

VOLUME EIGHTY-FOUR

V THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL



“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Acknowledgement

Louise Buffington

***Oh, Lord,
I want to thank YOU
For the source of prayer
That such an one, as I,
May kneel before Your throne
And always find YOU there.***

***Like now, in the still of night
With no one else around,
I can reach heavenward
Where I know YOU will be found.***

***Oh, Lord,
I have nobody
On whom I can depend,
But YOU, my true, my faithful
and trusted Friend.***

***So, Lord, help me
To touch someone
Who is alone like me,
Then by some simple act of love
I may grow more like Thee.***

Acts 2 - Everything Was Right

In Acts 2, the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, everything was in place for the Church to begin as has been prophesied for hundreds of years . . . **EVERYTHING WAS RIGHT!**

- **THE RIGHT MEN** } • Mark 9:1
• Acts 1:8
- **THE RIGHT PLACE - JERUSALEM** } • Isaiah 2:2-3
• Micah 4:1-2
- **THE RIGHT TIME - "IN THE LAST DAYS"** } • Acts 2:16-17
• Joel 2:28-29
- **THE RIGHT POWER - "THE HOLY SPIRIT"** } • Acts 1:8
- **THE RIGHT MESSAGE - "REPENTANCE AND REMISSION OF SINS"** } • Luke 24:47-49
• Mark 16:16
- **THE RIGHT NAME - THE NAME OF CHRIST** } • Luke 24:47
• Acts 2:38
- **THE RIGHT AUDIENCE - "DEVOUT MEN OUT OF EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN"** } • Acts 2:5
• Isaiah 2:2

NOTE: Some years later at Caesarea (Acts 11:15), Peter would refer to the Day of Pentecost as "the beginning."



"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ."

Acts 2:38

A Saving Formula Planned

John 3:16



- ☞ The SOURCE of Salvation - "For God"
- ☞ The STIMULUS of Salvation - "So loved"
- ☞ The SUBJECTS of Salvation - "The World"
- ☞ The SHARING of Salvation - "That He gave"
- ☞ The STAR of Salvation - "His only Begotten Son"
- ☞ The STIPULATION of Salvation - "That whoever believes on Him"
- ☞ The SHOULD of Salvation - "Should not perish"
- ☞ The SPAN of Salvation - "But have everlasting life"

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



Jars of Clay

Byron Nichols

The use of illustrations and word pictures can put life into what might otherwise be a very mediocre presentation, whether spoken or written.

It is noteworthy that God’s “presentation,” His written Word, is full of illustrations and word pictures. The title above is just one example of the Lord’s handiwork.

Before actually dealing with this biblical phrase, “*jars of clay*”, I believe it will be helpful for us to look at some introductory matters. We should all marvel that Almighty God can and is so willing to condescend, to bend over so far to lift us up! Notice how Paul described this remarkable reality in Roman 8:16,17 – *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”*

It is through obedient faith in Jesus and the Father that we experience a new birth – a spiritual birth – and thus become children of God. What an incredible gift! We must understand that this matchless gift brings with it a great responsibility, the responsibility to make known to others that they too can have this same gift!

This brings us now back to our title, “Jars of Clay”. Paul begins 2 Corinthians chapter 4 by speaking about the Gospel and its significance. Then in verse 7, he says, *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us”* (ESV). (Several other translations say “**earthen vessels**” instead of “**jars of clay.**”)

What is Paul saying? He is obviously not intending for his readers to take those words literally, so what is his point in using these words? He is saying that God decided to put the Gospel, the only thing in the world that can save man from his sins, into these “earthen vessels”, these “jars of

clay”. His readers in the first century could readily understand his usage of these words since jars of clay were very much a common part of everyday life at that time. Those pieces of pottery were used for containers for many things. It was also common for such containers to sometimes have flaws and imperfections, but they were still useful for their intended purposes.

We can easily see that WE are the “jars of clay”, that WE are the receptacles for the contents, which in this case are the inspired words of the Gospel. Why did God make this choice? The answer is clearly seen in verse 7, “...to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” God wants us to understand that the power is not in man, but in Him. Thus, He likens us to fragile pieces of pottery. There is no glory attached to an ordinary container that has little value or beauty. Most of us don’t have much trouble qualifying for this, do we?

However, a very common container can have in it a priceless treasure, and God’s children indeed have the only treasure that can save the world! By entrusting the Gospel to His “jars of clay”, God is proving to all who will take notice that it doesn’t take someone who is what we might typically call “special” to convey God’s message to man. It is apparent that Paul was correct when he said in Romans 1:16 that the Gospel “*is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*”

We learn from 2 Corinthians 5:17, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*” This all comes about as a result of the power of that which is contained in the “jars of clay” – the Gospel that is stored in God’s containers, those of us who are Christians, His children and servants, His bearers of the Good News. In spite of the fact that an obedient believer becomes a “new creature”, this new creature (creation) is subject to imperfection, he/she still has blemishes and flaws. Remember that Paul, as great and dedicated as he was, had to try to cope with what he described for us as his “*thorn in the flesh*” (2 Corinthians 12:7). God’s response to Paul’s pleas to remove whatever that troublesome problem was not what Paul was seeking, but he came to accept the wisdom of God in the matter as the Lord assured him, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*” (verse 9). God used the weakness of one as great as Paul to emphasize His own strength. The Lord succeeded in helping Paul to see and then teach others that the power is most definitely in the **message**, not in “**the jars of clay**”! †

Run with Endurance

Jerry Bates



It is easy to become discouraged while living the Christian life. Worldly pleasures, social pressures and physical afflictions all cause us to want to quit. However, we must not quit, because if we do, we lose everything for which we have labored. Becoming discouraged is nothing new, because some of the greatest men mentioned in the Bible became discouraged, such as Elijah and Jeremiah. Each wanted to quit serving God.

How can we prevent becoming discouraged? In Hebrews 12:1-2, the writer gives some very encouraging words to anyone who might be tempted to quit. *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Firstly, the writer tells us to put away some things. We must put away sin. Sin is all around us, and it seems difficult for some Christians to put it away. We must also put off the weight that can slow us down. Weights are those things that are not necessarily wrong in and of themselves, but they can draw us away from our true focus. We must put away anything that turns our attention away from Jesus.

Secondly, we must run the race with endurance. Notice that the writer compares the Christian life to a race. Some races require short bursts of energy and are over in a few seconds. Others require sustained efforts over a long period of time, maybe hours. The Christian life is much like a marathon. It is much more than emotionalism or a momentary spiritual experience. It is a life of service, one that requires energy and persistence. It is not easy, but unless we run with endurance, we obtain nothing.

We cannot expect eternal glory if we stop running before the end of our Christian race. *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Galatians 6:9). Earlier in Hebrews 6, the writer referred to the example of Abraham. *“And so, after he had patiently*

endured, he obtained the promise” (Hebrews 6:15). Similarly, Paul wrote that eternal life would be given *“to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life”* (Romans 2:7). Therefore, endurance is required for successfully running this “race of faith”!

Thirdly, we must focus on Jesus, or as the NASB translates it, *“we must fix our eyes on Jesus.”* Just as Peter began to sink in Matthew 14:30 when he looked at the waves and took his eyes off of Jesus, so we will veer off course in the Christian race if we look on something other than Jesus. Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and He helps us to finish our race. *“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”* (Hebrews 7:25).

Jesus succeeded in running the race by looking at *“the joy set before Him”* (Hebrews 12:2). We might wonder how He could have joy by looking at the cross. He looked at the joy of reversing the tragic defeat of man in the Garden of Eden and defeating Satan. He looked at the joy of His loved ones, the saved, entering heaven. With the anticipation of such “joy”, Jesus “endured the cross”, that is, the physical pain and suffering of the cross. The cross is possibly the most unspeakable way to die that man has ever invented, and Jesus endured it in order to save us.

Furthermore, Jesus “despised the shame”. To despise means to think little of it or to disregard it. We often do not think much about the shame of the cross, but crucifixion was also a very shameful way to die. The cross was reserved for the worst of all criminals. It was carried out publicly, and all the passersby would hurl mockery and ridicule at the one dying. Jesus endured that mockery (Matthew 27:27-31; 38-44).

Just as Jesus looked at the joy set before Him, so we must look to Jesus! Whatever trials may come our way, we can look to Jesus, because He suffered much worse.

We must *“consider him”* (Hebrews 12:3). The Greek word for *“consider”* in this verse is not used elsewhere in the New Testament, and it means to draw an analogy. This does not mean to just to think about, but to draw a comparison between Jesus’ suffering and ours in order to learn how to remain steadfast. Meditating upon our Lord will prevent us from becoming weary and discouraged. We must consider how He endured, not only on the cross, but even during His life He endured. Think about how weary and discouraged Jesus must have become. After all, His own people did not believe Him. His own disciples were often the ones with the weakest faith. He experienced the greatest suffering and received the greatest honor.

