realized as a result of our sincere, obedient response to God. Paul assures us that just as God raised Christ, even so shall He raise us.

Thus, we do not build great monuments with provisions for an existing afterlife, fashioned of stone and like materials. We build on living ***“soberly, righteously and godly in this present life”*** (Titus 2:11,12), fashioned in the likeness of Christ, based upon His Word and in obedience to His Lordship. Then, we rest in the hope of His promises that He is the Savior of all them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:8,9). The end of those who do not obey Christ, regardless of their provisions in tombs or religions fashioned according to their imagination, is clearly set forth in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9: ***“and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...”***

If you are interested in eternal life, we urge that you read your Bible carefully, honestly, and obediently. Obey the Gospel of Christ, live in His church in godliness, and face death with the assurance of the resurrection of Christ as the pledge of our own resurrection. †

Dean Fugett is a preacher and an elder with the church of Christ in Cave City, Arkansas, USA.

THE CHURCH



A Look at Paul's Preaching

Clarence DeLoach

In a time of dangerous trends, every gospel preacher can find a spiritual tonic in an examination of Paul's preaching.

In an emotion-packed meeting with the bishops of Ephesus, Paul gives one of the most comprehensive insights into the manner, method, and message of his ministry (Acts 20:17-38).

First, note his personal manner. Paul's conduct was a matter of public knowledge. There was no cover-up! He had been blameless and beyond reproach.

His manner had been the same **"at all seasons"**. This great preacher was the same, day in and day out! This suggests the stability of his life. He had taken

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seriously his own advice to Timothy, being ***“instant in season and out of season”*** (1 Timothy 4:2).

He was content to be a servant, literally a bondservant, one whose will is in complete submission to another — in his case, to ***“the Lord”***.

His service was with ***“humility of mind”***! In Paul’s day there wasn’t a keener mind, or a greater scholar within the ranks of Christianity than he. He was a privileged man by virtue of his knowledge of the law, his acquaintance with the culture, and even the poets of his day! His Roman citizenship gave him distinct advantages. Yet, he never gloried in any of these things. He looked upon the Gospel ministry as a grace bestowed upon him, of which he was totally undeserving! What humility!

There is no place in the pulpit for arrogance! Intellectual snobbery is repulsive to the *Gospel of grace*.

He served ***“with tears”***! How we need to restore tears to our religion! One of the greatest dangers preachers face is becoming so professional that we lose the capacity to cry! Like Ezekiel, we need to *sit where they sit!* Like our Master, we *should be touched by the infirmities of others*. Sowing and weeping go together, for ***“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”*** (Psalm 126:6).

Paul served *with trials!* There are definite trials in preaching! They are the hazards of the work. Why should we be exempt? When we are tempted to complain because of inadequate support, poor working conditions, or lack of cooperation from the brethren, we are a bit embarrassed as we read of Paul’s list of perils in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.

But, he served ***“with joy”***! Paul’s desire was to finish his ministry with joy (verse 24). In spite of tears and trials, it is a joyful work. Preachers who can’t find joy in their work ought to quit! Perhaps those who have left the ministry should have. How can one preach *from heart to heart* if his heart is not in the work?

There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is based upon what happens. It is dependent upon circumstances. Joy is independent of circumstances and is based upon one’s relationship with God through Christ. Paul did finish his course with joy! Among his last words were, ***“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”*** (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

Second, consider his method of preaching. “I have showed you,” he said! He was what he preached! Nothing can substitute for personal example. What he enunciated with his lips, he exemplified in his life. His talk and his walk harmonized!

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His method of teaching was both public and private. He loved to preach to the crowds, but he was also content to teach, person to person. No preacher should feel that the pulpit is his exclusive territory.

Paul testified! How unfortunate that this good word has been so abused in the religious world. Many look upon “testifying” as giving some emotional experience. However, the word means to “present evidence” and in Paul’s case it involved giving logical proof that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Acts 17:3).

He preached to both Jew and Greek. There is no place for social prejudice in the heart of one who ventures to preach Christ. Since Christ is no respecter of persons, those who serve as His messengers must emulate their Master.

Paul warned! He warned elders! He called for alertness! He cautioned the brethren about men arising from their own ranks, speaking perverse things. Some today would call him an alarmist. Shouldn’t we be alarmed when men seek to pervert the truth? Preachers need to be informed as to what is going on in the brotherhood so they can warn of men and movements that would pervert the truth.

But, Paul also commended! All of his preaching wasn’t negative. Brethren need to be encouraged! Commendation was a vital part of his letters.

Third, look at his message. It did not originate with Paul. He had received it of the Lord Jesus. It had come by revelation (Galatians 1:12).

Paul had so discharged his responsibility regarding this message that he could say, **“I am free from the blood of all men.”** He could say that because (1) he had preached the whole truth, (2) he had persuaded them to believe the Gospel, and (3) he had lived the Gospel before them.

Paul had kept back nothing profitable! Preaching is no work for cowards! Preaching what people need is not necessarily what they want! It doesn’t contribute to the popularity of the preacher, but it does convict, save, and build! People do not know what they ask when they say, **“Prophecy to us smooth things.”** When needed truth is withheld, the soul is jeopardized.

Paul preached the importance of faith and the necessity of repentance. He preached the kingdom as a present reality. He declared that the church was purchased by the blood of Christ. He described the Gospel of grace. He preached about dangers facing the church and warned of tendencies toward apostasy.

How we need Paul! How we need to be like him! May his vibrant manner, method, and message refresh our spirits in these perilous days. †

Clarence DeLoach, Jr. has preached for many years and now lives in Cookeville, Tennessee, USA.

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One Sunday morning, a preacher pointed out to one of the elders that the flower arrangement usually sitting in front of the pulpit was missing. The elder hadn't noticed it, but he certainly did now. This elder pulled all the other elders to the side and asked them if they had any knowledge of what had happened to the flower arrangement. None of them knew; so the search for the missing flower arrangement was on.

The elders called a special meeting with the deacons and asked them to help locate this arrangement, due to its great value; after all, the florist billed the church several hundred dollars for that arrangement. Every room in the church building, every closet, and every cabinet was turned upside down in the search for that missing flower arrangement. Announcements were made in the church bulletin, emails were sent out, and even a phone tree message was made to every family in the church. Still, they had no luck in recovering the missing flower arrangement.

After looking at a "bare" pulpit for a month, the preacher got up to preach. He reached down behind the pulpit, pulled out the missing flower arrangement, and placed it on its rightful stand in front of the pulpit. There were audible sighs of relief that could be heard from the unsuspecting congregation. But what followed next was this preacher's shortest, and perhaps the best and most convicting sermon he ever preached. He simply said, "I must confess, I am the one who took the flower arrangement. Why? Because I just wanted to see if, as a church, we were more stirred and moved to action by a missing flower arrangement than we were by a missing soul."

Well, what about you? If you were a member of that church, would you have been convicted of misplaced priorities that morning? Give it some thought. †

Steve Higginbotham preaches for the Karns Church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA.

THE CHURCH

Who Owns the Church?

Hollis Miller

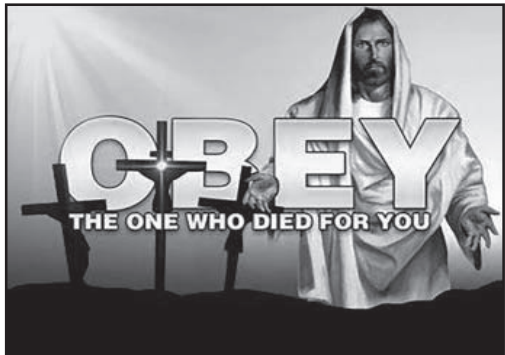
For believers in Jesus Christ the answer to the above title is easily given. Jesus said, *“Upon this rock I will build my church”* (Matthew 16:18). In addition to the Lord’s words, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Jesus does own the church. According to Acts 20:28, He purchased it with His blood. He has never sold it, nor has it been stolen from Him.

Because Jesus owns the church, anyone who usurps His authority over it is guilty of robbing the Lord of what rightfully belongs to Him. No theologian, no religious philosopher, no eldership, no deacon, no preacher, no synod or convention can decide anything that does not meet the approval of the church’s owner. The apostle Paul, a divinely appointed spokesman for Him, taught that Jesus owns the church and that He is the Head over all things that pertain to it (Acts 20:28) *“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church... For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church”* (Ephesians 1:22f; 5:23).

Elders or bishops shepherd the church, but they have no right to change what the church’s owner has set in motion. Deacons serve the church, but they cannot change any program the church’s owner has approved. Preachers can proclaim the teachings of the church’s owner, but they cannot substitute their own ideas for those the church’s owner has taught.

Who owns the church is a vital question in this day when men are busying themselves with changes here, and new ideas there. The first question to be asked when something new or different is proposed is: **Has the church’s owner said anything about it?** The church itself is not its own governing body. While certain things may appeal to the church (the people), what appeals to it is not the determining issue. †

Hollis Miller is an evangelist living in Murray, Kentucky, USA.



THE CHURCH



How to Build Up the Church

Charles Pugh III

The church was designed by God to ultimately go in one direction — UP (Colossians 3:1,2). What can you and I do

to build up the church? The book of Ephesians has as its theme the glorious church of Christ — *“Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus . . .”* (Ephesians 3:21). In Ephesians there is a section on the edifying (building up) of the church (Ephesians 4:11ff).

The church is built up when it is **STUDIED UP**. The truth builds up the church (Ephesians 4:15; cf. Acts 20:32). A physical body can be built up by good nutrition and exercise. The spiritual body (the church — Ephesians 1:22,23) must practice good nutrition and exercise regularly. The spiritually nutritious food is the Bible (1 Peter 2:2). Members of the church need to develop an appetite for the Word of God (Job 23:12; Matthew 5:6). Some fail to eat right and eat regularly. Too much junk food is eaten spiritually. Couple a poor diet with a lack of exercise (i.e., little study, prayer, attendance, service) and the church will suffer, just as any physical body will suffer from malnutrition and lack of exercise.

The church is built up when it is **USED UP**. The body is built up when every member contributes (Ephesians 4:16). We need to learn the joy of involvement.

The church is also built up when it is **TALKED UP**. What we say to one another, and about one another, either builds up or tears down (Ephesians 4:29). We need to **THINK** before we speak. T-H-I-N-K. Is what I am about to say true, helpful, inspiring, necessary, and kind?

Which direction are we taking the church through our study, our involvement, and our words? †

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

THE CHURCH



Don't Be Ashamed

J.C. Choate

Many are ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. They are ashamed to let others know that they believe in God, and that they are followers of Christ. They are ashamed of the church and are ashamed to proclaim that it is the only church that was bought and cleansed by the blood of our Lord. They are reluctant to speak out against things that are wrong and to stand up for the truth.

Why do people remain quiet? Because they love the world and want to be with the majority in the secular world and also in the religious world. They want

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to be popular and accepted. They don't want to be considered narrow-minded and associated with the minority. Rather than speak out for Christ, they quietly try to blend with their friends and neighbors, with their family members who are not Christians, so that no one will have hard feelings toward them. Their attitude is opposite that of early Christians who were willing to die rather than deny their Lord, who rejoiced *“that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5:41).

The Apostle Paul said, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:16,17).

We read, *“As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed”* (Romans 9:33). Again, *“For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed”* (Romans 10:11).

Paul declared, *“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death”* (Philippians 1:20).

Paul continued, *“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:*

“Wherefore I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:8-12).

Again, Paul said, *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15). The Hebrew writer in speaking of God and His children, said, *“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through*

THE CHURCH

sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Hebrews 2:10-12). Continuing, he said, *"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city"* (Hebrews 11:16).

Peter wrote, *"Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that ye might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit"* (1 Peter 3:16-18). He went on to say, *"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief; or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf"* (1 Peter 4:15,16).

Christ said, *"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever therefore shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:32,33). He also said, *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels"* (Mark 8:38).

My friend, where do you stand before the Lord?

Do you believe in Him (Hebrews 11:6; John 14:1), or do you reject Him?

Will you believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16), or have you accepted the teachings of men?

Are you a member of the Lord's church (Matthew 16:18), or do you belong to a denominational church that began with man?

Do you wear the name of Christ (Acts 4:12), or do you wear a manmade name?

Remember that in the last day we will be judged by the Word of the Lord itself (John 12:48).

Please do not reject Christ and His will. Do not be ashamed of Him. Believe in Him, obey Him, and live for Him, and one day He will acknowledge you as His own and give you an eternal home in heaven. †

J.C. Choate (deceased) began publication of *The Voice of Truth International* in 1993.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses Hebrews 12:22-24

... you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

This beautiful picture is describing our spiritual surroundings in worship, but it concludes with stress laid on one vital part of our worship: the Memorial Supper, as we eat the bread which is His body, and drink of the cup which is His blood that was poured out as the seal of the New Covenant, that we may be the children of God and the brother of the Lord who died for us!