We should think more about our benefits from the cross than about the temporary shame that may come upon us. Paul emphasized the same thing when he wrote in Romans 8:18, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* When we look beyond the cross, like Jesus did, we will be much more likely to successfully run the race.

The words in Hebrews 12:1-2 were written to encourage some Hebrew Christians who were tempted to quit Christ. These same words will encourage us as well. Don’t quit! †

REDEMPTION REQUIRES A REDEEMER

Louis Rushmore



“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth” (Job 19:25). Once prosperous from every consideration, then destitute of this world’s goods and even of his health, yet Job maintained the hope of a heavenly hereafter that sufficiently overshadowed every present distress. Job demonstrated confidence in the Lord to whom he gladly trusted his eternity. Job earnestly desired that the consolation with which he was

comforted based on this hope would be realized by many others as well.

Job’s hope and confidence was three-fold: (1) Job was confident that the Redeemer lives; (2) he also fully expected that the Messiah would someday appear to rescue his and other souls; and, (3) Job was hopeful and confident regarding the general resurrection in which he would participate.

These reflections encouraged Job in the face of his severe adversity and served as the basis of his hope. Likewise, contemporary children of God who find themselves greatly afflicted or facing death can appropriate to themselves consolations through the same hope. Certainly, for the rest of us who are relatively free from great trials, we can also through this hope known to Job find sufficient strength to satisfactorily cope with daily difficulties.

The Redeemer of whom Job spoke is the Christ (i.e., Savior, Christ, Messiah), whose function and certain ministry on earth was first intimated in Genesis 3:15. That our Redeemer lives is the foundation of all our hope; if our God were dead as some declare, we could have no hope. Job had sure hope based on the resurrection long before the earthly walk of Christ, His crucifixion and triumphant resurrection; we see so much more clearly than Job and yet he harbored great hope — the same hope we now have.

Unlike idolaters whose worship pertains to dead gods fashioned from stone, wood, metal, and the imaginations of men, Christians have a living Savior. Our

Great Prophet is alive evermore, whereas other world religionists, for instance, revere dead (buried) prophets. Jews reject the Christ and have no Savior (Redeemer). Only Christians have a living Savior — who resides in heaven at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-10; 7:55-56).

Jesus our Messiah is coming back to rescue the righteous. In Job's day, the first advent of our Lord was still future, to which he referred (19:25). However, when Jesus returns, He will not stand on the earth (Zechariah 6:12-13; Hebrews 8:4).

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of both Old and New Testament children of God; our eternity depends on it. While necessarily the "first" coming preceded the future "second" coming, were Jesus not to come again, the "first" coming would be meaningless. The Second Coming of the Lord is the cardinal hope of Christians (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and the dreadful fear of the ungodly (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The general resurrection is pending (John 5:28-29). Job believed in a bodily resurrection (19:26), which is also a principle of Gospel truth (1 Corinthians 15:49-54; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2-3). Our hope for eternity rests on our resurrection from the grave; we know we shall be resurrected because the resurrection of Christ guarantees our resurrection. Without our resurrection all would be hopeless (1 Corinthians 15:19). We have a common hope with Job and God's people of all dispensations: (1) our Redeemer lives; (2) our Redeemer is coming for us; and (3) our Redeemer will resurrect us.



Job desired that his hopes might be recorded in a book or engraved in stone so that others might develop the same kind of hope and become beneficiaries of the same consolations. His words, though, are immortalized in the eternal volume, the Bible, for all of every time to see.

Modern man has often derived comfort from Job's words as one sings them: "I know that my Redeemer lives." May our Redeemer live in each of us as we always abide in the Gospel. †

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The Angel of Jehovah

Dave Hart

One of the most fascinating and interesting personalities of the entire Bible is the Angel of Jehovah. Perhaps no other Bible character is so little known or understood as He. Who is this Angel of Jehovah? The answer to that question will be the object of our study.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGELS

To properly understand about this angel, we need to review the characteristics of angels in general. Angels are created beings. They were made through Christ in ancient times (Colossians 1:16,17). Being creatures, angels are not divine in nature. They are not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent. Angels are holy, but they are capable of sinning (2 Peter 2:4). Their very name indicates that they are *messengers* of God. Man is never allowed to worship angels, since only God may be properly worshipped (Revelation 22:8,9).

ACTIVITIES OF THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH

In the Old Testament we find at least 23 separate references to this Angel's work for God's people. The Angel of Jehovah appeared to Hagar, the handmaiden of Sarah as she wandered in the wilderness. He promised her a son and a large posterity. ***“And she called the name of Jehovah that spake unto her, Thou art a God that seeth...”*** (Genesis 16:7-14).

Jehovah appeared to Abraham at Mamre (Genesis 18:1,2). ***“He lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him...”*** He fed his three guests a meal. One of them promised that Sarah would bear a son within a year (18:10). When Sarah laughed at the idea, He claimed that nothing was too hard for Jehovah (18:14). He told Abraham that He was come down to investigate the situation at Sodom. Abraham perceived that He was ***“the judge of all the earth”*** (18:25). After Abraham had secured a promise from the man concerning Sodom, ***“Jehovah went away”*** (18:32). Then we read that He (Jehovah) rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah ***“brimstone and fire...”*** (19:24). Notice that while He appeared to be an ordinary man, in reality it was Jehovah Who visited Abraham that day.

Genesis 22:9-18 records the story of Abraham offering Isaac. Just as the

GOD

patriarch lifted his hand to plunge the sacrificial knife into his only son, “... *the Angel of Jehovah called unto him out of heaven.*” When Abraham saw the ram which had been provided, he called the place Jehovah-jireh (22:14). “*And the Angel of Jehovah called unto Abraham a second time...and said, ‘By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah...’*” (22:16). He then renewed the covenant promise of the Messiah.

Genesis 28:10-17 tells of Jacob’s dream at Bethel. He saw a ladder set upon the earth and the top of it reached to heaven. “*And behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold Jehovah stood above it...*” (a footnote says that Jehovah stood beside him). Moses tells us in Genesis 31:11-13 that it was the Angel of Jehovah that was the “*God of Bethel*” whom Jacob saw. When Jacob was returning to his homeland, he wrestled with a man throughout the night. The man said, “*Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel for thou hast striven with God... And Jacob called the name of the place Penuel for he said, ‘I have seen God face to face...’*” (Genesis 32:22-30). Hosea later wrote of Jacob, “*In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he had power with God, yea, he had power over the angel...even Jehovah, the God of hosts...*” (Hosea 12:3-5). On his death bed, Jacob blessed his sons by the name of God, the Angel who had redeemed him from all evil (Genesis 48:15,16).

When Moses saw the burning bush, “*The angel of Jehovah appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush...and when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush...and he said, ‘Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.’*” When asked by Moses what was His name, he was told that it was “*I AM THAT I AM*” who spoke with him (Exodus 3:2-14).

It was “...*the Angel of God who went before the camp of Israel*” when they made their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 14:19,20). Yet in chapter 13:21 of the same book we are told that it was Jehovah who went before them in the pillar of cloud and fire. Concerning His Angel, Jehovah warned Israel, “*Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Take ye heed before Him, and hearken unto His voice, provoke Him not, for He will not pardon your transgression: for My name is in Him*” (Exodus 23:20-23). Note that they had to obey the Angel and that He could forgive their sins.

At the episode of the golden calf, God withdrew this special Angel and only

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promised to send an ordinary angel. This so frightened and distressed Moses and the people that Moses fervently interceded for God to reconsider. Upon their repentance God did send His Angel to once again lead them (Exodus 33:1-3, 12-16). Isaiah comments that this was ***“the Angel of His Presence”*** that guided and protected them (63:9). The expression literally means “Angel of His Face.”

As Joshua prepared to march on Jericho, ***“he lifted upon his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with His sword drawn in His hand.”*** When asked, the man replied that he was ***“prince of the hosts of Jehovah...and Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship... and the prince of Jehovah’s hosts said unto Joshua, put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy”*** (Joshua 5:13-15). Continuing the narrative in 6:2, we read that ***“Jehovah said unto Joshua...”*** So this *man* whom Joshua worshipped was in reality Jehovah.

Three times the book of Judges records appearances of this notable Angel. He appeared to the nation at Bochim to reprove them for their disobedience (2:1-5). He appeared to Gideon to commission him to save Israel from Midian. Here again, the Angel is called Jehovah (6:11-14). In Judges 13, He appeared to Manoah and his wife and promised them a son, Samson. When Manoah offered Him food to eat, the Angel ordered him to ***“offer it unto Jehovah”*** as a sacrifice (13:16). ***“Manoah knew not that he was the Angel of Jehovah. And Manoah said unto the Angel of Jehovah, ‘What is thy name, that, when thy words come to pass, we may do thee honor?’ And the Angel of Jehovah said unto him, ‘Wherefore asketh thou after my name, seeing it is wonderful?’”*** (13:16-18). When the burnt offering was made, ***“the Angel of Jehovah ascended in the flame of the altar”*** (13:20).

In 2 Kings 19:33-36, Jehovah promised to save Jerusalem and King Hezekiah from the armies of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. ***“The Angel of Jehovah went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred four-score and five thousand...”***

When David sinned by taking a military census of Israel, God sent a pestilence upon the nation by His Angel. ***“And David lifted up his eyes and saw the Angel of Jehovah standing between earth and heaven, having a drawn sword in His hand stretched out over Jerusalem.”*** David and the elders fell upon their faces and prayed (1 Chronicles 21: 9-30).

Daniel saw the Angel of Jehovah in 533 B.C. while an exile in Babylon. He was ***“a man clothed in linen whose loins were girded with pure gold of***

GOD

Uphaz; His body also was like the beryl, and His face as the appearance of lightning, and His eyes as flaming torches, and His arms and His feet like unto burnished brass, and the voice of His words like the voice of a multitude.” Daniel felt totally undone in His august presence. He had come to reveal the future of the nation to Daniel (10:5-14).

A SUMMARY OF FACTS ABOUT THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH

We have seen that passages that began with “the Angel of Jehovah” as their subject commonly shift the names to “Jehovah, God, or Lord” as in Exodus 3:2-6. The angel claims God’s power and authority. He has the power to forgive sins (Exodus 23:4), but this *only God* can do (Mark 2:5-10). He revealed the future (Daniel 9:14). He had the power to judge, to save, or to destroy (1 Chronicles 21:14,15). God’s people are allowed to worship the Angel, but we are strictly forbidden to worship any ordinary angel or created being (Revelation 22:8,9).

WHO, THEN, IS THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH?

He certainly is not a created being. He is not a man, although he often appeared as a man. He is not merely a created angel. Nor is He God the Father, for John tells us that no man hath seen God at any time (John 1:18). Remember that the Angel directed Manoah to worship another than Himself (Judges 13:15).

The following observations will establish that this mighty Angel was no less than the Word of God, the preincarnate Christ. The Angel of Jehovah told Moses that his name was “I AM THAT I AM.” *Jesus* also claimed that he was I AM (John 8:58). The Angel led Israel through the wilderness and provided their needs (Exodus 14:19,20). Moses reported that Jehovah directed him to smite the rock that the people might drink in the desert, but Paul tells us that the rock they drank of was *Christ* (1 Corinthians 10:24).

In the book of Joshua, the angel is the prince or leader of Jehovah’s host or army (5:14). In Revelation 19, we see the army of heaven and its notable leader. Then John sees His name which is “*The Word of God*” (19:11-16). In his Gospel, John identifies the Word of God as the only begotten of the Father, who became flesh, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-4,14).

The Angel told Manoah that His name was wonderful (Judges 13:16-18). Isaiah, in his famous prophecy of Messiah said, “*His name shall be called Wonderful...*” (9:6).

Isaiah calls him “*The Angel of God’s Presence,*” which means “*of His Face*” (63:9). The Hebrew writer says Christ is “*the very image of His (God’s)*

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substance” (1:3). Edward Young says, “The angel of His face is the angel who is His face or in whom His face is made clear” (*The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 3:p. 482).

Jacob saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending and Jehovah standing beside it (Genesis 28:13 footnote). Jesus declares Himself to be that ladder (John 1:51).

The Angel of Jehovah can be worshipped (Joshua 5:4). No mere man or created angel can be worshiped acceptably (Acts 10:25,26; Revelation 22:8,9), but Jesus commonly accepted the worship of men (Matthew 28:17).

The Angel is repeatedly called Jehovah, but Jesus is also called Jehovah. Isaiah affirms that there is no Savior but Jehovah (43:11), but Paul describes Jesus as our great God and Savior (Titus 2:13). Therefore, Jesus is Jehovah. We do not affirm that Jesus is the Father. We simply recognize the fact that inspired writers ascribe the descriptive noun “Jehovah” to all three of the sacred Godhead. The word Jehovah describes a person who is eternal and self-existent. This is true of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Daniel saw the Angel in His regal glory (10:5,6). John the apostle saw the same glorious being on Patmos. He saw *“one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breast with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white as white wool, white as snow, and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace, and His voice as the voice of many waters...and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.”* The One John saw was the Son of God who had been crucified but resurrected (Revelation 1:12-18).

These appearances of the Angel of Jehovah in ancient times are called theophanies (i.e., when God assumes the form of an angel or a man in order to speak and act visibly and audibly to men, to provide them some revelation or guidance).

These many references demonstrate that our Lord existed from eternity with the Father, just as John affirmed in his biography of Jesus (John 1:1-3). They tell us of the Savior’s activities as Mediator between God and man before He came as Jesus the Son of Mary. They reveal how He acted on behalf of the redeemed during those long years when mankind groped in darkness for a guiding hand. In the light of these Scriptures let us honor and adore the Messiah who blessed man in ancient times as the mighty Angel of Jehovah and now as Jesus of Nazareth. ✠

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"Our Father in Heaven"

Charles Box

In giving the “model” prayer, Jesus said, *“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”* (Matthew 6:9). God is called “Father” by Jesus no fewer than 160 times — “Our Father in Heaven.”

God Has the Heart of a Father

“As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:13). God pities His children and will do far more for them than any earthly father ever could or would. God’s mercy shines when He is seen as a Father with His children whom He pities.

God Has the House of a Father

“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). Christians have an abiding place (“mansion”) in the “Father’s house.” The blessings awaiting in the Father’s house are beyond our ability to grasp, but through the eye of faith we see!

God Has the Love of a Father

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The love of God for sinners caused the greatest gift ever given — God’s Son, as a sacrifice for our sins. God’s love touches every moment of our life. His love is that of our Father in Heaven.

God Has the Tenderness of a Father

“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11). God is pictured as full of pity and tender mercies. *“Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us”* (Luke 1:78).

Because God is Father and has great love for mankind, He has provided forgiveness of sins through Christ’s death. *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (Ephesians 1:7).

God is your Father if you are His child through humble obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9; Mark 16:16). God has the heart of a Father, the house of a Father, the love of a Father, and the tenderness of a Father. Can you truthfully say, “Our Father in Heaven”? †

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The Master Designer Makes a “Better Roof”

David Everson

In the December 2002 *National Geographic*, Jennifer Steinberg, in an article entitled “A Mist Opportunity,” details how architects learn from a bug how to build a better fog-collecting roof for houses in desert areas. In the article, she quotes Oxford biologist Andrew Parker who says, “Animals are master engineers, so we copy them.”

Now let me get this straight; “animals are master engineers,” even though according to most scientists they evolved by natural selection or evolution and could not control what they turned out like; it was just environmental pressure causing mutations that brought about these changes! But this recognized Oxford biologist says that “animals are master engineers.” How can animals that are just responding to random environmental pressure due to natural selection engineer their own structure?

What is the thing that has been noted by human engineers? Well, it is a beetle! After observing the *Stenocara* beetle of the deserts of Namibia, human engineers have built roofs that can collect water from fog. God created the *Stenocara* beetle with a bumpy shell that can collect water in this very dry environment from the frequent fogs that cover its desert home.

It appears that this scientist believes that this insect decided how to engineer and then built its own shell. **How Absurd** — especially since I’m sure he believes the source of all changes in this beetle, as in all nature, is due to mindless organic evolution. Without God, none of this would be possible, but that answer is not acceptable to the scientific community, and so scientists continue to take positions that make them seem less than rational or intellectual.

These scientists, like most every scientist in the world today, will accept any answer that leaves God out the picture. It is certainly much easier to believe that a supernatural Creator, who is all knowing, was able to engineer the best possible shell for the beetle to allow it to survive in its desert home. Let us be very careful to be thankful, amazed, and humbled by the creative ability of the Master Designer. ✠

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EVIDENCES

The Butterfly

Brett Petrillo

For thousands of years people have been charmed by the beauty and elegance of the butterfly. Even more so, cultures have been inspired by its incredible metamorphosis. There are about 20,000 different species of butterfly in the world, ranging in size and color. One of the most famous is the monarch butterfly. While most butterflies share many of the same abilities, the monarch stands above the rest. Here are some reasons why.

1. Eggs & Location. As the monarch butterfly roams around, it is looking for a place to lay eggs. To do so, it must find the milkweed plant. This plant is pretty much the only plant the monarch caterpillar will eat (*National Geographic*). To figure out if it is the right plant, the butterfly will taste it with its feet. It will land on a plant, stomp on it to raise some juices, taste the plant, and determine if it is milkweed or not. Once it finds the milkweed, it will lay eggs on the plant. The obvious danger is for the egg to fall off and die before it hatches. So, the butterfly produces an incredibly unique and super strong glue to keep it fixed to the plant. It's nature's super glue.