In this passage, the contrast is made between the terror felt by the Israelites when they stood in the presence of God and He spoke to them from Mount Sinai, and the scenario for members of the body of Christ as we worship today: We must forget our physical surroundings and realize that in worship we approach the spiritual “Mount Zion” and **the heavenly Jerusalem**; that even as we sit in a church building, we are surrounded by **the angelic host**; that the number in our assembly may be small but that actually we are a part of **the entire church** that is worshipping at God’s throne; that we — **along with the spirits of all those who stand perfected in Christ** — are in **the presence of God** and of **Jesus Christ** who stands as Mediator between us and the Father in Heaven....



Humor

Billy's mother heard him scream and she ran into the bedroom and found his two-year old sister pulling his hair. She gently released the little girl's grip and said comfortingly to Billy, "There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts."

The mother was barely out of the room when the little girl screamed. Rushing back in, she asked, "What happened?"

Billy replied, "She knows now."



When Joe came home, his wife was crying. She sobbed, "Your mother insulted me."

"My mother? How could she do that when she is on vacation on the other side of the world?"

"I know, but this morning a letter addressed to you arrived. I opened it

because I was curious."

"And?"

"At the end of the letter she had written – 'P.S. Dear Diane, when you have finished reading this letter, don't forget to give it to my son.'"



A fellow told his neighbor, "I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me \$4,000, but it's state of the art. It's perfect."

"Really?" answered the neighbor. "What kind is it?"

"Oh, no problem. It's 2:15."



A surgeon returned some books that he had borrowed from the library. The librarian checked the books, and then said, "Sir, your books are always returned with the last page missing in every single book."

The surgeon replied, "I just can't help myself. I can't stop myself from removing an appendix whenever I see one."



One of the single girls from work came to the office one morning and began passing out candy bars all tied up with blue ribbons.

When asked what the occasion was,

PROVERBS 17:22

she joyfully announced, “It’s a boy! Six feet tall, 200 pounds!” And then she proudly displayed a diamond solitaire on her left ring finger.



Because they had no reservations at a busy restaurant, an elderly husband and wife were told that there would be a 45-minute wait for a table.

“Young man,” the husband said, “we’re both 90-years-old. We may not have 45 minutes.”

They were seated immediately.



I have decided that the reason politicians try so hard to get re-elected is that they would hate to have to make a living under the laws they have passed.



Sunday was nearly over and the preacher’s wife dropped into an easy chair saying, “Whew, am I ever tired!”

Her husband looked at her and said, “I had to conduct two special services last night, and then today I have taught another class and preached three sermons. That means that I presented six different lessons and sermons. Why are you so tired?”

“Dear,” she replied, “I had to listen to all of them.”

Some Points to Ponder

God gives us the ingredients for our daily bread, but He expects us to do the baking.



Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.



God loves His children, not because of who they are, but because of who He is!



“If men grew physically at the rate they grow spiritually, many of them would spend their lives in a playpen.”

— Gene Bennett



Be like the steam kettle! Though up to its neck in hot water, it continues to sing.



The reason a lot of people cannot find opportunity is that it goes around disguised as hard work.

What Is Not Said

David Deffenbaugh

“Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:26,27). An amazing statement, isn’t it? Paul links the preaching of the Gospel to his personal responsibility for the lives of men. The verdict, Paul claims, is his innocence!

This isn’t the first time Paul has said something like this. At Corinth he told the Jews in the synagogue, *“Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean, from now on I shall go to the Gentiles”* (Acts 18:6). The same connection is made. But, why? For the answer one must turn to the Old Testament and the instruction to the prophet Ezekiel. God tells His spokesman:

Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel: whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. Again when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

Anyone claiming to be a preacher of the Gospel has the responsibility of preaching the whole purpose of God. That message is not always a popular one. It got John beheaded, Jeremiah thrown into a muddy cistern and left for dead, Paul beaten, stoned, verbally assaulted, and so on, and Jesus...nailed to a cross. Need we even ask what the result will be if one teaches the singleness of the church, God’s laws about marital rights, male leadership in the home and in the church, and sexual purity exclusively within a monogamous heterosexual marriage?

It is not only a matter of what one teaches. What one **fails to teach** may be the biggest problem; it may determine the verdict of guilt or innocence. †

David Deffenbaugh preaches for the Southwest congregation in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA.

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Grace **abounding**

Bobby Dockery

Grace is incredible... but true! After man had rebelled against God and demeaned himself in sin, God still loved. So God involved Himself in a plan for man's redemption (John 3:16). God took the initiative: "*The Word became flesh*" and "*of His fullness we have all received...grace upon grace*" (John 1:14,16).

In Romans 5:17, Paul speaks of "*the abundance of grace.*" Two other times in the same chapter Paul links the word "*grace*" to the words "*abundant*" or "*abounding*" (verses 15,20). There is no grace shortage!

The religious world has a tendency to become unbalanced when it talks about grace. On the one hand, there are some who preach what might be called "earned grace" — the idea that we must in some way demonstrate that we deserve the undeserved, that God should extend grace only to those who can pass qualifications. At the other extreme is "easy grace" — the notion that we should not really worry over our sins. "Don't be so uptight," we are told. "Don't be concerned over weakness," this theory goes. "Just let grace take care of things!" But grace never says that sin does not matter! It says that sin matters so much that Jesus died to give us the opportunity to escape from its clutches!

Perhaps it would be well to remind ourselves of some things the Bible teaches about grace!

(1) We Are Saved by Grace. "*By grace are you saved through faith...*" (See Ephesians 2:4-9). Man was lost; without hope; without God in the world. There was nothing man could do to help himself. Romans 5:6 explains, "*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*" God stepped in, sending His own Son to die for us. Grace does not mean that sin does not have to be paid for! It means that *I* do not have to pay for it because Jesus died to pay the debt I could never pay.

(2) We Are Schooled by Grace. "*Grace teaches us,*" the apostle Paul says, "*to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age*" (Titus 2:11-14). Grace teaches us that we must say "No" to all that is wrong and "Yes" to all that is good, righteous, and true. Grace teaches us that we who have died to sin can no longer live in sin (Romans 6:2).

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(3) We Must Surrender to Grace. God's grace is not unconditional, as many in the denominational world teach. The gift of salvation is freely offered, but it is necessary for us to *accept* it in the way which God commanded. It is possible to turn away from grace. Not all will be saved because not all will respond to the invitation.

The only possible human reaction to grace is surrender!

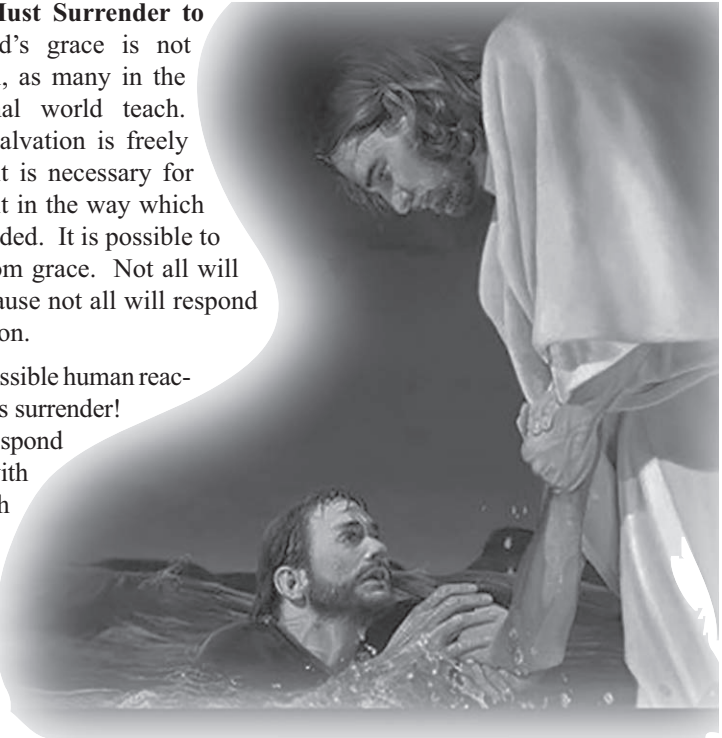
We must respond to grace with obedient faith (Hebrews 5:8,9). In Romans 6:1-4 Paul demonstrates that it is in the act of baptism that

man's obedient faith surrenders to the grace of God! This is *not* salvation by works. Baptism does not earn salvation! Baptism is simply the point of surrender where God's grace and man's obedient faith meet! Without that meeting, and the burial into the death of Christ, there can be no salvation.

Suppose you are invited to the home of friends to partake of a meal. They prepare the dinner; they provide the home; they set the meal on the table. But you must go and eat it! Your going does not earn it. It is a free gift which must be accepted before you can have it. We accept God's offer of grace through surrender.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound..." Shout it! Share it! But, above all, Surrender to it! ***"Whoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely"*** (Revelation 22:17). †

Bobby Dockery is a writer and preacher living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA.



DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Peter's Successor

Neal Pollard

An important element of thinking among our Catholic friends involves the idea of papal succession. In this concept, Catholic scholars attempt to look all the way back to Peter and trace a line of papacy. This elaborate effort to defend the idea of a universal pope goes back to fairly ancient times. The further back they go, however, the more difficult this effort to find Peter's successors becomes.

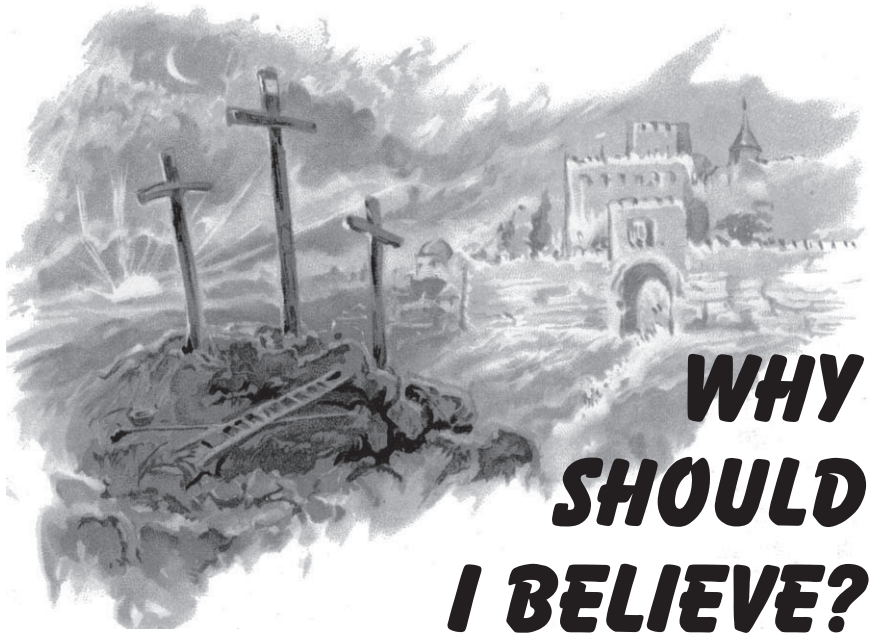
A case in point involves the so-called third successor of Peter as bishop of Rome. Everett Ferguson points out that Irenaeus looked at Clement as this bishop. However, as Ferguson writes, "As many Protestant and some Roman Catholic historians have observed, the difficulty arises because there was a plurality of presbyter-bishops at this time in the church at Rome, and Irenaeus and others read back into this time the later organization of only one bishop in a church" (*Church History* 53).

Though the New Testament does not say where, Peter served as an elder in a first-century congregation (1 Peter 5:1-4). Yet, as he indicates in that very passage, the divine model was for a plurality of men to be among their respective flocks. Those who met Paul from Ephesus were elders (Acts 20:28). Paul urges Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1-8) and Titus (1:5-11) in their work of identifying a plurality of men who were qualified to serve as elders. Ferguson later gives theological, organizational, geographical, and political reasons for why Rome was elevated above other cities, and Peter was elevated above other men in the whole papal discussion, but the important point is that this "progression" was without New Testament foundation! In fact, it is generally agreed that the first officially recognized pope, Leo I, did not emerge until 440 A.D. (or over 400 years after the Lord's church was established). Even if one were to point to Marcellinus, this innovation of recognizing an earthly head over all the church would still be over 250 years after the first generation of the church, and without the sanction of Scripture.

It is important that the authority of Scripture not be shared with any other source. The Bible alone is sufficient to lead, guide, and govern (cf. 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Galatians 1:6-9). Let the Bible be the measuring rod by which every practice, every doctrine, and every name is measured. What cannot be supported as true to God's Word must be dismissed as of human rather than divine origin (cf. Matthew 7:24-27; 15:13). †

Neal Pollard is the preacher for the Bear Valley Church of Christ in Denver, Colorado, USA.

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY



WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE?

Kevin L. Moore

Why Should I Believe in God?

All who genuinely search for God can easily find Him (Acts 12:27), and to confirm the reality of God one could appeal to any number of philosophical arguments and logical syllogisms. But the Bible provides the simplest and most powerful argument of all: ***“For every house is built by someone...”*** (Hebrews 3:4a). How simple, yet how profound! I exist, you exist, and this universe exists — so where did it all come from? The only alternative to a Creator is the untenable assertion that everything came from *nothing* through the accidental process of chance! It is much more reasonable (and believable) to accept this simple truth: ***“For every house is built by someone, but He who build all things is God”*** (Hebrews 3:4).