When the monarch egg finally hatches, it will eat its own shell and then the milkweed plant it was laid on. This seems fine, except for the fact that milkweed is poisonous and capable of killing large animals if they eat enough of it. Somehow the caterpillar feasts upon this plant without any problem at all. The poison has no effect. In fact, it will even use this poison to make itself very unappealing to predators. If a bird eats a monarch butterfly, it will not be so quick to eat another.

2. Transformation. Once the caterpillar has grown and gone through a shedding-like process a few times, it is ready to go under a leaf and form the chrysalis. Inside, the caterpillar will release enzymes to break down and liquefy much of itself. What are left are a few main parts, like organs, and a soupy substance. This liquid is exactly what it needs to transform and keep from starving. This fluid mess functions like a bunch of little Lego blocks (Young). Even though the body is broken down, certain groups of cells (e.g., muscles) will stick together to be reused. Other cells in this fluid will form into "imaginal discs", which will soon grow into parts like wings and legs. All of these little pieces will build back together. After about 10 days and some incredibly complex growth spurts, the butterfly will finally emerge in its exquisitely transformed body.

3. Migration. Like most butterflies, monarchs can't fly in cold weather. It must get its body temperature up around 85 degrees to fly. The cold winter weather is a

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death trap, so monarch butterflies must migrate to warmer climates. The problem is, not a single butterfly of its generation has done this before. In fact, by the time the yearly winter migration happens, several generations will have already lived and died (*National Geographic*). The monarchs that make the trip are the previous year's great grandchildren. Amazingly, every year these butterflies easily make the 3,000-mile migration to the exact same location, following the exact same route, and some even to the exact same tree as their great grandparents (*National Geographic*).

The monarch butterfly is an amazing insect! Like many creatures, its abilities pose many difficult questions for the supporters of evolution. Why is the butterfly able to go through such a dramatic transformation in just a few days when other animals supposedly must take millions of years to evolve? Why is it that only insects can undergo such a transformation and no other animals, which are supposedly higher up the evolutionary line, are able to do this today? How does the butterfly know exactly where to migrate to, even sometimes down to the same tree as its ancestors? How did it develop the taste receptors on its feet? How and when did it develop immunity to milkweed?

Such an incredible insect can only be the creation of the Almighty God. Without a doubt, it was the Lord who made all the insects and creatures (Genesis 1:24-25). All other explanations fall short. Butterflies, especially the monarch, boldly proclaim God as the Creator (Psalm 19:1). As Psalm 95:6 says, “*Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*” The Lord is deserving! †

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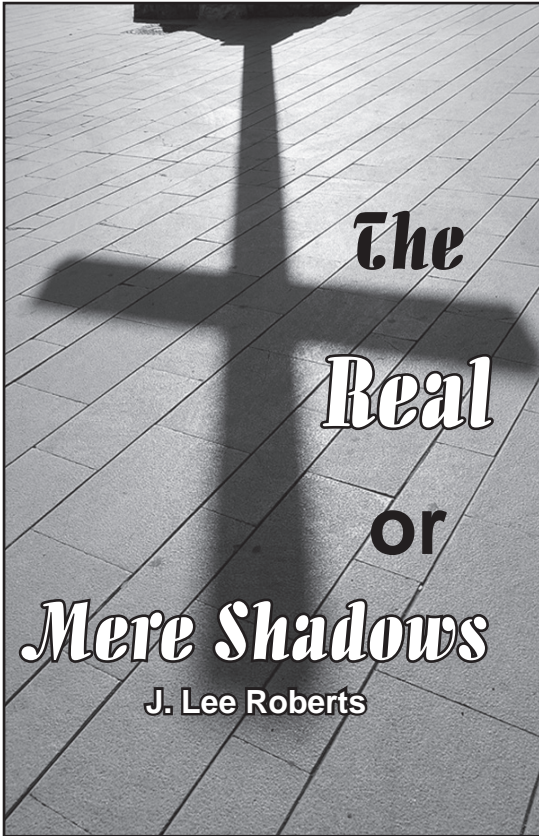
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“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:1-4)

WITH THE COMING OF CHRIST the purpose of Old Testament history and the Law was fulfilled. The Law made nothing perfect. *“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law,*

kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:11,23-25). Read also Hebrews 7: 18 - 22; 8:5-13; Acts 13:38,39.

THE OLD TESTAMENT was not God’s ultimate message for human redemption. It was to point us to the coming Savior, and therefore it was prophetic in announcing the time of a new covenant, not like the old. It contained *shadows of the good things to come* and was not the final word in leading men to reconciliation. That reality came with Jesus.

THE WORD OF GOD

A New Covenant

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Christ the Fullest Revelation of God

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...” (Hebrews 1:1,2).

THE NEW TESTAMENT makes plain that the ordinances and practices of the Old Covenant were shadows of spiritual things to be available only in Christ. The Law itself, the dietary rules, holy days, the Old Testament sanctuary with its priests, worship instructions and much more — all were mere shadows of what would be inaugurated by the Messiah. He would bring a New Covenant sealed not by the blood of animals but with His own blood.

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:9-20). Read also: Hebrews 8:1-13; 9:6-11; Galatians 1:6-9; 5:1-6; Acts 2:41,42; 1 Peter 1:18,19; 1 John 1:7.

TO REJECT CHRIST’S MESSAGE and resurrect Old Covenant shadows is to fall from grace. No true follower of Jesus can substitute Old Testament shadows of true worship practices for what Christ’s apostles taught and what the New Testament church practiced. We can not justify any practice today with anything except the inspired Gospel of Christ.

WHO WOULD SUBSTITUTE THE SHADOW FOR THE REAL? †

THE WORD OF GOD

Overlooking the Obvious

Dean Fugett

In our eager and seemingly insatiable quest for learning or knowledge, mankind has often overlooked the obvious for the elusive and hidden. In fact, it would seem that many times the habit has been to overlook the obvious in order to find something sensational. Many of the great discoveries of science lay at man's fingertips for centuries while he looked over, under, and around them. Excellent health procedures were evident in the Scriptures to the Hebrews of old days. Scientific truths lay unaccepted while men went in search of that which was hidden!

We often complicate our spiritual life and religion in general by overlooking the obvious while searching for the "deeper" things of religion. Many passages of Scripture have been perverted and their real power destroyed because someone was convinced that "there must be something more there!" Vital Bible themes have been exchanged for a mystical and speculative interpretation of an otherwise simple Bible statement. Sophisticated doctrines have been born in the mind of men and supported by proof-texts in willful ignorance of the obvious content of the verses.

Every verse of Scripture should be examined within its context — immediate and extended. It should be taken to mean what it says, unless it is revealed to be a figure of speech or an illustration of a previously-stated truth. Give it its usual sense of meaning, unless it is contradictory or obviously symbolic. Be sure that it is in harmony with all other related Scriptures. Remember, "*God is not the author of confusion!*" Consider giving the same attention to the field of religious investigation that you would give to any other discipline.

Do not join ranks with those who have always thrived on profaning that which was holy. The obvious meaning of the message is usually the correct one. Your Bible can be read and understood by you! It can also be read with enjoyment, not frustration, but you must be willing to invest the effort. That individual who uses the Bible only to find the oddities and the obscure will find no meaning there for his life — and the Bible is a Book of Life! †

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THE WORD OF GOD

The Gospel Is the Power

Lewis G. Hale

Paul wrote, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation*” (Romans 1:16). Imagine anything so powerful that it can take away every sin that has ever been committed! (Not that every sin will be blotted out, but every sin could be.)

Power that is unused is of no value. The benefits of the Gospel must be appropriated to be effective.

Just what is this power that is so great? You say, “The Gospel.” True, but what is the Gospel? Several times in the New Testament the word “gospel” is used for the message which the apostles preached. In fact, Jesus said, “*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel*” (Mark 16:15). The word literally means “Good News”. The Gospel of Christ really is good news.

While the Gospel is a message of good news, the power is not in the telling of the good news. The saving power of the Gospel is the event itself. Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection are the core of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Of course, people will remain unaware of the good news until we tell it. Jesus said, “*Men do not light a lamp and put it under a basket*” (Matthew 5:15). It is elevated to where it will light the room. Neither do we conceal the Gospel. It must be told.

Some discount the power inherent in the Word and call it a ‘dead letter’. The writer of Hebrews said, “*The word of God is living and powerful*” (4:1,2). The Word is powerful because it connects us to the power.

Electric lines do not generate power, but they do connect us to the power plant. Without them all the power plants in the world would never light our homes nor run our electric appliances. Even with the lines, if we do not flip the switch, we still have no power.