Why Should I Believe in Jesus?

Secular history verifies the historical person of Jesus Christ, but the writers of the New Testament provide the most comprehensive description of His life,

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character, and words. By honestly considering the testimonies of those who personally knew and observed Jesus, and by carefully examining His teachings, there is only one legitimate conclusion to reach: Jesus was exactly who He (and numerous others) said He was — the very Son of God (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-21). Moreover, Jesus launched a religious movement nearly 2,000 years ago that has not only survived and prospered in the face of the most extreme prejudice and persecution imaginable, but it has significantly impacted and transformed both human history and countless individual lives. ***“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”*** (John 20:30,31).

Why Should I Believe in the Holy Spirit?

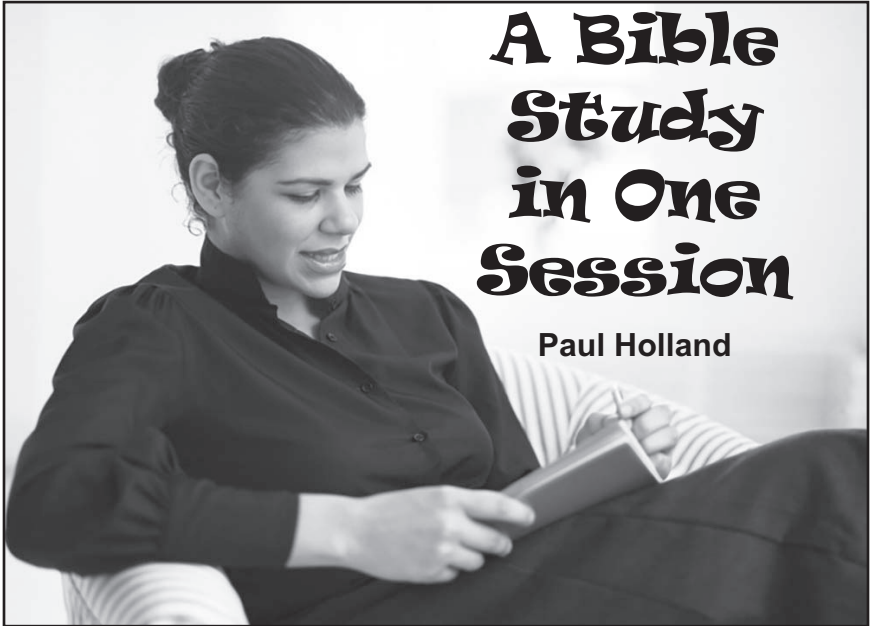
Something much more substantial than subjective emotion or personal experience confirms the reality of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says: ***“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”*** (Ephesians 6:17). The Holy Spirit, who guided the writers of the Bible to produce the most remarkable document ever written (2 Peter 1:21), **reveals truth** (1 Corinthians 2:10), **sanctifies** (2 Thessalonians 2:13), **comforts** (Acts 9:31), **empowers** (Romans 15:13), **strengthens** (Ephesians 3:16), **leads** (Galatians 5:18), and **saves** (Titus 3:5). And all this is accomplished through the medium of God’s Word, which **reveals truth** (2 Timothy 3:15-17), **sanctifies** (John 17:17), **comforts** (Romans 15:4), **empowers** (Romans 1:16), **strengthens** (Psalm 119:28), **leads** (Psalm 43:3; 119:105), and **saves** (James 1:21). The Bible is obviously no ordinary book, because the Holy Spirit has given it life and power (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:23).

Why Should I Believe in the Bible?

The Bible is by no means an outdated collection of irrelevant stories. The Word of God ***“is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,”*** penetrating to the innermost depths of one’s soul (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible has been transforming lives and shaping societies for centuries, and its message is just as relevant and powerful today as when it was first written. The Bible’s greatest proof is itself! †

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DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY



A Bible Study in One Session

Paul Holland

Recently a brother presented the possibility to me that he and his wife might have a Bible study with a woman dying of cancer. If he had the opportunity to read from God's Word His plan of salvation, in one session, **where would he start? What would he read? Where would he go?** While that answer could come from a variety of different possibilities, I offered the book of Romans...

Romans 1:16 — *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The word gospel means "good news".* What's the bad news first?

Romans 3:10-23 — *"It is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.' 'Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.' 'The venom of asps is under their lips.' 'Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'*

"Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may

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be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That’s the bad news. There is further bad news...

Romans 4:1-5 — *“What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”* We cannot work our way to heaven. It must come by the grace of God through faith. What are we to believe?

Romans 5:6-10 — *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”* How has God made it possible to take advantage of the death of Jesus Christ?

Romans 6:3-7 — *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”*

From there, jump to chapter 8 and read the wonderful blessings that are now available to a person who has been united with Christ through baptism into the likeness of His death and the likeness of His resurrection. †

Paul Holland, minister, Swartz Creek church in Swartz Creek, Michigan, USA.

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

“All Things Are Lawful”

Hugo McCord

A question comes about 1 Corinthians 6:12: *“All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be made subject to any.”* A similar statement is in 1 Corinthians 10:23: *“All things are lawful, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful, but all things are not upbuilding.”*

The word *“All”* in the statement, *“All things are lawful,”* would include a man living in *“fornication”* with *“his father’s wife”* (1 Corinthians 5:1), but Paul’s condemnation of such, *“Expel the evil man from among you”* (1 Corinthians 5:13), shows that fornication is not in Paul’s list of *“all things”* being lawful.

Similarly, Paul did not include *“having lawsuits”* among *“brothers”* in his statements that *“all things are lawful,”* for he also wrote that *“lawsuits among yourselves”* is *“a complete defeat”* (1 Corinthians 6:7, FHV; *“an utter failure,”* NKJV). They are *“lawful”* but neither *“helpful”* nor *“upbuilding”* (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23).

The immediate context of *“all things are lawful”* (1 Corinthians 6:12) is in the next verse: *“foods”*. So Paul was saying that though *“all foods are lawful”*, some are not *“helpful”*, and he would not allow himself to be *“made subject to any”* of that kind. A vegetarian makes himself subject to his own law about *“foods”*: *“a person who eats no meat, and sometimes no animal products (as milk, eggs, etc.)”* (Webster).

Thus there are two kinds of Christians: *“One believes that he may eat anything, but another who is weak eats vegetables”* (Romans 14:2).

“Let not the one who eats look down on the one who does not eat; and let not him who does not eat condemn the one who eats, for God has received him. Who are you to condemn the servant of another man? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for the Lord can make him stand” (Romans 14:3-4). *“He who does not eat refrains for the Lord, and he thanks God”* (Romans 14:6). *“None of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether, therefore, we live or die, we belong to the Lord”* (Romans 14:7-8).

“All things are lawful, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful, but all things are not upbuilding. Let no one seek his own good, but that of another. Eat whatever is sold in the market, questioning nothing for the sake of conscience, for ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and its fullness.’ If an unbeliever invites

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you, and you wish to go, eat whatever is placed before you, questioning nothing for the sake of conscience. But if anyone says to you, 'This is a temple sacrifice,' do not eat, for the sake of the one who told you, and because of conscience. However, I do not speak of your own conscience, but of the other's. ...I please all men in everything, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:23-29,33).

Another area in which *"all things are lawful"* is in regard to days, whether holy or non-holy:

"One person considers a certain day as more sacred than other days, while another person considers every day alike. Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind. He who regards a day highly does so for the Lord. ...Why do you condemn your brother? Why do you look down on your brother? All of us will stand or fall before God's judgment seat, for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will acknowledge God.' Each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead, judge this, that you do not place a stumbling block or an obstacle before your brother" (Romans 14:5,6;10-13). †

Water is important in a man's life. God created water first, then He created man out of the dust. Without water, dust would not stick. There is power in the water.

There is water in a car. There is power in that water. If you do not believe it, try going home without it in the radiator and you have got a burnt up car. Now, try to get a man to go to Heaven without water, and you have got a burnt up man. Try going to Heaven without water, and you have got a burnt up church.

Some say you are saved before baptism. Christ said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). Now, you cannot say you are saved before baptism; that would be calling God a liar. You cannot go to Heaven calling God a liar. You can call me a liar, but not God.

Some say, "A man is saved and then baptized." A woman does not wash clothes because they are already clean. She washes clothes because they are dirty. Man is baptized because he is dirty and needs to be cleansed.

The Gospel is made up of five "pills" that will cure anything: first pill — "hear"; second pill — "believe"; third pill — "repent"; fourth pill — "confess"; fifth pill — "be baptized". Take 'em with water, and they'll cure sin. †

— Marshall Keeble

WORTHLESS SERVANTS?

Bonnie Rushmore

“Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor” (Luke 6:12-17).

Who were these men Jesus appointed as His apostles? They were men from Galilee, a northern district in Palestine, and were considered unlearned, ignorant men from the working class who were looked down on by the Jews from Judea (Acts 2:7). Matthew was a tax collector; the Pharisees linked tax collectors and sinners in the same category (Matthew 9:9,10). Simon was a Zealot, equal to a modern-day terrorist. Peter was impetuous, speaking before he thought through what he was saying; frequently he had the proverbial foot in his mouth. James and John were intolerant (Mark 9:38,39) and revengeful



CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

(Luke 9:51-55); Jesus called these brothers “*sons of thunder*” because of their attitude toward others.

Saul, better known to us by his Greek name Paul, consented to the death and imprisonment of Christians. After he became an apostle, he along with many of the other apostles, were imprisoned for their teachings. All the apostles, with the exception of John, were killed because of their belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God. John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos for his beliefs.

Were these men, with their un-Christ-like characteristics, worthless servants to our Lord and Master Jesus Christ? “No!” Jesus chose these men as His special helpers: “*Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick*” (Luke 9:1,2). As time passed, these men grew in their faith in God and His Son, and they became diligent servants.

Some people will not accept the saving power of the Gospel because they think their lives are far from the life Jesus wants them to live. They think they are too bad for the saving power of the Gospel. Look at the apostles; the lives of these men were far from what God wanted them to be, yet, when Jesus said, “*Come follow me,*” they left their homes to follow Christ.

Some Christians do not serve the Lord to the best of their abilities because they think of themselves as uneducated and of low esteem. All the apostles, with the exception of Paul, were uneducated and were looked down upon by the Jews in Judea.

Some Christians fail to realize that God really forgave them of their sins when they were immersed in the watery grave of baptism. Thus, they do not eagerly serve God because they think their past is too horrible. While it is true that we may have consequences because of the sins of our past, which may limit some activities, we are still commanded to be diligent servants of our Lord.

What is holding you back from obeying and serving our Lord? Just as the apostles grew in faith and knowledge, through Bible study, we too can grow in faith and knowledge of God’s Word. As we grow, we can become better servants for God. The apostles did not let their pasts pull them away from serving God, and neither should we! †

Bonnie Rushmore is a staff writer for the *The Voice of Truth International* as well as a layout person. She and her husband live in Winona, Mississippi, USA where they and others cooperate to help perpetuate the longstanding missionary work of the late J.C. Choate.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Going the Extra Mile

Dale Grissom

Have you ever lost a loved one who had not obeyed the Gospel, or one who was a Christian but had not lived faithfully? Such a loss is so much more difficult to bear than the death of one whose relationship with God was what it should be. It is hard to cope with the knowledge that we had failed to make a difference in that life, especially if no effort was made on our part.

People all around us are starving for the Gospel; many are just waiting for someone to talk to them about their souls. How sad it will be if, on the day of Judgment, someone turns and says to us, “You never mentioned Him to me!”

All of us have opportunities to talk to people about their souls. Many times we are afraid and we don’t know what to say, but we dare not let the fear of rejection stand in the way of the message of salvation! The stakes are too high; the cost is too great.

It is easy to make excuses for our failure to teach — we are too busy, or we are afraid, or we have ministers supported by the church to do this work. All Christians have been entrusted with the responsibility of taking the Gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19,20), and the world begins just outside our doors. God will not look kindly on our excuses.

Do we care enough to put forth the effort? Let us prepare ourselves to go the extra mile. †

Dale Grissom (1927-2014) was dedicated to personal evangelism and worked with the church of Christ in Dexter, Missouri, USA.



CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

The Great Commission – Given to Whom?

Bill Keele

I believe there may be some in the church who believe that the Great Commission really is not given to us today! Their thinking may be based upon the fact that Jesus spoke those words to **the eleven disciples** (Matthew 28:16).

I believe there may be others in the church who believe that the Great Commission was given only to **those in leadership positions!** Their thinking may be based upon the idea that the Great Commission was initially given to the eleven disciples, who represented the leadership of the church. This approach would encourage support of missionaries, evangelists, and local soul-winning activities among the leaders.

I believe there may be some in the church who believe that the Great Commission is given for everyone, but it may be fulfilled simply by **the living of a good example.** From this point of view, no one member needs to be involved in soul-winning beyond the point of living a good example. If someone wishes to do more, they may, but the “more” is totally optional. This approach would allow soul-winning activities, but only a “good example” is required.