God has not only provided the power, He has told us how to utilize it. Romans 5 tells us that our faith is our access into His grace. Hebrews 11 demonstrates the fact that acceptable faith is one that does something — something God says to do. The Gospel has commands to be obeyed. Failure to obey the Gospel results in eternal destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9). †

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THE WORD OF GOD

How God Speaks to Us Today

Jim Poland

Can a nearly two thousand-year-old document speak to modern man? The answer is, “YES!” Do we have to modify the Bible message to the computer age? Do we dare modify the Bible message for any age? The answer is, “NO!”

The scope of the Bible New Testament is stated in 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.”* “Forever”, eternity, never goes out of date — one cannot even date or measure it by time, nor can anyone improve on it.

The Bible is inspired by God and gives the man of God everything needed to be fully equipped for God’s service. Listen to the Holy Spirit; *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

The completeness and finality of God’s Word is spoken in the book of Jude. The salvation commonly needed for all has been revealed in writing, and

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that faith necessary for salvation is to be defended. Jude was inspired by God to write: *“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). Therefore, being once delivered, it gives no allowance for modern revelations today or anytime until the day Christ comes again (1 Corinthians 15; John 12:48).

God’s Word has commanded us by Jude to remember His words. *“But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Jude 17).

Modern revelations from God are not promised, nor are they needed. Any who claim later revelations have gone beyond God’s Word and not remained in the doctrine of Christ. John was inspired to address this possibility when He 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. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds”* (2 John 9:11).

The spiritual problems of the computer age are basic to the problems of the chariot age, or any age of the past or future. The lists of sins in the New Testament transcend the external environment of man — they are problems of the heart (Romans 1:18-32; Galatians 5:19-21). The God of heaven and earth and Father of all mankind transcends the beginning and the end of the earth, galaxies, and man (Acts 17:24-31). He will one day judge the world by the Word of His Son (John 12:48). Modern man is called to repent of the same sins as was the first-century man. For men to try to change God’s Word in any way will not only not improve on God’s revelation, they will corrupt His document and bring condemnation to themselves and any who follow the commandments of men (Matthew 15:3,9).

Truly, the Bible is as fresh and needed today as it ever was! Surely it will continue to be vital to the heart and soul and eternal destiny of man! Claims of later revelations from God have no blessings from God, nor need for mankind. To change the Divine revelation can only bring God’s curse. God’s apostle was inspired by God to say; *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:8-9).

The Word of God still has a message for all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31)! *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16). †

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THE WORD OF GOD

Don't Throw the Whistle Away

Bob Plunket

There is a commercial on television where a man is trying to get his stubborn, lazy dog to obey him. He has tried everything. Someone told him, I suppose, to get this high frequency whistle. You can't hear it, but the dog can. So he takes a deep breath and blows until his face is red. The old dog does not budge. But just as he is about to throw the whistle in the garbage every dog in the neighborhood bursts through the door, knocking him down to answer the call.

There is a message here for the church. Don't throw the Gospel whistle away just because the spoiled, lazy, indifferent, preoccupied, and rebellious do not respond, as well as those who are so full and satisfied that they do not want to come to God's table. This happened when Jesus offered His great supper in Matthew 22. Those invited were preoccupied, but Jesus didn't throw the supper away. Rather He said, "Ask any and everyone to come to the feast."

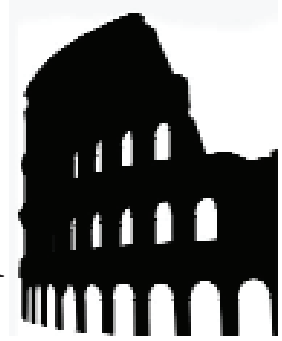
Don't throw the whistle away because you do not hear it or because you do not understand how it works. We can't understand everything about this marvelous whistle — the Gospel. How can we fully understand a God who gave His only Son to die for the wicked? Just blow it. Deliver it. Leave the rest to God. Jesus plainly told us, "*few there be*" that answer the call.

Don't throw the whistle away, because many with good and honest hearts are responding — those who are spiritually empty and hungry are making their way to His table. Paul had no positive response at Athens, but he didn't throw the whistle away.

Don't throw the whistle away. It is the only invitation we have from God. Look what it did in the first century.

Don't throw the whistle away. Some are saying, "Let's just tune it." I believe it was tuned by the Master, and we dare not touch it. "*Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, correction, for instruction which is in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, furnished completely unto every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16). †

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1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Jerry Bates

1. The message of the cross is _____ to those who are _____. (v. 18)
2. What is the power of God? (v. 18)
3. Verse 19 is a quotation of what Old Testament passage? (v. 19)
4. What is the wisdom of this world compared to God? (v. 20)
5. Jews request a _____, and Greeks seek after _____. (v. 22)
6. To the Jews a crucified Christ is a _____ and to the Greeks He is _____. (v. 23)
7. To God Christ is _____ and _____. (v. 24)
8. The foolishness of God is _____ than men, and the weakness of God is _____ than men. (v. 25)
9. Very few Christians come from what class of people? (v. 26)
10. God has chosen the _____ things of the world. (v. 27)
11. What things did God choose to bring to nothing the mighty things of this world? (v. 28)
12. Why would God choose those things? (v. 29)
13. What did Christ become for us? (v. 30)
14. In what or whom should be glory? (v. 31)
15. Where is the above passage written? (v. 31)

(see the back cover for answers)

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

NOTE: This section compares the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man. A full understanding of this concept will make divisions as described in the previous section seem to be nothing. We need to realize that God is much wiser than we are. Even our wisest thoughts are foolishness to God, and God's weaknesses are stronger than man's. Here Paul would be using anthropological language, that is, giving God human characteristics. Since God is all powerful, He would not have any weaknesses, but if He were to have any weaknesses, even they would be much stronger than man. The Jews could not conceive of their Messiah and Deliverer being crucified; thus, it was a great stumblingblock to their acceptance of Christ. The Greeks considered the idea of God becoming a man as simply foolishness. God's plan does not conform to the world's conception of wisdom; consequently, most Christians will come from the lower classes of the world. God has chosen this way for a purpose, so that man will come to depend upon Him rather than his own wisdom. Pride is possibly the biggest sin that man must overcome. Only when we begin to realize our limitations can we let God really be God.

Preaching Another Gospel

J.C. Choate

Paul knew what the Gospel was because he had preached that Gospel. It was the good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), along with the commands that one must obey to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). In believing in the Lord, repenting of one's sins, confessing Christ to be the Son of God, and being buried in the waters of baptism, one would not only be obeying the Gospel (2 Peter 4:17), but he would also be picturing the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection through his obedience (Romans 6:3-6). What a wonderful plan for bringing about the salvation of obedient believers!

In writing to the Galatians, Paul said,

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9).

Did you hear and understand what Paul said? He said that even though the Christians at Galatia had heard the one and only Gospel of Christ, he was surprised that they had so quickly left the truth to accept another so-called gospel. That “gospel” would have been a perverted message, a false gospel, one that would condemn



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their souls rather than save them. Paul warned sternly that even though he, himself, or even an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel than the one they had already received, that false teacher would be accursed. To add emphasis to what he had said, Paul repeated, “*As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*”

My friends, how much plainer could the warning be than that? How much more emphasis could be placed on the necessity of preaching the one Gospel? What greater penalty could be placed on a teacher for presuming to change the truth of God into “another gospel” than to actually be *cursed of God*? And Paul said that even he, as an apostle of Christ, or even an angel from heaven, would not escape this curse — this terrible punishment — if he dared to preach another gospel. Of course, God did not commission angels to be the messengers to impart the Gospel — that responsibility was given to men — but Paul used an angel, a heavenly being, as an extreme example of what would happen even to such an exalted being if he should dare to come and preach a gospel different from the one that had already been preached.

All of this serves to emphasize the importance, the seriousness, and the necessity of staying with the Lord’s teaching and not changing it or perverting it in any way. The truth will save one’s soul, but error will condemn. The Lord’s way will lead one to heaven, but the ways of men lead to eternal destruction.

This warning in the Scripture alerts us to the fact that there were false teachers and false gospels being preached even in the days of Paul. The same problem continues to this day! As a matter of fact, men will tell you dozens of ways to be saved, which means that they are teaching dozens of different gospels! The most popular one insists that “faith only” is the means to salvation, yet James declared in chapter 2, verses 17 and 24, “... *faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ... You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*”

Another very popular “false gospel” is “once saved, always saved”. The Scriptures plainly teach the opposite: “*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace*” (Galatians 5:4) “*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? ... I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain*” (Galatians 4:8,9,11).

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The sad part is that even though the true Gospel, and all that the Lord wants one to know and to do to be saved and to go to heaven, is clearly revealed in His Word, along with the consequences for accepting error, still most people go blindly on, following and preferring the teachings of men instead of the Lord's will. Not only is that a fact in the religious world, but even some of our own brethren have begun to join the enemy, accepting their false teachings and proclaiming those "gospels" as "truth". **All of these stand accursed before God for preaching another gospel.**

How can people be comfortable in following the doctrines of men? There is a simple explanation: *Most people do not study the Bible.* They have no understanding of what God has asked them to be or to do. And many reassure themselves with the thought that "What I don't know won't hurt me." They believe that God will not condemn them for not obeying Him if they don't know what He says. *The Scriptures give no such comfort for ignorance!* Hosea 4:6 plainly warns: ***"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."***

The Lord himself condemns those who teach the doctrines of men: ***"And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men"*** (Matthew 15:9). He says that not everyone who says Lord, Lord shall go to heaven: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven"*** (Matthew 7:21-23). Again, He says that the majority are on the broad way but that only a few are on the narrow way that leads to life: ***"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets..."*** (Matthew 7:13,14).

Paul says that we are to avoid those who cause divisions among us: ***"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"*** (Romans 16:17,18). John wrote that those who abide not in the doctrine of Christ have not God (2 John 9).

PLEASE do not ignore these warnings and dare to preach or to believe another gospel. †

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WHAT THE RICH MAN SAW

David R. Pharr

A television program examined the “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”. It was about those who are very wealthy, people who live in mansions costing millions, who fly in private jets and sail in beautiful yachts. Curiosity, and perhaps envy, wants to know what they wear, what they drive, how they eat, how much money they spend, etc. Doubtless, for many curiosity becomes admiration, which may in turn give way into covetousness (1 Timothy 6:9,10).



The Bible tells of a man who was rich and living in luxury. He lived in a gated home, had the finest clothes, and enjoyed the finest foods. Maybe he inherited wealth, maybe he earned it as a smart businessman, or maybe he was profiting from wise investment. Jesus called specific attention to how in life this man enjoyed good things. Tradition has given him the nickname “Dives,” meaning “rich man”. But all of his wealth did not make him a better man, and he never found forgiveness for his sins. Then, the day came when his body died and was buried, but his soul “*being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes [saw where he was]*” (Luke 16:23).

When a lost soul opened his eyes on the other side of death, what did he see? He saw what many refuse to believe—that there is a conscious existence beyond this world. “*The body without the spirit is dead*” (James 2:26), but the converse is not true. Earthly flesh is deceased, but the spirit lives on. At

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the instant of death, angels come for the souls of the saved, as happened to the poor beggar Lazarus, but as soon as the rich man opened his eyes, he saw he was in a place of torment.

He saw that the fires of torment are real: *“I am tormented in this flame”* (Luke 16:24). There are too many places where the fire is mentioned for its reality to be ignored. It is a *“baptism of fire,” “unquenchable fire,” “everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” “the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.”*

Because he was allowed to see to the other side, Dives saw there is a place of comfort, a paradise, from which he was kept far away and which he could never enjoy. There are wonderful promises for those *“who die in the Lord”* (Revelation 14:13), but not even a drop of water could be brought to Dives from over there.

Dives saw that he was in a prison from which he could not escape. There was *“a great gulf [chasm]”* that no one could cross. Like the angels that sinned, who are held in *“everlasting chains of darkness”* (2 Peter 2:4), the dead who had lived in disobedience are held as *“spirits in prison”* (1 Peter 3:19).

Another thing Dives saw was that God’s grace and mercy which had been refused in life cannot be claimed in death. God is *“rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us”* (Ephesians 2:4). God *“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4). The opportunity to receive salvation had been available to him in life before he died. He had neglected it and died in sin (John 8:21,24). When it is too late, it is horribly too late!

He also saw that only the Word of God could save others from coming to such a terrible place. He wanted someone from the dead to persuade his brothers to repent, but *“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead”* (Luke 16:31). The only offer of salvation is through God’s Word. Either it will bring one to repentance, or impenitence will bring one to damnation.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him” (Hebrews 2:3). Someone asked, “Where will you be five minutes after you die?” When Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus, He gave answers to that very question (Luke 16:19-31). †

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The Perseverance of the Saints

Tim D. Shoemaker



Sometimes it seems hard to continue the struggle of the Christian life when we see the way this world is going. At times it seems that the world is winning in the battle for men's souls. Because of that, many will never become Christians, and many who are Christians will become discouraged and give up. Even great men of God have become discouraged by the events of this life, and some came close to quitting. The psalmist declared in Psalm 73:2,3, "*But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling: my feet had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*" Though he had done his best to live a life of purity and innocence, he felt it had all been in vain, for in spite of all his good, he suffered all day long (Psalm 73:13,14). Thankfully, by going to God's sanctuary, he learned the true end of the wicked, that they will be cast down and destroyed in a moment (Psalm 73:17,18). We need to understand that there will be

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setbacks and times of struggle and despair, but ultimately God's cause will win out, and the faithful will be vindicated and justified.

The twenty-eighth president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, declared on one occasion, "I would rather lose in a cause that will someday win, than win in a cause that will someday lose." That is exactly the position in which Christians find themselves. We may have to endure suffering, but we can take comfort in the knowledge that we are involved in a cause that will someday win, while the wicked are involved in a cause that will someday lose. In chapter 13 of the book of Revelation, we read of the great beast that came up out of the sea, and "*it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues and nations*" (v. 7). The picture looks bleak at that point, but what helps the Christians to persevere is to remember that the book of Revelation does not end with chapter 13. Just one chapter later John writes, "*This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus*" (NIV). When one understands that eventually the Christian cause will win and the world will lose, it changes the whole outlook we have on life and what is happening. The Christian needs to maintain a "*patient endurance*". Just previous to this statement, John had written, "*And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name*" (Revelation 14:11). We need to realize the cause of the world will lose and those following that way will suffer torment forever and ever. The verse following says, "*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'*" (Revelation 14:13). The cause of God and His Christ will eventually win and Their followers will be blessed, and they will have rest forever. †

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One Is Baptized into Christ to Become a Christian

Sunny David

Recently, I bought a little book, entitled *Believe and Be Baptized*. In it, the author vainly tried to show his readers that baptism follows conversion and that baptism is just an outward sign of an inward salvation. In one place, explaining Acts 2:38, he says, “They must REPENT in order to be forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” How brazen one could get to prove an error! Is this what Acts 2:38 in your Bible reads? The Bible clearly states: “*Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent and let every one of you*

be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” The Bible teaches one must both repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins—not just repent. Yet,



in another place in his book he writes, “A person is not baptized to make him a Christian, but rather to show he is a Christian.” The Bible in Galatians 3:27 says, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*” Can one be a Christian without getting into Christ or without putting on Christ? How does one put on Christ? The Bible teaches, through baptism into Christ in whom we have redemption through His blood, one receives the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14).

The apostle Peter, in his first epistle, linked baptism with salvation and used Noah’s ark and the floods as an illustration. He stated in 1 Peter 3: 20,21, “*Who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is,*

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eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The clear inference is that it was the water of the flood that separated Noah from the disobedient generation that perished, and it is the water of baptism that separates between the saved of today and the disobedient who will perish. Before one is baptized, he is outside of Christ; after he is baptized, he is in Christ. So the apostle Paul said to the Romans, “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we 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 the newness of life*” (Romans 6:3,4). The newness of life or the new life in Christ begins after and not before baptism. Before one is baptized, he has the guilt of sin upon him; when he is baptized, his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). Obedience is his appeal to God, and in the act of baptism, he calls upon the name of the Lord. One submits to baptism to obtain forgiveness and to have a clear conscience.

Let us now study two cases of conversion to Christ from the eighth chapter of the Book of Acts. When Philip the evangelist had gone into the city of Samaria, he preached there “*the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.*” The next line reads that “*both men and women were baptized*” (Acts 8:12). If proclaiming things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ did not include baptism, the Samaritans would not have known to be baptized. Preaching Christ and baptism cannot be separated.

In the same chapter we read the story of the eunuch to whom Philip had “*preached Jesus*” as they were traveling in the eunuch’s chariot. The record says, “*Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him*” (Acts 8:36-38). Philip had preached Jesus to eunuch, and the eunuch wanted to be baptized right then and there. What does this show? It shows very clearly that one cannot preach Christ genuinely and candidly without preaching about baptism. If I am preaching Christ, I must preach baptism. Preaching baptism is preaching the Gospel of Christ (Mark 16:15,16). †

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Relationships

Clarence DeLoach, Jr.

John makes it clear that when we are in fellowship with God, we sustain a special relationship with each other. That warm relationship is called fellowship.

Fellowship translates the word “koinonia”. God has placed His redeemed people in a community called the church. It is in that atmosphere that we are given all of the ideal circumstances for growth. As new creatures in Christ, the climate is provided for life, growth, and development.

This “koinonia” was one of the outstanding traits of the early church. The Roman world was amazed at this quality. Even her poets wrote about it. These people really cared about one another, belonged to one another, and were so sensitive to each other’s needs that Luke says they were of “*one heart and one mind*” (Acts 2:42).

As the first Christians were drawn together in Christ, they found acceptance, openness, encouragement, support, and trust. They shared each other’s hurts, weaknesses, problems, dreams, anxieties, and triumphs.