I believe there are some in the church who believe the Great Commission **applies to the church,** and that the church ought to be winning souls. This allows every member in the church to have a good conscience if some are involved in soul-winning. So long as the church has a soul-winning program and missionaries, a non-soul-winning member can be happy.

I believe there are some in the church who believe the Great Commission applies **to every member,** but they are obligated to be active in soul-winning only if others are. In other words, if the preacher and elders are not active in winning souls, I do not need to be active either. In this way, a lack of soul-winning can be blamed on the *other* person. The preacher blames the elders, the elders blame the preacher, the members blame the leaders, the leaders blame the members, and *no one is responsible.*

I believe there are some in the church who believe the Great Commission applies to **every member and the church.** They believe they need to be winning souls, whether anyone else does or not. They believe the church ought to be active in soul-winning, but this does not relieve individual responsibility. They realize they have other responsibilities, but this does not crowd out soul-winning. Day-after-day, year-after-year, they bring people into Christ.

Brother, Sister...where are we?



Bill Keele has preached for many years, primarily in Texas and Oklahoma in the USA.

Association, But Not Participation

Cecil May, Jr.

The Bible says, *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mark 16:16). This is obviously different from **“Whoever believes is saved and then should be baptized,”** as is preached and practiced in most churches today. The Bible also commands, *“Be baptized and wash away your sins calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16). These biblical passages clearly show that many preachers and other people who consider themselves Christians may actually have never been forgiven because they have not obeyed the Lord’s explicit commands.

Ephesians 5:11 (KJV) says, *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”* “Fellowship” is “joint participation.” The unfruitful works of darkness” are sins. The passage does not say, “Do not participate in sin or in teaching or practicing error.” A clearer translation says, *“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them”* (Ephesians 5:11 ESV).

We need to be careful not to approve of or participate in the spread of error. When speaking to a group that, according to their own teaching, were likely sprinkled as infants and not immersed as adults, we should not address them in ways that imply they are brothers and sisters in Christ. If they have not been *“baptized into Christ,”* they have not *“put on Christ;”* they are not *“in Christ”* (Galatians 3:27). That does not give us license to be impolite or mean. It is important, however, not to mislead them and, gently and lovingly, to bring them a little further along from where they are to where they need to be.

Isolation is not the answer. It is very easy for a preacher to work for years with a congregation, visit, teach, and preach to them, marry, baptize, and bury them, and never even know a non-Christian except those who happen to attend services. We will never convert anyone with whom we have no association. That is why Jesus, to the chagrin of the Pharisees, associated with sinners. Our aim should always be to convert. How quickly we can accomplish that depends on a number of factors, including the degree of trust we have built and where the other person is in his or her understanding, but it is always appropriate to work at it, meekly, gently, and humbly. It is not helpful to build a fence that neither the teacher nor the hearer will cross before work even begins. †

Cecil May Jr. is Dean-Emeritus of the Bible Department at Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

If I Bear No Fruit

J.R. Matheny

If I bear no fruit, will God reject me?
On final judgment day he will inspect me,
A false and barren tree with naught but leaves,
A consumer who ungratefully receives,
A useless servant, talent buried deep,
Who planted nothing, yet fiercely hopes to reap.

Woe to me if I refuse to lend
A hand to a soul in need, to be spent and spend,
To teach, to edify, to help my neighbor,
To devote myself to do God's loving labor!

"Begone!" He'll say, "Away from me, be cast
In outer darkness, where the first are last!
Your life on earth was spent on selfish ends,
With worldly mammon you made no heavenly friends!"

"But, Lord," I'll say, "I gave to charity,
And sent donations in time of calamity;
I gave a buck to the bum down on the street,
A dime to help a dimwit on his feet."

"Who're you?" He'll ask. "I don't believe we've met —
Your hardened heart never broke a sweat.
You only gave the coin that never hurt
To part with, refused to take the very shirt
Off your back; you never felt the pain
Of sacrifice — never the death of the grain,
In order to bear much fruit. So now you face
On this final day, forever, the loss of grace."

The Lord's Supper

Dennis Gulledge

The Lord's Supper is a central part of the Christian's worship each Lord's Day. It is a memorial meal by which we pause to remember the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross (Luke 22:19). It is a communion with Christ in a sacred feast (1 Corinthians 10:16). It is a proclamation that the Lord will one day return to *"deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father"* (1 Corinthians 11:26; 15:24).

The Lord's Supper is currently the subject of much controversy. Some are calling it a "celebration." Some belittle our practice of observing the Supper by calling it "a nip and a sip." Some are saying that it should be a home-based meal with full food and drink. Some want to observe it at times other than Sunday, even at weddings and funerals. One religious group has found a way for shut-ins to participate in the Lord's Supper by phone. We have no right to change the Memorial to fit the free and fancy notions of modern liberalism, nor should we allow it to become a meaningless ritual because of its weekly frequency.

Do we call the Lord's Supper by scriptural terms? In the New Testament it is referred to as *"the Lord's Supper"* in 1 Corinthians 11:20; as *"the Lord's table"* in 1 Corinthians 10:21: *"you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons; "the communion"* in 1 Corinthians 10:16: *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"*; and in Acts 2:42; 20:7 as *"the breaking of bread"*: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

Do we know of the Lord's Supper's origin? It was instituted by Jesus at the final meeting with His apostles, prior to His crucifixion (Luke 22:1,1-16,19,20): *"When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. ... And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.'"* Jesus told His disciples the elements to be used and their meaning in the supper (verses 19,20).

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He also told His disciples how it was to be done in His remembrance (verse 19).

The Passover meal was an annual Jewish feast in memory of the passing over of the houses of the Israelites by God in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-30). The Passover lamb was to be killed on the 14th day of the first month (verse 14). The Passover and the Lord's Supper are similar in meaning: Both involve sacrificial blood. Jews had the Paschal lamb. Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Do we understand the when, where, and why of the Lord's Supper? The New Testament tells us **when** we must partake of the Supper, that being on the first day of the week, which is Sunday: *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight"* (Acts 20:7).

The New Testament tells us **where** we should partake of the Lord's Supper. We are to remember our Lord's death in the assembly of the saints (1 Corinthians 11:18, 26; Hebrews 10:25; Acts 20:7).

The New Testament tells **why** we should partake of the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, *"This do in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:19). The word *"remembrance"* means to re-live something in your memory. The Lord's Supper enables us to commune with the Lord retrospectively — *"in remembrance"* of Jesus Christ; introspectively — examining ourselves, and prospectively — proclaiming the Savior's death upon the cross until He comes again. †

Dennis Gullede preaches for the church of Christ in Mabelvale, Arkansas, USA.



WORSHIP

In This Matter of Giving

Jerry Jenkins

In this matter of giving there are certain principles that should be remembered:

1. One can never out-give God. One man, when asked how he clothed, fed, and lodged his nine children replied, “I shovel out and the Lord shovels in, and His shovel is bigger than mine.” The God we serve is so tremendous, His resources unlimited, and He will not withhold anything that would be good for His children. David long ago reflected about God’s goodness to mankind: *“O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour; Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”* (Psalm 8).
2. One’s giving is a reflection of the way he feels about God. Our gift tells of our true feelings. The teenage boy denies any interest in girls, but he might possibly be seen looking for some gift for a special someone. The gift reveals his true feeling. *“Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf”* (2 Corinthians 8:24).
3. A third principle that must be remembered: God blesses us financially in proportion to the manner we support His cause. The schemes of television con artists have caused many to deny this biblical teaching. *“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 8:24).

Brethren let us give liberally to our God and to His cause!



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

Sing!

Travis L. Quertermous

A vital element of the worship of the New Testament church was congregational singing. Yet so many Christians today deprive themselves (and God) of the joy of this particular act of worship, simply because they opt out of the singing! A crucial verse on singing is found in Colossians 3:16 where the apostle Paul wrote, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”*

Herein, we are commanded to:

1. **Sing!** Notice that Paul did not say, “Sing well.” Evidently, some brethren have concluded that because they do not sing well or because they don’t like to sing, they are free to disobey God’s command!? Unless one has an illness like laryngitis that prevents him from singing, we should all sing praises to His great name!
2. **Sing with grace!** This simply means to sing with joy, love, thankfulness, and reverence as we praise our Heavenly Father.
3. **Sing from the heart!** The heart is the instrument upon which our

music is made, and not a mechanical instrument. This also means we are to genuinely worship God through song and never just thoughtlessly mouth the words, or “go through the motions”.

4. **Sing to the Lord!** We must always remember that the primary purpose of our worship is to glorify the Lord and not ourselves. Jehovah God is always our audience in worship. We do not assemble to entertain the masses!
5. **Sing to one another!** All must participate in the musical worship of the church; all must sing to the Lord. As we sing these beautiful and scriptural hymns to God, we also teach, admonish, and edify one another in the faith. This emphasizes congregational singing and rules out choirs and solos, where only part of the assembly sings.

Brethren, if we want to get the most out of our worship services, we must open up our mouths and joyfully sing our Heavenly Father’s praise! Yet, we have too many brethren with closed mouths during our singing! Quit worrying about what others think and concern yourself more with what God thinks! *“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!”* (Psalm 150:6). †

Travis L. Quertermous is a Gospel preacher working with the church of Christ in Dexter, Missouri, USA.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

Michael L. King

Some people spend an entire lifetime sorting out the meaning of life. Man's life is exposed to numerous internal battles. He struggles with having to cope with failures of the past, overwhelming demands of the present, and a multitude of fears for the future.

Socrates, a sage old philosopher, was right when he observed that man could secure a grip on life when answering three questions: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Time is of essence to man because he has so little of it. Time for God is inconsequential because He is not regulated by time.

Each of us stands today on the peaks of Mt. Perspective, seeing more clearly in all directions. Paul indicated that when man has through faith negotiated



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the tribulations of life, he gains patience. Patience blesses people of God with experience which matures into hope (Romans 5:4). Sometimes the words “trial” and “proof” are used as synonyms of “experience”. More than likely you have heard someone say, “I would not go through that experience again for anything in the world, yet I would not take anything in the world for having had that experience.”

Experience is a constant beacon, reflecting from the pages of God’s Holy Word lessons by which man can live and do well, both here and in eternity. The analogies employed by the writer of Psalm 90 give great emphasis to life’s brevity. He said that life is *“like yesterday when it passes by”* (verse 4a), *“as a watch in the night”* (verse 4b), *“like grass... it sprouts and withers”* (verse 5,6), *“like a sigh”* (verse 9), and *“soon it is gone”* (verse 10). In looking back, life is very brief at best.

Life is seen from experience’s Mt. Perspective as being uncertain for the present. “The best laid plans of mice and men” have a tendency to become dashed. James warned against declaring that *“we will”* accomplish tasks either today or tomorrow, but we *“ought to say, If the Lord will...”* (James 4:13-15). This is the reason Jeremiah insisted *“that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”* (Jeremiah 10:23).

The desires of God for man can be seen in life as a challenge. Jesus promised *“that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10). What wonderful aspirations to *“seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth”* (Colossians 3:1-2). This is an experience of a lifetime to look into the heavenly and eternal while yet living in the flesh! We should accept spiritual challenge with pleasure. If our faith, learning, and experience do not enable us to see beyond the mediocre and mundane, we may be similar to the Pharisees. Because they sought personal and temporal acclaim, Jesus said, *“They have their reward”* (Matthew 6:2,5,16).

Allow the Word of God to define your perspective of things past, present, and future. When we do, our hope will be properly focused, values adequately ordered, and our concepts made spiritual. Be patient with your spiritual growth, for from it comes experience that gives perspective, and purpose for your life, which provides hope. †

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The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

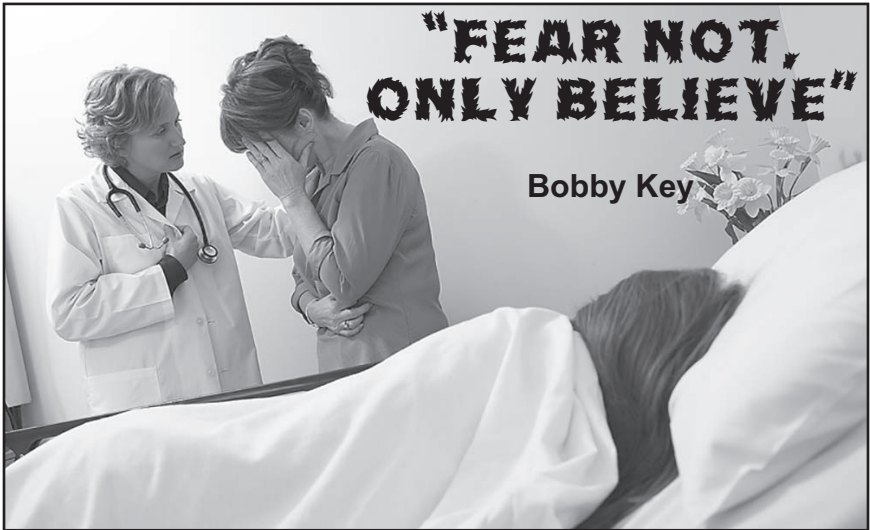
Wayne Barrier

Man's search for purpose, fulfillment, happiness, recreation, rest, contentment, and security in life has always been difficult. Almost any person will tell you that they are not satisfied in all these areas of life. Even though we live in times when advances in medicine and technology have made life longer and easier, most people still feel that things should be better. Very few are well satisfied with their lives. Is it possible to overcome this emptiness? The wisest man to live — Solomon — used his wisdom to accumulate wealth and power that allowed him to pursue complete satisfaction in any way he desired. He failed. Some of his findings are preserved in God's inspired Word in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. He offers his conclusion on the whole matter of man's duty, following a life of failed attempts to achieve satisfaction through popularity, power, wealth, and pleasure. Consider his words in Ecclesiastes 12: 8-14:

“Vanity of vanities”, says the preacher. “All is vanity.” And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright — words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one shepherd. And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Man's wisest path in life is to trust God and do His will. Jesus calls us to Him and promises that we have no need to be anxious about the usual concerns of life (Matthew 6:25-34, Matthew 11:28-30). We can achieve that seemingly impossible state of contentment, joy, satisfaction, confidence in purpose, and fulfillment if we will commit and serve God without reservation. Are you a faithful child of God? There is nothing worth having, if it demands that we neglect God. †

Wayne Barrier lives in Florence, Alabama, USA, and does mission work in several countries.



Fear is one of the strongest emotions of the human heart, surpassed in intensity only by love. It is a universal experience of mankind. From the cradle to the grave, we mortals are plagued by fear.

Before my mother's death, I was sitting by her side at the hospital. In the hall outside the room a nurse spilled several trays. The crash resulted in a loud noise. There was instant fear and panic among the patients in the entire area. They were manifesting one of man's instinctive reactions, the fear of loud noises. About the same time in another part of the hospital, a preacher sat by the bedside of a man who had reached the age of 95. As they talked together the old gentleman said, "I am gradually growing weaker. The end cannot be far away, and I am afraid to die."

Fear is recognized as the common experience of men. The Bible teaches us that faith is the antidote for fear. Freedom from fear demands great faith. ***"Fear not, only believe"*** (Mark 5:36.) Fear cannot exist in an atmosphere of faith. ***"And this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith"*** (1 John 5:4).

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Love, when properly expressed, is dynamic faith. When one really believes that nothing ***"shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,"*** he has the type of faith that conquers fear. †

Bobby Key preached many years for the Lord's church in Miami, Oklahoma, USA, where he continues to live.

Called to Purity

Josh Pierce

A PURE MIND

Imagine a large slice of moist, fresh from the oven, still warm-in-your-mouth chocolate cake! Everyone loves chocolate cake. There is nothing better than baking a cake. When you pull it out of the oven that sweet smelling steam hits you in the face. Then you let it cool just a bit and cover it with rich, smooth, chocolate icing. My mouth is watering just thinking about it. There are lots of good ingredients that make up that cake. If you are like me you take a short cut and buy that Betty Crocker cake mix. You need some vegetable oil. You will need a few eggs. If you want it to be really good you need to moisten it with milk.

Now imagine baking that cake with less desirable ingredients. You find a box of cake mix that is outdated by a few years. When you open it little worms are wriggling around in it. You pour the cake mix into the mixing bowl. You go to the fridge and get your eggs out. When you crack them the awfullest nose-burning, eye-watering rotten smell comes out of them. You throw them in the mix. You realize you are out of oil so you drain your fish cooker you used to fry fish two years ago and never got around to cleaning out. You open your milk and it doesn't pour out it; plops out in large white smelly chunks instead. You mix it up. You bake the cake. Then you cover it with that rich, smooth, chocolate icing. Are you going to eat it? Of course not! That cake is garbage!

I always tell the teens in our youth group: "Garbage in; Garbage out!" If we are going to be pure as in the sense that Christ calls us to purity, we have to protect our minds from the garbage of the world.

Romans 1:28-32: ***"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."***

Paul mentions here the risk of not making God the center point of our knowledge. He says God gave them over to a debased (reduce in quality or value)

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mind. When our minds are full of things that are not of good quality or value then we will find ourselves engaged in activities that are not pure.

If we spend our time taking in the garbage of the world, whether it be from TV, radio, Ipods, cell phones, movies, or the Internet, we will only reap garbage before the Lord. I hear so often phrases such as: “I don’t pay attention to the cuss words,” “I close my eyes in the bad parts” or “It’s no different than wearing a bathing suit” so often that I cringe. It doesn’t matter how much sweet icing you try to cover it up with. Garbage only produces garbage. If our minds are constantly surrounded by garbage then that is all we can expect to come out.

Instead of absorbing all the garbage the world is constantly telling us is normal and ok, we need to be absorbing ingredients that are pure inside and out. If we want to be equipped with good ingredients and not garbage, we need to be in constant meditation and study of God’s Word.

2 Timothy 3:16,17: *“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.”*

So when the world tries to fill you with garbage — and it will — think, “Garbage in, Garbage out!” Don’t fall into the snares of the devil by trying to justify filling your mind with garbage. Remember it doesn’t matter how sweet the frosting is, if the ingredients in the cake are rotten it’s not good for anyone.

A PURE HEART

When I was a sophomore in high school, my family moved to McComb, Mississippi. It is hard to move in the middle of high school. It’s very difficult to make friends. I remember very clearly the person who befriended me that first day of school. His name was Greg McDowell. Greg was one of those people you immediately liked. He had everything going for him. He was a star athlete. He could have gone to any college of his choice for football, track and field, baseball, or basketball. Basketball, that’s where I met Greg. The school year had already started so athletic teams like the basketball team had already been picked. My brother and I went in for individual tryouts and the coach put us on the team. The only problem was that all the lockers in the boys’ basketball locker room were spoken for. I was 5’11” and 130 pounds soaking wet and this 6’7” 210-pound monster comes up, puts his arm around me, and says, “Here, you can share a locker with me.” This guy had a huge heart, which is what led to what is still one of the hardest days of my life. In December of 1995 we were playing basketball

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in Jackson, Mississippi at the annual Christmas Tournament. Greg was tiring and the coach pulled him from the game. He begged the coach, “Put me back in!” The coach said, “I’ll work you back in, in a minute; take a breather.” Greg walked to the end of the bench, sat down in his chair, clutched his chest and fell out in the floor. Later we learned that Greg had a heart condition: an enlarged heart valve.

The heart is so sensitive; any defects and it stops. If there are impurities put through the heart, it stops. If the heart stops we die. It’s that simple.

The spiritual heart is no different. If the spiritual heart is defective, it will stop. If we fill our spiritual heart with impurities, it will stop. If the spiritual heart stops, we die (in separation from God). Yet, how many times do we fill our lives with impurities? How often do we ignore the beatings and hurtings of our spiritual hearts?

Matthew 5:8: ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. If we want to have a strong spiritual heart we have got fill our lives with pure things.”***

1 Peter 1:22-25: ***“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...”*** because ***“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”*** One thing is guaranteed in this life. Our physical heart will stop beating one day. The beauty of that is this: If we will take care of our spiritual hearts and fill them with the Word of God, we will find ourselves dwelling in heaven in the presence of our great and Almighty Creator for eternity.

PURE BODY

Keeping a pure body in this day and age is — let’s be honest — a huge challenge. Our society has proudly surrounded itself with sex. Everywhere you turn, sexual immorality is not only being practiced but praised. Our children are being taught to “experiment with casual sexual encounters” because it’s natural but told “Just be safe!” The Bible is very clear on the dangers of sexual immorality. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8: ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness,***

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but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”

So how do we learn to protect our bodies from being defiled by the world’s view? Anytime the topic of purity comes up, I am immediately reminded of Joseph and his encounter with Potiphar’s wife. We are all familiar with this account. Joseph is well regarded in the eyes of Potiphar but he has a problem. Potiphar’s wife wants him sexually. Joseph finds himself one day in a difficult situation where he and Potiphar’s wife are in the house alone. Notice what takes place. Genesis 39:12-14 says that she caught him by his garment, saying, **“Lie with me.’ But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, ‘See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.”**

So often we want to flirt with the idea of getting as close as possible to sin without falling over the edge. We walk this tightrope with the devil where we try to get just as close to sin as we can without actually being guilty of that sin. First off, if you walk a tightrope with the devil, you’re going to lose! Second, how easy would it have been for Joseph to say: “Well, Potiphar is gone and he will never find out if we just fool around a little.” He could have “justified” 1000 different scenarios where he “didn’t necessarily sin”.

In 13 years of youth ministry this question always comes up on a regular basis. “How far is too far?” “How far can I go before it’s wrong?” Notice how Joseph responded when faced with sin. He didn’t take the time to reason it out. He didn’t try to figure out where the line was. The Scriptures say, **“He fled.”** She tore his clothes from his back as he left forcefully and in a hurry. Joseph fought and physically tore himself from her grasp in order to keep his body pure.

If you want to know how to stay pure in body, look at how Joseph responded to temptation. Second Timothy 2:22 says, **“Flee youthful lusts.”** Tear yourself away from those temptations at all cost. The other thing we need to do is stay busy in the Lord. James 1:27: **“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”** Let me encourage you to stay so busy working for the Lord that you don’t have time to find yourselves in situations where you are bored. You won’t have time to find yourselves asking questions like, “How far is too far?” You won’t have time for the devil’s attacks on the purity of your body. †

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Why “Same-Sex Marriage” Cannot Be “Marriage” by Any Biblical Measure

Dr. Glover Shipp



There are at least four fundamental reasons why “same-sex marriage” is not marriage at all. These are:

1. Definitional — Dictionaries in languages all over the world define marriage as between a man and a woman. One current dictionary definition of marriage: the formal union of a man and a woman, typically recognized by law, by which they become husband and wife.

2. Historical — From the earliest recorded history, marriage has always been considered, until recent years only, a union of a man with a woman, bound by some sort of legal, contractual or covenantal agreement. Hear what Genesis 2:24 says about the dawn of marriage: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* Marriage was considered a covenantal relationship, entered into with God: *“[the wayward wife] who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made with God”* (Proverbs 2:17). *“...the Lord is acting as a witness between you and*

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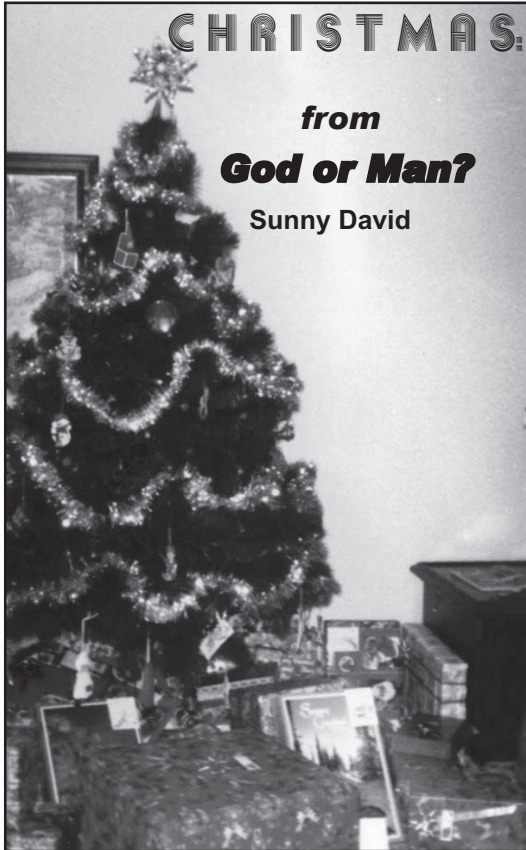
the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant" (Malachi 2:14). *"...each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband"* (Ephesians 5:33). Down through the centuries marriage has been considered a very special and holy union, always between man and woman, not between man and man, or woman and woman.

3. Anatomical — Humans, as the animal kingdom in general, are designed to reproduce through copulation. This is the purpose for the sex organs, the male penetrating the female and depositing sperm in her uterus, where it joins an ovum, thus beginning the process of reproduction. That this act is also pleasurable is a bonus. In a gay relationship, the sex act is a perversion of the natural process. The anus is an organ of discharge, not a receptacle. Using it for this purpose can do irreparable physical damage. Moreover, such an act cannot be construed as God-designed and cannot result in conception. This is also true for lesbians who are determined to be "legally married". If marriage was designed to produce children and nurture them, then gay marriage fails on the first of these two requirements, if not on both.

4. Biblical — Throughout the Bible homosexual relationships have been classified as immoral and sinful. Following are specific passages on this matter: *"If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them."* (Leviticus 20:13). Is this not clear? *"Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). *"...outside [of Heaven] are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie."* (Revelation 22:15).

Based on these four reasons, by no means can a sexual union between those of the same gender be considered marriage. Legally, they may perhaps receive a document stating that they are partners, but never a married couple. To make them legally married is to completely change the definition of marriage, the historical nature of marriage and the biblical concept of what constitutes a marriage. Both those who are joined together in a non-marriage relationship and those who legalize such a relationship in an attempt to make it a marriage fly in the face of history, God's Word and His judgment. As His Word states it, their blood will be on their own heads. †

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Millions of people around the world every year celebrate December 25th as the special religious “holy day” because they believe it marks the date of Christ’s birth. It may, however, come as a surprise to you to learn that Christmas is a religious observance of wholly human origin.