They were truly brothers and sisters. In the body, each member found his place. In the family, each one belonged. Church membership was not having a name on a roll, but being involved in the family. It was a “one-another” experience.

Unity is stressed and division was condemned. Dissent threatened fellowship! So, when jealousy, pride, prejudice, and self-centeredness arose in local churches, they were dealt with because these are the roots that cause division. And, division destroys fellowship (1 Corinthians 3).

It must still be this way if the church is to grow. Let’s zealously guard our fellowship in Christ. In fellowship we can grow! And, in fellowship we can reach out to others.

“Koinonia” is rooted in love. Because we have received the love of Christ, we are enabled to love Him in return and others as well. It is love’s way of applying itself.

That God for the “*fellowship we have with Him and all those who belong to Him*”!
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Church membership was not having a name on a roll, but being involved in the family. It was a “one-another” experience.

THE CHURCH

Qualifications of Elders

Wayne Barrier

A study of the Bible reveals that the New Testament church must be overseen (1 Peter 5:2), ruled (1 Timothy 5:17), equipped for service (Ephesians 4:11), provided with protection (Acts 20:28-29), and spiritually fed (Acts 20:28) by elders. Elders are referred to as bishops, shepherds, overseers, and pastors. Different words are used to emphasize a specific component of their responsibility. Elders are the only leaders with authority to oversee and rule. Performance of their duties are essential to the long term well being and growth of the church. Elders must meet a strict set of qualifications that are provided in the Bible. The church will struggle and fail to achieve its mission of spreading the Gospel and edifying members if elders are not qualified to serve. These qualifications are described in Scripture as follows:

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:1-7

If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. Titus 1:5-9

The church is the most important organization on earth. Its mission is the most important work in the world. Christ is the Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22), the Bible is the authoritative source of guidance and doctrine for the church (2 Timothy 3:16), and elders are to oversee the church (body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:29), using God's Word as the basis of their oversight. Elders must be qualified if the church is to be effective. Bible qualifications for elders are well described and easy to understand. †

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“Let Us Rise Up and Build”

Gary C. Hampton



The Jews had been a laughingstock because the walls of Jerusalem lay in rubble. Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls. He wanted to remove the source of Israel's shame. Of course, he had his detractors. Yet, in their biting questions are found some great principles of success.

“What Are These Jews Doing?”

Sanballat, the Moabite, apparently held some position in Samaria at the time Nehemiah began to rebuild the walls. He asked his brothers and the Samaritans, *“What are these feeble Jews doing?”* His question points out our absolute dependence on God for success.

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Paul said, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13). Men may claim some special ability to help others achieve greater success. However, the apostle Paul refused to take the credit. *“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13). Jesus said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

“Will They Fortify Themselves?”

We might have asked, “Will they fight?” The answer soon became obvious. They worked half-ready for battle and half to rebuild the wall despite the opposition. Nehemiah told his fellow Jews, *“Therefore, wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us”* (Nehemiah 4:20). Actually, God plus anyone is a majority. *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31).

“Will They Complete It In A Day?”

Many people make a good start but do not see it through to the end. How many New Year’s resolutions are broken before January ends? Paul wrote, *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Galatians 6:9). In 1 Corinthians 15:58, he said, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*

“Will They Revive the Stones From the Heaps of Rubbish?”

Satan still questions the material used in building the church. But, we are *“living stones...being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* We *“are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Peter 2:5, 9-10).

We can succeed with God’s help. We are strong with Him on our side. We must be ready to confront Satan’s forces. Willingness to sacrifice is essential. We must carry on to a good ending. The church is made up of good material because Christ’s blood has made those people who comprise it free from sin. †

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Five Sins That Will Hurt the Local Church

Roger Leonard

“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14,15).

Paul wrote these words to the evangelist Timothy with regard to his behavior in the local church. It was personal, but is not the church made up of individuals? We each have an individual effect on the local congregation of the Lord’s church where we attend.

What are some sins that will hurt the local church? This article will discuss five.

- 1. Lack of prayer.** Sometimes we may find ourselves looking at and pointing out the weaknesses of the church and individuals, but fail to pray for the Lord’s people. Jesus said that *“men always ought to pray and not lose heart”* (Luke 18:1b). One thing we can lose heart about is the hope of the future of the church! We can become discouraged and even get down on our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul wrote that we should *“pray without ceasing”* and *“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18). Instead of being discouraged and losing hope in our brethren, we should pray for them individually and for the whole body. Jesus prayed for the future of the church in John 17:20ff. The early church *“continued steadfastly in... prayers”* (Acts 2:42). Paul often told the churches to whom he wrote letters that he always prayed for them (Colossians 1:3). One reason for this was his *“deep concern for all the churches”* (2 Corinthians 11:28). We must pray for the church always.
- 2. Laziness.** One of the greatest sins to overcome as a member of the church is laziness. Jesus made a serious issue out of it in Matthew 25:26, where He said to the one talent man who did not use his talent, *“You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.”* Fear was what caused this man not to act; however, Jesus would not accept that as an excuse! In fact, He said the man was an

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“unprofitable servant” and condemned him to *“outer darkness”* (i.e., hell) for his laziness. Why would Jesus react in such a way as this? It obviously is because of the need for and value of service in the church. The church is made up of the saved (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23), so the Lord wants His people to be actively involved in *“the growth of the body”* of redeemed people. (Ephesians 4:16). Involvement is the cure for laziness.

- 3. Stubbornness or Rebellion.** The Word of God is published in the bulletin, taught in Bible classes, and proclaimed from the pulpit. All of us are accountable for our response to it. Jesus stated over and over that people needed to “hear” the Word of God. Those who refused to do so were said to have dull



hearts, virtually deaf ears and closed eyes (Matthew 13:15). The Lord told King Saul: *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD....”* Notice how the Lord viewed rejection of His Word. One has to wonder how rebels in the church see themselves when they refuse to hear the Word of the Lord. We know what the Lord sees, and this not only affects the person, but also the church. In fact, the church is supposed to withdraw from such if they

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refuse to repent, in order to save their souls (1 Corinthians 5:4ff). Rebels need to repent.

4. **Worldliness.** This is much like number three, but the thought here is the worldly mindset. In other words, the church may or may not know, but the world does, and they are watching and listening. The effect is on the outside. Paul wrote, *“Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”* (1 Corinthians 10:32-33 NKJV). Peter also addressed this: *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Peter 2:11-12). If people hear Christians using bywords or cursing, see them drinking or gambling, hear them lie or compromise Christian virtues, that has a negative impact on the reputation of the church, and it can cause many to be lost. Worldly church members need to love God, not the world (1 John 2:15-17).
5. **Lukewarmness.** Jesus used this word but once, and it was to the church in Laodicea: *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth”* (Revelation 3:15-16). This might be one of the most insidious sins we commit. What I mean is, we may not take much notice of it in our lives. After all, who wants to admit such? The Lord mentions three levels of zeal for Him here: (1) Cold zeal (i.e., none), (2) Lukewarm zeal, and (3) Hot zeal. Now, He said He wants us to be cold or hot. (He really does not want us to be cold, but is making a point!) So, what is the problem with lukewarmness? It pretends to be something it is not. It is a heart content with its accomplishments. It is the satisfied soul that probably assembles with the church, but not regularly, and he or she is not actively involved in the works of the church (*just warm enough to stay in the directory?*). Jesus says the lukewarm make Him sick! So, what is the remedy for lukewarmness? Four words: *“...be zealous and repent”* (Revelation 3:19).

Where do we find ourselves in these things? Better still, if we find ourselves in any of these sins, what will we do about it? †

Roger Leonard is the preacher for the Adel Church of Christ in Adel, Georgia, USA.

THE CHURCH



A man who had not attended one service of the church in four years told me he had never thought of “quitting” the church. I reminded him that he had already (1) withdrawn his presence from its services, (2) refused to give his moral support to the activities of the congregation, and (3) had withdrawn his financial support, for he had not given one dime to help carry on the Lord’s work.

I asked: “What else would one have to do in order to ‘quit’ the church? In case you ever decided that you no longer desired to be a member, what other steps would be necessary for you to take? Just what else would be necessary to ‘quit’ the church?”

As his true status dawned upon him, his expression reflected his sober thoughts. He replied, “Why, brother Nichols, I’ve already quit, haven’t I? Well, I surely didn’t mean to! And I don’t know when I did it...but I’ve quit the Lord and His church! I’ll tell you right now: I’m coming back!” He did, too. At the next service he was restored, and three years later he was still faithful.