The Bible, which is the source of learning about Christianity, is completely silent concerning any special festivities to commemorate the date of Christ’s birth. The observance of Christmas did not originate in the apostolic age, and is thus without divine sanction. As a matter of fact, the word Christmas, which means “Mass of Christ”, not even once appears anywhere in the Bible!

We are living in the year of our Lord, A.D., *Anno Domini*, and the time before His birth is known as B.C., *before Christ*. All people on earth, therefore, accept and admit, advertently or inadvertently, when they write a date on any piece of paper or document that almost two thousand years ago Jesus Christ was born. Matthew, chapters 1 and 2, and Luke, chapter 2 record the *event* of Jesus’ birth, but concerning the month and the day, the Bible is silent. No command is given, and no example is found in the entire New Testament of any celebration of His birth. Inasmuch as there is neither precept nor example for its observance, faithful Christians should not keep or observe or celebrate Christmas as a religious festival.

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In origin, “Christmas” is pagan. More than three hundred years after Christ was born, some believers had begun celebrating His birthday, influenced by the pagan society around them because they had been observing certain days of the year in commemoration of their gods and goddesses. First, various days were recognized by various groups: January 6, March 18, 20, 24, April 2, 17, May 20 etc., but in A.D. 354 the Bishop of Rome declared that December 25th, a Pagan feast day which was observed throughout the Roman Empire in honor of Saturn, a Roman God of agriculture, and Brumal, “The Birthday of the Unconquered Sun,” should be observed by Christians in honor of Christ’s birth.

“The Pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christians, heavily influenced by the Pagan festival. The traditional riots and merrymaking were so popular that “Christians” were glad of an excuse to continue the celebrations with little change in spirit and manner.” (*Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*).

However, this date of December 25th was not accepted by some; therefore, they celebrated Christmas on January 6th, as the Eastern Orthodox Church does even today. It is also interesting to note that many of the festivities and symbols connected with Christmas, such as Christmas trees, Yule logs, Santa Claus or Father Christmas, etc. had their origin in paganism.

On the other hand, if God desired that people celebrate His Son’s birthday, He would have certainly revealed it to us in the Bible, just as He has revealed every other thing that we need to know, believe, and practice. He would have told us when and how we should observe the day, just as He has told us to commemorate Christ’s death on the first day of the week by partaking of the Lord’s Supper, as His faithful followers observe everywhere. The command in Matthew 26:26-28 reads, **“Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’”** (See also Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.) But there is neither a command nor an example about observing and celebrating Christmas.

Why has God not even revealed the day or month in which Christ was born? God knows man’s idolizing tendency, and perhaps this may be the reason why He has not revealed the date of Christ’s birth. He doesn’t want us to glorify and give importance to a particular day, and to remember Him only once in a year, as many people do. Christmas is the only day of the year when almost all church

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buildings are full. That is the day when most people become more religious, loving, kind, forgiving, and giving. Christmas Day has become so important, influential and powerful for people that they sing, *“A man will live forever more because of Christmas day.”*

Christianity is not a “once a year” religion. Christ said: ***“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me”*** (Luke 9:23).

Although Christmas is observed and celebrated today with much zest, enthusiasm, excitement, and fanfare by people all over the world, this does not mean that it is right and acceptable to God. God is happy only when people do those things He has commanded (1 Samuel 15:22).

God has given us the Bible to be our guide in all religious matters, faith, and practice. Popular opinions and human traditions are not safe guides. Christ said, ***“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”*** (Matthew 15: 8, 9). In Proverbs 30:6, the Bible says, ***“Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”***

John, an apostle of Christ, wrote, ***“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son”*** (2 John 9). Is Christmas in the doctrine of Christ?

We must also remember what the apostle Paul said to some Christians who were observing particular days and seasons which were not intended for them, ***“But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have labored for you in vain”*** (Galatians 4:8-11).

The basic reason for not observing Christmas or Easter or any of the other special religious “holy days” is the simple fact that the Bible, and the New Testament in particular, nowhere teaches us to do so. The Bible, God’s book of inspiration and revelation should be our guide in all religious matters, faith, and practice. We should not offer to God “holy days” and worship of human, pagan origin. †

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5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

FORGIVENESS

Paula Bates

1. And when you stand _____, if you have anything against _____, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also _____ you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. Mark 11:25-26
2. And be kind to one another, _____, forgiving one another, even as _____ in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32
3. For Your name's sake, O Lord, _____ my iniquity, for it is _____. Psalms 25:11
4. Look on my affliction and my _____, and _____ all my sins. Psalms 25:18
5. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the _____ man his thoughts; let him return to the _____, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Isaiah 55:7
6. Therefore let it be known to you brethren, that through this _____ is preached to you the forgiveness of _____. Acts 13:38
7. Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a _____ against another; even as Christ _____ you, so you must also do. Colossians 3:13

Answers

1. Praying, anyone, forgive
2. Tenderhearted, God
3. Pardon, great
4. Pain, forgive
5. Unrighteous, Lord
6. Man, sins
7. Complaint, forgive

OUR CHANGING TIMES

Dalton Key

A while back I read about a strange wedding which took place just outside Denver, Colorado. The participants all wore T-shirts. The bride wore a shirt with “bride” printed on the front, the groom had “groom” emblazoned on his, and the other members of the wedding party, including the minister, had their individual roles printed on their T-shirts as well.



Music for the ceremony came from a band of kazoos, one of which was wielded by none other than the groom himself. And to top it all off, there on the front row sat the bride’s mother, obligingly holding the couple’s eight-month-old daughter.

Yes, times have changed. Couples are now repeating their vows in the air, in the water, on the water, on unicycles, on bicycles, and just about anywhere else, and under just about any circumstances one might care to imagine. If these outlandish trends continue, the traditional wedding of the past will soon be considered quaint.

Not only has the ceremony changed, but the marriage relationship itself has been affected by our change-crazed culture. Many couples are sidestepping marriage, choosing to live together instead.

Does the Bible mention living together outside of marriage? Not in those precise terms. It does mention adultery. It does talk of fornication. And it condemns both. ***“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness...they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”*** (Galatians 5:19,20).

God’s Word is clear: ***“Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”*** (Hebrews 13:4).

All change is certainly not wrong. Some change may not be attuned to our ideas of good judgment or taste. We may not like it, but our opinions alone do not determine a thing’s rightness or wrongness. However, any change which contradicts the teaching of God’s Word is both wrong and sinful, and God’s Word has not changed. †

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Parents: Be a Mentor to Your Children!

Patrick Morrison

As we mature in the faith, we have an awesome obligation and a wonderful opportunity to mentor others who could benefit from guidance and encouragement. If the Great Commission is to be carried out effectively, then it is imperative that we in the church see our responsibility to help mold and instruct those who are younger in the faith.

God designed the church and the home to function in this way. Parents are a child's first mentors. Faithful stewardship demands that we be consistent in modeling Jesus before our children by way of instruction as well as example (2 Corinthians 4:2). Before Samson was ever born, Manoah asked of the Angel of the Lord, ***“How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?”*** (Judges 13:12). Think of how much stronger our homes would be if all parents took seriously this opportunity to order their children in the way that God would have them to go! Home is the training ground for future soldiers of the cross.

What are your children seeing in your home (Isaiah 39:4)?

Do they see a father and mother who love God supremely? Jesus said, ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”*** (Matthew 22:37).

Do they see a home where Christ and the church are honored, respected, cherished, and esteemed? ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”*** (Matthew 6:33).

Do they see a home where God's plan for marriage is upheld? ***“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge”*** (Hebrews 13:4). Is yours a home where father and mother love each other in a way that reflects the love Christ has for His bride? ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself”*** (Ephesians 5:22-28).

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Do they see a home where mom and dad are walking the walk instead of just talking the talk? ***“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked”*** (1 John 2:6).

Do they see a home where God’s Word is taught at every opportunity? ***“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up”*** (Deuteronomy 6:6,7).

Parents, please do not underestimate your role as a mentor to your own children! Your faithfulness to the Lord, or lack thereof, will shape the souls of your precious little ones. Do not sin against your children by failing to keep the way of the Lord (Genesis 18:19; 42:22). Do not miss out on the opportunity to bring your children up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Sadly, far too many homes are not what God intends for them to be. Millions of children grow up in homes where ungodliness and immorality are front and center in the lives of their parents. Alcohol, drugs, pornography, sexual promiscuity, foul language, and the like are modeled before impressionable young minds in myriads of homes.

Then, there are homes in which immorality and ungodliness are not necessarily the norm, but where parents are indifferent to the moral, emotional, and spiritual well-being of their children. Large numbers of young ones are being raised with no encouragement to embrace eternal verities.

Then, there are homes where mom and dad give the appearance of godliness, but do not live it out in their everyday lives (2 Timothy 3:5). Here are parents who have enough religion to make themselves miserable. They attend services when it suits them or when their consciences bother them enough. They leave services speaking evil of the preacher and of the elders and gossiping about brethren in order to make themselves feel better about their hypocrisy. These parents sing, “O, how I love Jesus,” but then never bow their heads in prayer around the dinner table or open up their Bibles at home.

In these homes, parents make a mockery of the faith of Jesus Christ, and they set their children up for discouragement and disappointment. Who will step up and take these young ones under their wings? Who will see the untapped potential within these precious souls and patiently guide them toward eternal life in Jesus Christ? If God’s people won’t take advantage of such a wonderful opportunity, rest assured that Satan and his forces will step in and “mentor” these young minds. ☩
Patrick Morrison preaches for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama, USA.

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Divorce

Howard Winters

Recently, I took time out to watch Jane Pauley's presentation of an NBC White Paper on divorce. It was a very forceful presentation, one that I found myself wishing that everyone could see, especially those contemplating marriage. It proved beyond question that in most cases divorce creates more problems than it solves. Most of us know what the Scriptures teach on the subject: *"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ... And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."* (Matthew 19:4,5,9). Most of us are also aware, at least to some degree, that there are problems created by divorce. The program pointed out three that are outstanding. These are problems which we knew or suspected existed but which are now confirmed by studies made by people outside the religious community who (to one extent or another) approve divorce, that is people who do not accept the Bible as the only standard by which all such matters are to be settled. The three outstanding problems as I gleaned them from the program are:

The growing attitude that marriage may be scrapped for any cause. This is seen in the large number of divorces granted by the courts in this country. According to the program (and other sources), one half of all marriages now end in divorce. The Bible clearly teaches — and only a few years ago nearly everyone believed — that marriage is for life. Paul left no room to doubt this when he said, *"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man"* (Romans 7:2,3). Thus when two people marry, they make a covenant between themselves and with God to live together and fill each other's needs for as long as both shall live.

When marriage is entered with this concept as its basis, it either works (and marriages work only because both parties are determined to make them work) or else each of the parties lives alone until death takes one or the other. Knowing that one

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can never have another mate makes him do all that lies within his power to keep the mate he has. But the modern attitude is that marriage is nothing more than a human contract that can be broken at the will of either party for almost any cause (or even for no cause at all). This takes away a powerful incentive to make marriage work. The parties separate with the attitude that they can marry another as soon as a civil divorce is granted. (Incidentally, the program said that most divorcees do remarry, but the divorce rate among the remarried is even higher — up to 70 percent.)

Divorce brings innumerable problems to the divorced wife in most cases.

In 90 percent of the cases, according to the program, she has custody of the children. This within itself is not bad; in fact, it may be good. But because the feminist movement has pushed for laws to make women equal in every respect with men, the mother is often left to rear and support the children alone. In many cases she is unprepared for the job market. Even if prepared, to provide care for the children while she works (in the case of large families) costs her more than she can earn. According to the program, it is all but impossible to force the father to help provide for the children's needs. Thus, both mother and children are in many cases left in a state of poverty and must be supported by public tax money. To some, this is degrading, especially when they were well off financially during the marriage.

The emotional strain of a broken home takes its greatest toll on the children. They do not understand (and who can) why father and mother cannot live together. It is especially hard for them to cope with the divided situation. Because of it, they are apt to grow up to be problems in society, and when they themselves marry, the chances are far greater that they too will divorce their mates because they have not been taught the scriptural concept of marriage. So, according to the program, the greatest casualties of divorce are the children. They are forced to pay a high price for the folly of their parents — a price God never intended for children to pay.

Aside from the Scriptures, which positively prohibit it, is divorce the answer? Absolutely not. The only solution to marital problems is for both parties to follow the Bible. When they do, they can and will build on a solid foundation of purity and love, solve their problems in the proper manner, and live happily together in the Lord's service. Is divorce worth the cost? Not by any stretch of the imagination. It results in the broken law of God, broken homes, broken lives, broken hearts, broken children, broken promises, and broken hopes. There is a better way, God's way, which calls for one man and one woman bound together for life. †

Howard Winters (deceased) was a preacher for many years in North Carolina and South Carolina, USA.

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A GOOD PARENT

Selected



- **A Good Parent** is willing to make sacrifices to provide for his child's essential needs, but able to pursue his own interests.
- **A Good Parent** strikes balance. He is authoritative without being overbearing, and permissive within given limits of allowable behavior.
- **A Good Parent** does not need to see himself mirrored, improved, or fulfilled through what his children are or turn into.
- **A Good Parent** has an awareness of the problems that may confront him. He prepares his children for safety, health, learning, behavioral, social, sexual, and other problems they are likely to encounter, and for eventual independence.
- **A Good Parent** learns with his child. He keeps abreast of events, trends, and knowledge. He selects those features that aid his child and shelters him from others that are potentially damaging.
- **A Good Parent** shares his feelings with his child. He listens to him as well as talking. He asks questions as well as making statements.
- **A Good Parent** gives his child experience in the real world and as much freedom as he can handle at each stage of development.
- **A Good Parent** shares and takes an interest in his child, his activities, friends, and schooling. He is most interested in his child's eternal destiny. †

“...And We Are Not Saved”

Maxie B. Boren

The prophet Jeremiah, in the 8th chapter of the book which bears his name, laments the spiritual condition of Judah in the dark days prior to their being taken captive by Babylon.

In verse 3 he predicts that *“death shall be chosen rather than life”* by the residue of the ones remaining. In verse 7 he declares that they did *“not know the judgment of the Lord,”* and in verse 9 he indicts them for having *“rejected the word of the Lord”*.

Finally, toward the end of the chapter, in verse 20, Jeremiah said, *“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”* Yes, the great prophet perceived that God’s patience with Judah had ended and all hope for their salvation from the hordes of Babylon was gone. Judah’s time to repent had expired.

Jeremiah’s writings of about 2500 years ago serve as an incisive critique on the millions and millions of people today who continue in sin in spite of the warnings of God’s Word.

The irony of it all! Even the wild duck on a northern lake feels the hint of coming frost, and he heads toward a sunnier climate. But poor deluded man, for all his boasted superior intelligence, seems blissfully unaware of the judgment to come. God’s warning for Israel was loud and clear; it would be no less clear for all today who disobey Him: *“I will surely consume them,” says the Lord. “No grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things I have given them shall pass away from them.”*

Let us allow the seasons of the year to teach us a lesson that Judah couldn’t seem to learn in the long ago, and that millions choose to ignore today. The summer of life will end someday and the harvest will be past. Will you cry with the multiplied millions, *“...we are not saved!”* or will you be able to rejoice with the redeemed as an abundant entrance into heaven is given? *“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:11)?

Don’t let the harvest come without being a faithful Christian!



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“Do All Things Without Complaining and Disputing”

Jimmy Clark

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (Philippians 2:14-16). These verses are all one complete sentence. The major thought of the sentence is to do all things without murmuring and doubtful reasoning. The context of this command is in verses 12 and 13 of the same chapter, where the brethren are told to *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Philippians 2:12). Living a life with a cheerful and trusting heart is the essence of having the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). There are three modifying statements in the sentence to give further insight to this great life, void of complaining and disputing.

(1) **Showing Attributes of True Children of God.** The first modifying statement is the clause *“that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation”* (Philippians 2:15). The life of a Christian is to manifest the pure nature of God to the corrupt servants of Satan. Words like *“blameless”*, *“harmless”*, and *“without fault”* do not mean that the Christian can live a sinless life. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:8-10, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”* Though Christians do fall short and commit sin, they are to strive to live lives that are *“blameless”*, *“harmless”*, and *“without fault”* before a world full of sin. The child of God is to obey the will of God, striving to practice righteousness, and when sin is present there is a penitent and humble spirit that is quick to confess and seek forgiveness (1 John 1:7,9; 3:9). While the world lives unto sin, the child of God lives to obey God (Romans 6:13). The child of God seeks first and foremost the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Since every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17), about what does he have to complain or dispute with God?

TEXTUAL STUDIES

(2) **Shining as Lights in the World.** The second modifying statement is the clause *“among whom you shine as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2:15). The purpose of the child of God is to reflect the True Light in life before a world of darkness. Light is clearly distinctive from darkness. A life that is lived in cheerful trust, not with doubtful murmuring, is in great contrast to the cynical, skeptical world of today. The Christian has something that the non-Christian lacks but desperately wants. Paul lists such qualities as love, joy, peace, and the like (Galatians 5:22f) coming only in the fruit of the Spirit, not through the practice of the flesh.

In 1 Timothy 4:8,12-16 the apostle explains that real profit is in godliness, *“For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. ... Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. ... Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”*

(3) **Steadfastly Holding the Word of Life.** The third modifying statement is the participial phrase *“holding fast the word of life”* (Philippians 2:16). The troubles and bitterness of sin in the world would make it easy to fall prey to murmuring and doubtful reasoning. However, the Word of life, held firm in the mind and heart, prevents such from happening. It is very important that the



child of God be reminded daily of the precious promises that are from God, one of those being that God will not forsake His people. The writer of Hebrews said in chapter 13, verse 5, *“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you..”* All suffering is but light affliction that works for the child of God toward something far better than what the world has to offer (2 Corinthians 4:17). †

Jimmy Clark preaches for the Bethel Church of Christ in Athens, Alabama, USA.

TEXTUAL STUDIES

Open-Mindedness

John Gipson

Hear what the psalmist said: *“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple”* (Psalm 19:7).

Don’t let the word “simple” throw you. We have corrupted that word until, as frequently used, it means something not much better than half-witted, and that is not at all what the psalmist had in mind. Moffatt’s rendering, “that instructs the open minded,” has much to commend it. We recall the old phrase, “There is none so blind as he who will not see.” The proud man trusts his own mind, and Solomon calls that man a fool (Proverbs 28:26). The humble man opens his mind to receive the Word of God, and his soul is revived.

God instructs the simple-minded. That ought to be obvious. What other class of people could the Eternal possibly instruct than the open-minded? No others are teachable. Man in his pride proclaims, “There is no God.” The apostle Paul has a few words for such close-minded people: *“Let no one deceive himself, if any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise”* (1 Corinthians 3:18).

Unfortunately, it seems that many minds are hermetically sealed when it comes to God and religion. Almost a century ago Thomas Hardy looked at the attitude of Byron and Swinburne and observed that they were “nothing but naughty boys peeking around the church door and making faces at the parson.” Such behavior remains with us to this day.

Are we open and receptive? James says, *“Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul”* (James 1:21).

Nor should we forget the words of Jesus, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:3). †

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

Obstinate, closed minds to God and His Message are comparable to “naughty boys peeking around the church door and making faces at the parson.”

A Vital Connection

Harvey Porter

Jesus taught, *“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me”* (John 15:1-4).



There are some great Christian principles contained in the above simple words of our Lord. **First, Jesus is the true, real, only valid spiritual relationship in all creation.** Everyone needs to be connected with Him for spiritual life. The metaphor is one of life dependency. No branch (person) can produce fruit or even life without being connected to the Vine — Jesus.

Second, God is the Gardener. He planned the whole life relationship. He cuts off branches (lives) that bear no fruit so the whole vine can remain healthy. He also prunes healthy branches so they can bear more fruit. All of us as Christians must of necessity look at our lives very closely to see if we are really bearing fruit for the cause of Christ. Doing nothing for the Lord means that we are a dead branch — we only sap strength from the vine, and God will eventually cut us off because we are dead spiritually.

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Third, the relation of the Word to our spiritual union with Christ must be noticed. The Word saves us. The Word creates faith in our hearts. The Word is the Father and the Son communicating with us. It becomes our rule for living. It is absolutely necessary for our connection with Christ.

Fourth, Jesus said, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you.” The Word states that we were *“baptized into one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:13). The body is defined as the church and Christ is the Head of the body, the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). If anyone quits the church, he leaves Christ also. Everyone who is a Christian is vitally connected to Christ and is connected with all others who are in the same body, the same vine. They all enjoy strength from the same source, and they live together to produce the same fruit. There are no “Christians at large”! If you have a relationship with Christ, you have a relationship with His church. If you are still connected to Him, the true vine, you are connected to all the branches and are concerned about the health of the whole vine. You seek to produce the same fruit.

Fifth, Jesus cautioned that no branch could bear fruit of itself. There are no self-sufficient Christians. The body of Christ is the church. Every member is in close contact with the Head and with every other member of the body. This kind of unity is healthy for the vine and productive for all the branches. It is amazing how many hold the view that they are close to Christ, but not close to the church. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, taught clearly that you do not love God or Christ if you do not love the church. *“Whoever loves God must also love his brother”* (see 1 John 4:19-21). I have seen the slogan, “Jesus, yes; the church, no!” This thinking is contrary to the whole teaching of Christianity. The church is the family of God, with God as our Father and Christ as our Brother. The family stays together, works together, worships together, and hangs together, through good times and bad.

Sixth, Jesus concluded, “Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” A single branch does not do anything since it is severed from the vine, its life source. We have to remain in Christ, and through Him we are connected to the rest of the vine, the branches — the church. Together we can do immeasurably more than we could do as a single individual, even if we could remain connected to the vine. The very nature of the vine is the fact that it has many branches that exist together, are connected together, and bear fruit together. This is how God, the Gardener, planted it and how Jesus, the true Vine, wants it. †

Harvey Porter (1929-1998) preached for many years in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA.



How Do You Measure Up?

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame....

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 6:4-6; 9-12



“The Servant of the Lord”

Gary C. Hampton

Moses is described as *“the servant of the Lord”* (Deuteronomy 34), yet he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. The people murmured against God when they arrived in Kadesh, and Moses asked the Almighty what to do in response to their complaints (Numbers 20). God told him to take the rod, assemble the people, and speak to the rock. Moses rebuked the people and *struck* the rock instead of *speaking* to it, even saying that he and Aaron were solely responsible for providing water for the people. *“And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them’”* (Numbers 20:10-12). Moses had failed to sanctify God in his actions, thereby acting like an unbeliever. His failure to follow God’s exact direction caused the Lord to deny him entrance to the promised land.

Moses pleaded with God to let him enter to see the end of the work of deliverance. He told the people, *“But the Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the Lord said to me: ‘Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter’”* (Deuteronomy 3:21-29). God did tell him to go up into Mount Pisgah, or Nebo, in the Abarim range to see the land the people would possess, and to charge Joshua with the job of leadership, and to encourage him in the work.

Moses died *“according to the word of the Lord.”* Leslie G. Thomas says this literally means “by the mouth of the Lord,” and the Jewish Rabbis say the meaning is “by the kiss of God.” He went to sleep with the kiss of the loving Father in heaven. God took his body and buried it in a place unknown to man. Moses led the people for forty years. At the time of his death at the age of 120, his physical strength had not left him, nor had his sight grown weak.

The lesson for us is powerful. I can be a *“servant of the Lord,”* yet lose heaven for failing to obey His will. Thankfully, Moses also shows us we can repent and still go to sleep with the kiss of the Father. †

Gary C. Hampton preaches for the Siwell Road congregation in Jackson, Mississippi, USA.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

David's Prayers

Dan R. Owen



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What makes God disposed to hear the prayers of mere human beings? The principle is stated, *“the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil”* (Psalm 34:15). The blind man said, *“We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will”* (John 9:31). These principles notwithstanding, we are all sinful human beings. While we may not be rebellious and negatively disposed toward God, we are filled with failure, and often overcome by temptation. Will God listen to our prayers? Is there hope for weak human beings like us? If David’s life is any indicator, there is.

First, consider the weaknesses of David. They were not insignificant. He violated the sanctity of marriage when he committed adultery with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. He conspired to commit murder to cover up his sin, robbing Israel of a fine military commander. He refused to forgive his son for five long years due to his pride. He was willing to allow these hard feelings to plunge his country into

BIBLE CHARACTERS

civil war. He despised his faithful adviser and most capable commander, Joab. Though Joab had helped bring David to power, had carried out his orders with unwavering loyalty, had tried to reconcile him to his son Absalom before it was too late, had saved his kingdom when Absalom led Israel in rebellion, and had tried to keep David from his prideful actions in numbering Israel, David resented him and hated him. One of the last things David did was order the death of Joab, one of the most faithful servants he ever had. Surely, David was anything but perfect. He was plagued by pride, lust, jealousy, resentment, and insecurity.

In spite of these weaknesses, David is described as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13). It was because of this underlying attitude that David was able to cling to a relationship with God throughout the ups and downs of his life, and God was able to use David powerfully. God listened to David's prayers most of the time, for several reasons. First, David was a man of great faith. He was inclined to God completely. This was obvious when he ran toward the giant Goliath on the battlefield, armed only with a stone and sling, crying, ***"I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty... this day the Lord will hand you over to me."***

David was also a man with a tender conscience. When he cut off part of Saul's robe in a cave, his conscience was stricken. When Nathan the prophet confronted him about his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, he repented sincerely and abjectly. When he sinned by taking his prideful census, he repented of his sin. Though he sinned, he was always penitent.

David was usually forgiving. He forgave people like Amnon, Abner, Shimei, and others, often to his detriment.

Most of the time David was also very humble. He recognized that God had placed him in power and given him everything. When he cried out to God, he cried out in complete humility, realizing that God could bring him down in an instant.

It was because of these attitudes, and because David never stopped trying to pursue his relationship with God, that God heard David's prayers and used him mightily in his eternal plan.

I'm glad the story of David is in the Bible. It gives me hope for people like me who are plagued by sin and failure. God uses imperfect, sinful human beings, whose hearts are turned toward Him. We don't have to be perfect to be used by the Lord and to be heard by Him, we just have to pursue our relationship with faith and penitence, and God's grace will be sufficient. If He listened to David, He will listen to weak but sincere people today also, and use us for His glory! †

Dan R. Owen works with the Broadway Church of Christ in Paducah, Kentucky, USA.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

A FIERY DEPARTURE

Betty Tucker

In 1 Kings we read of two men of God with very similar names – Elijah and Elisha. It was a time of famine in Israel. There had been no rain for three and a half years. Can you imagine how dry the earth was? All of the grass had died; animals had starved to death. The ground had baked hard so that plowing was not easy.

Change of Occupations

Elisha was a farmer. One day he plowed in the hard, dry field with 12 yoke of oxen. The necessity for having 24 oxen to plow a furrow was two-fold: the oxen were weak from having little food, and the ground was hard and unyielding to the plow.

God had instructed Elijah to select Elisha as his successor. He found Elisha in the field that day plowing with his 24 oxen. Being a man of few words, Elijah simply tossed his cloak over Elisha. Both understood the significance of that simple gesture.

Elisha knew that now he was to be a part of Elijah's work, so from that day he walked with the prophet. He became Elijah's servant, for in so doing, he could learn how to do everything that he needed to do in filling his new role.

The Bible tells us that Elisha "*poured water on the hands of Elijah.*" He needed to learn how to do the menial things so he could one day do the great things.

A Simple Ceremony

The two men trained student prophets so they could one day take part in the work of the Lord. Elijah and Elisha worked together for about ten years. On an appointed day, it was time for Elijah to be taken. He wanted to go on to Bethel alone, but Elisha said, "*As the Lord lives...I will not leave you.*" So, they went down to Bethel together (2 Kings 2:2). The sons of the prophets (students) watched from afar as the two prophets approached the Jordan River. Elijah took his cloak, folded it, struck the waters so that they parted, and the two walked across on dry ground (2:8). The young prophets saw this miracle.

Then Elijah asked, "*What shall I do for you before I am taken?*" Elisha did not hesitate. His request came loud and clear, "*Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me*" (2:10). Elijah said, "*You have asked a hard thing. But,*

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if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you...” Elisha could have asked for riches, power, or fame. Rather, his request showed great wisdom.

He had worked side by side with this man of God for ten years. He knew that if he were to be able to carry on in Elijah’s footsteps, he would need more than his own abilities. He would need a double portion of Elijah’s spirit.

As the two walked along together, suddenly a loud noise like a whirlwind was all around them. A chariot of fire and horses of fire separated them, and Elijah went up to heaven in the whirlwind (2:11)!

Elijah’s mantle fell from him as he was taken. Elisha tore his own coat in two pieces. He would not need it now that he had the cloak of Elijah. Elisha knew that God had granted unto him a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, because he had seen that prophet as he departed into heaven.

Elisha folded the mantle and struck the waters of the Jordan, as had Elijah. They parted, and he crossed over on dry land. The young prophets saw this miracle, and they knew that Elisha now had God’s power, evidenced by a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. †



Betty Tucker was a staff writer for *The Voice of Truth International* prior to her death in 2008.

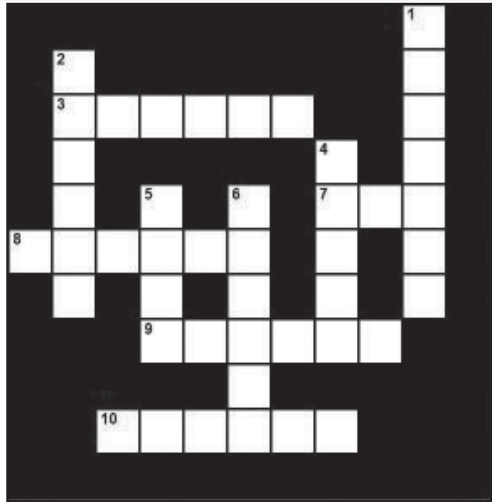


Leprosy

Bonnie Rushmore

Across

- 3 What king of Judah was struck with leprosy when he became angry with the priest when they told him he could not burn incense in the sanctuary? (2 Chronicles 26:16-22)
- 7 How many returned to thank Jesus for healing them of leprosy? (Luke 17:11-17)
- 8 Name the servant of Elisha who was afflicted with leprosy because he accepted gifts from Naaman. (2 Kings 5:27)
- 9 Who declares a person leprous or healed from leprosy? (Leviticus 13)
- 10 Who was the commander of the Syrian army who went to Elisha the prophet of God to be healed of leprosy? (2 Kings 5:1-9)



Down

- 1 What must one afflicted with leprosy call out? (Leviticus 13:45)
- 2 What must be done with the garments of a leprous person that have the disease on them? (Leviticus 13:47-52)
- 4 Whose arm was covered with leprosy when he made excuses for not doing as God commanded him? (Exodus 4:6-7)
- 5 All lepers were commanded to be put outside the _____. (Numbers 5:1-4)
- 6 Who was afflicted with leprosy when she criticized her brother's choice for a wife? (Numbers 12:1-10)

What Is the Name that God's People Are to Wear?

I. D. Byars

It is often thoughtlessly said, “There is nothing in a name,” but nobody really believes this. When next you hear that said statement, inform the person so saying that hereafter you will address him as the “Devil.” Note how quickly bitter resentment rises. If there is nothing in a name, why is not the name “Devil” as good as any?

Various religious titles are used today, not one of which may be found in the Bible. Is it not strange that some people prefer to be called by some human name rather than the one found in God's Word? *“The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”* (Acts 11:26). Those people not only claimed to be Christians, they were called by **that name**. Peter, the apostle, wrote, *“if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on His behalf”* (1 Peter 4:16). Paul sought to make Agrippa a Christian, no more, no less (Acts 26:28). Should this not be enough for us today?

The name “Christian” is the divine name ordained by God that His people should wear. Isaiah, the prophet, wrote that a *“new name”* would be given to the Lord's people. It was to be given only after the Gentiles were invited to become partakers of salvation through Christ (Isaiah 62:2; 65:15). It could not have appeared before Acts 10, when the Gentiles were recognized as being heirs of salvation. Is it not significant that in the chapter immediately following — Acts 11:26 — that the *“new name”* — the name *“Christian”* was given?

No other name, however ancient, honorable, or distinguished can ever meet the demands of the inspired prophet. It pleased God to call His people *Christians* in the apostolic age, and that which pleased Him then must undoubtedly meet His approval today. Let it never be forgotten that we glorify God only when we wear the name *“Christian,”* no more, no less. **The church is the bride of Christ — she must wear the husband's name!** †

I. D. Byars serves the Lord in Hooker, Oklahoma, USA.

BIBLE QUESTIONS

What Is Christianity?

Leon Cole

If you were called upon to define Christianity, what would you say? Perhaps we would say it is the religion founded by Jesus Christ. While this answer would be correct, it would not mean much to one unacquainted with Jesus and His teaching. Christianity, in fact, is more than simply a system of beliefs – it is action.

James 1:27 reminds us that pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: *“to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”* (NKJV). Religion, then, is something we do or practice, not something we get or merely believe. It is significant that Luke described the Gospel account that he had written as being, *“All that Jesus began both to do and teach”* (Acts 1:1).

Occasionally, we hear someone interpret or define Christianity as if it consists only of going to an assembly of the church. Questions are posed that lead to this conclusion: “Where were you on Wednesday night?” “Did you study your Bible lesson?” “You missed the class Sunday morning!” Similar statements can be multiplied.

It is hoped that there has been no misunderstanding. These matters are important. Christians must not neglect worshipping together (Hebrews 10:25) and they need to study the Bible together. But there must not be a forgetting that Christianity involves what we **do** and **practice** *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and all day Saturday, as well as what we do on Sunday!*

Remember the Good Samaritan. He ministered to the man who was robbed, beaten, and left half-dead by the side of the road. He wasn't at an assembly of the church at all! In fact, two highly religious people, the priest and the Levite, passed by this man, on the other side. If outward form and ritual become so important that we neglect the needs of people, then we are in a bad way. ***“But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice”*** (Matthew 9:12).

Jesus came to teach us how to live. This involves what we do at home, what we do at work, what we are in our thought world, and what we do with our leisure time. It involves our daily relations with people. ***“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”*** (Galatians 6:10).

How do you define Christianity? The best way is to simply put it into action. We are commanded to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to

BIBLE QUESTIONS

God (Romans 12:1). If as Christians we would start being kind to the unknown, the less fortunate and lonely, we would be more like Jesus.

There was once a large billboard sign, which read: “No Less Precious” underneath the words was the picture of a mentally retarded child. Remember God loves all people. They may be poor, ugly, or unlovely, but they are “no less precious” in God’s sight. You can make someone happy today if you choose one of these persons and show special kindness to him. That would be one of the best definitions that could be made of Christianity—a demonstration or practice of it. *“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35). †

Leon Cole works with the North Carolina Church of Christ in Killen, Alabama, USA.

The Wonder of Conversion

A. R. Holton

Man is the only being of God’s creation that has a realization of sin and also remorse for his sin. He is the only being of God’s creation that is aware of the mystery and wonder of his own spirit. He is the one being to whom the Holy Spirit can bear witness.

To be converted, then, is one of the great mysteries facing humanity, and at the same time it is the deepest reality that man knows.

To turn from doubt to faith is to be converted. Yes, we stand amazed at the possibilities of an hour of worship in the presence of our God. We stand amazed at the human spirit making decisions of acceptance of God and of things high and noble. May we never lose the sense of wonder at the mystery of human life on this earth. Each new year should bring us to an increasing awareness that this is God’s world, that we belong to Him, and that we shall go at last into the eternal presence of God! †



The Gospel

MARK 4:26-29

L.L. Brigance

Introduction

- A. Definition of the Gospel is good news.
- B. There is no religious significance in the word Gospel.
 - 1. Illustrate. To some the New Deal was good news.
- C. What is the Gospel of Christ?

Discussion

I. Evolution of the Gospel (Mark 4:26-29).

“And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’”

II. Purpose (Ephesians 3:8).

“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...”

III. Promise (Galatians 3:8).

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’”

IV. Prophecy (1 Peter 1:10).

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you...”

V. Preparation (Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:3).

“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.”

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

VI. Perfection (Acts 2:36).

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

VII. The Gospel consists of:

A. Facts. There are many but three are fundamental.

1. Death of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1). Why is the death of Christ good news? Because he *“died for our sins.”* *“Without the shedding of blood is no remission”* (Hebrews 9:22; 10:3-4).
2. Buried. In Joseph’s new tomb.
3. He arose again.
 - a. This proved Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4).
 - b. In this fact all of our hopes rest (1 Corinthians 15:12ff). He ascended; offered His blood; became our Mediator.

B. Commands.

- c. Believe (1 John 3:23).
- d. Repent (Acts 17:30).
- e. Baptized (Acts 10:48).

C. Promises.

- f. Remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- g. Gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- h. Eternal life (1 John 2:25).
- i. The Lord is not slack in His promises (2 Peter 3:9).

VIII. The effects of the Gospel:

- A. The Power of the Gospel (Romans 1:15-17).
 1. Saved by it (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).
 2. It was preached in every conversion.
 3. Foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21).
- B. How does the Gospel save? By change of heart.
 1. The heart is changed by faith (Acts 15:9).
 2. The life is changed by repentance.
 3. The state is changed by baptism.

Conclusion

- A. Christ will take vengeance on those who obey not the Gospel (2 Thesalonians 1:7-9). †

L.L. Brigance (1879-1950) was a prominent Gospel preacher and a highly respected teacher of the Bible at Freed-Hardeman College in Henderson, Tennessee, USA.

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Gospel Gazette Online

Serving an international readership with the old Jerusalem Gospel via the Internet

Gospel Gazette Online is a monthly Gospel magazine on the Internet, begun by Louis and Bonnie Rushmore in 1999. Thousands of articles, written by faithful Christians, are archived and selectable through the on-site search engine. *GGO* is free to users throughout the world, and it is visited regularly even in parts of the world that remain virtually inaccessible to missionaries. (www.gospelgazette.com)



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- * Does the church of Christ exist in your community, so that you can hear the Gospel preached? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
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ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

Verse Search (page 31)

1. Paul.
2. Through the will of God.
3. Saints.
4. God.
5. Grace of God that was given them.
6. Jesus Christ.
7. They all speak the same thing and have no divisions.
8. Mind, judgment.
9. From household of Chloe.
10. Paul, Cephas, Apollos, Christ.
11. Only Christ was crucified for them, and they were baptized into Christ.
12. Crispus, Gaius, household of Stephanas.
13. Lest anyone think he had baptized in his own name.
14. He had been sent to preach the Gospel.
15. Lest the cross of Christ be made of no effect.

Bible Find (page 103)



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