Dear reader, how about you? Have you quit the Lord and His church without resolving to do so? Perhaps no one deliberately decides to quit, while many carelessly drift into backsliding. If you have (1) quit attending the services, (2) quit boosting the program of activities planned by the elders, and (3) quit giving as the Lord has prospered you to enable the congregation to meet its budget — you need to be restored. †

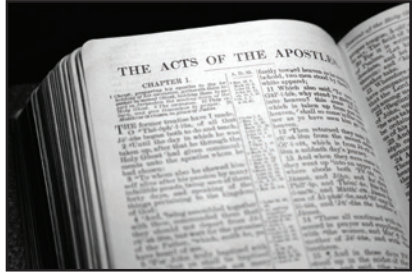
Gus Nichols was one of the great preachers throughout much of the 1900’s. He made his home mostly in Jasper, Alabama, USA.

THE CHURCH

Christianity Without Denominationalism

Carroll Sites

To what denomination did Peter, James, John, the 3,000 on Pentecost in Acts 2, Cornelius, the Eunuch, Lydia, the Corinthians, and the jailor in Philippi belong? They were members of the body of Christ, which is the Lord's church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18,24). Yet, none of these were members of any denomination. In the Bible, all who were



saved became members of this body, the church, by virtue of the fact that the Lord added to it (Acts 2:47). They joined no denomination. They had been “called out” of the “power of darkness” or the world and translated into the “kingdom of God’s dear Son,” which is the church (Colossians 1:13-14,18). But still, they were not members of any denominational church.

Just so today, if a sinner believes in Christ and is baptized, just as those mentioned above, such would make him a Christian, but nothing more. Study these Scriptures: Mark 16:16; Acts 2:36-41; Acts 8:36; Acts 16:14-15; Acts 16:30-34; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27. This would not make him a member of any denomination.

If a large number did this, would they not be Christians? If this number should come together on the first day of the week for worship...call themselves by the same name as did the apostles and early Christians...accept and teach the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice...select such servants as the Bible authorizes...and observe the same commands in the same way as the apostles and early Christians did and as are set forth in the Bible — they would be simply New Testament Christians, members of the body of Christ, the New Testament church, assembling for worship without being members of any denomination on earth.

This is the plea of Christ...that we all be one. We can be if we will be united on the Bible and use it as the sole and last authority in matters pertaining to religion. This is the plea of the church of Christ in every century. Won't you become a member of the church of the Bible only? †

Carroll Sites is an elder and the preacher for the Lord's church in Higden, Arkansas, USA.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses Hebrews 10:22-26

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

This passage lists three things beginning with the admonition, "Let us..."

1. Our *hearts*: In order to draw near to God, our hearts must be cleansed from an evil conscience while our bodies have been washed in baptism with pure water.

2. Our *hope*: We must be steadfast in our hope of the fulfillment of the eternal promises, because God — Who has promised — does not fail in His faithfulness.

3. Our *consideration* of each other in Christ: We are to be motivated by love for fellow Christians, to do good works. We must also not only participate faithfully in the assembly to worship God but we must encourage each other to faithfulness

To ignore these commands is to commit willful sin, for which there remains no sacrifice beyond the one already made in the death of Christ.

Confession Is Good for the Soul

John Deffenbaugh

We've heard this all our lives. Is it true? Is there something about confession that is good for us? What does the Bible say? Revealed in the New Testament are two kinds of confession. There is *confession of our belief* that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 8:37). There is also *the confession of sin*, taught by John (Matthew 3:6) and practiced in the church by Jesus' disciples (Acts 19:18).

Salvation results when we are willing to confess our belief in Christ (Romans 10:8-10). So, yes, this confession is very good for the soul, even necessary (Matthew 10:32-33)! A closer look at the practice of confessing sin reveals several things in the New Testament. First of all; *"If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). *"If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us"* (1 John 1:10). King David recalled living in denial of sin and the misery it brought (Psalm 32:3,4). Denying or hiding sin in our lives not only condemns the soul, but weighs heavy on our hearts and minds! Let's always be open and honest about our frailties and shortcomings.

None of us live this life perfectly, and God wants us to acknowledge that. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Confession of sin to God is very good for the soul because it: (1) brings cleansing and forgiveness, (2) humbles the soul, (3) reminds us of our need to improve, (4) exalts the sinless life of our Lord, (5) magnifies our need for God's grace, and (6) makes us thankful for the cleansing blood of Jesus. Enumerating specific sins to God helps us even more. Try it; you may like it!

Confessing our sin before God is vital, but we also sometimes need to confess our sins one to another. James 5:16 states: *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."* In the preceding verses we have prayer offered on behalf of the sick and also for forgiveness of sins. The end of verse 16 again emphasizes the need for prayer and its power. Sandwiched in between all this prayer, James inserts confession to one another. We have an example of believers confessing their sin to one another in Acts 19:18. The original Greek here suggests these people had believed at some point in the past and were presently still believers. What did they do when confronted with sin in their lives? They came confessing and disclosing their practices! Confessing our sins to one another is good for the

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

soul because: (1) it allows us to heal, (2) it is a way to make our penitent intentions known to others, (3) it enables our brethren to pray more accurately for our souls, (4) it allows the healing of broken relationships personally and congregationally, and (5) it promotes humility, transparency, honesty, and trust.

Sometimes as Christians we stray from God. We may find ourselves like Simon in Acts 8 where our *“heart is not right before God”* (v. 21). We too may be *“in the bondage of iniquity”* (v. 23). God’s solution for the erring Christian is simple. Peter told Simon to *“repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you”* (v. 22). Simon then asked for their help in prayer. If our sin has become known to others or affected them, then confession of our sin to one another informs them of our desire to repent and do better. It allows others to accurately pray for our forgiveness and healing.

Indeed, confession is good for the soul!



John Deffenbaugh serves as an elder in the Hillcrest congregation in Neosho, Missouri, USA.



DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Compare the “Miracles”

Royce Frederick

Some people deny the miracles of the Bible. Others try to imitate the miracles to deceive people (see Matthew 24:24-25). But the miracles in the Bible were true miracles from God. In the first century A.D., many miracles were done by Jesus, His apostles, and other disciples chosen by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:23-25; 10:8; Acts 2:43; 1 Corinthians 12:11). Several facts help us understand the difference between the true miracles of the Bible and the claims of men today.

Many of the miracles were CLEARLY SEEN. Jesus did not merely heal diseases which are hidden inside the body or mind. He healed every kind of sickness and disease (Matthew 4:23-24), including leprosy and crippled legs. He stopped a storm by speaking to it, fed more than 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish, walked on water, and raised the dead (Matthew 8; 14; John 11).

The healing miracles were IMMEDIATE. The people did not merely *start* recovering; they were instantly healed. Several years ago, some people made a film which portrayed Jesus healing the mother-in-law of Peter. She was lying in bed with a high fever. In the movie, after Jesus healed her, two people *helped her* into the next room where she *continued resting* to regain her strength. But the Bible tells us that the woman was *completely* healed, “...And *immediately she arose and served them*” (Luke 4:39). She was healed **instantly** and **totally**.

They never had a “healing service” in the Bible. Jesus and His disciples never tried to gather a large crowd by advertising that they would have a “healing service”. They never worked their miracles on a stage, making a big show for the people. They never needed to do those things. Thousands of people came to them because their miracles were real.

The miracles were verified by a multitude of people on the Jewish day of Pentecost. The apostle Peter told them, “*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know... you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death... this Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses*” (Acts 2:22,23,32). Those were bold words to people who had already shown their ability to hate and murder. However, they did not rise up to kill Peter, but about 3,000 of them obeyed the Gospel (2:37-41). But the *silence of all* and the *obedience of many* showed that the crowd clearly

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

acknowledged the truth — Jesus had worked miracles among them, and they had killed Him. The powerful beginning of the church of Christ that day is evidence that the miracles truly occurred.

Many eyewitnesses verified the miracles in the face of persecution and death. Some people will fight for a lie, but would you willingly *die for a lie* — lay down your life without fighting? Would you endure torture and death for your “eyewitness testimony”, knowing you had lied about it, knowing there was no truth and no hope in it? In the face of persecution and execution, the apostles and hundreds of disciples remained loyal to their testimony about the miracles and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2-9; 12-14; 16-28).

The miracles fulfilled their purposes for all time. Many of the miracles in the Bible showed God’s compassion for human suffering. He also shows His love in many other ways every day without miracles (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17; James 1:17). But providing physical help for man was not the primary purpose for the miracles. Je-

sus did not raise *all* the dead people to life. He did not come to keep everyone alive on this earth. He “*came to seek and save the lost*”, to take us to heaven after the end of this world (Luke 19:10; John 10:10; 5:28,29; 14:1-3).

The *purposes* of the miracles were: to prove that Jesus is the Son of

God (John 16:12; Acts 2:22; Hebrews 2:4; Romans 1:4), to reveal His New Testament by inspiration through His disciples (John 16:12; Ephesians 3:3; Jude 3), and to confirm the message of His disciples (Mark 16:17-20; Acts 2:1-12, 43).

The miracles of the Bible were true and fulfilled the purposes for which they were intended. †

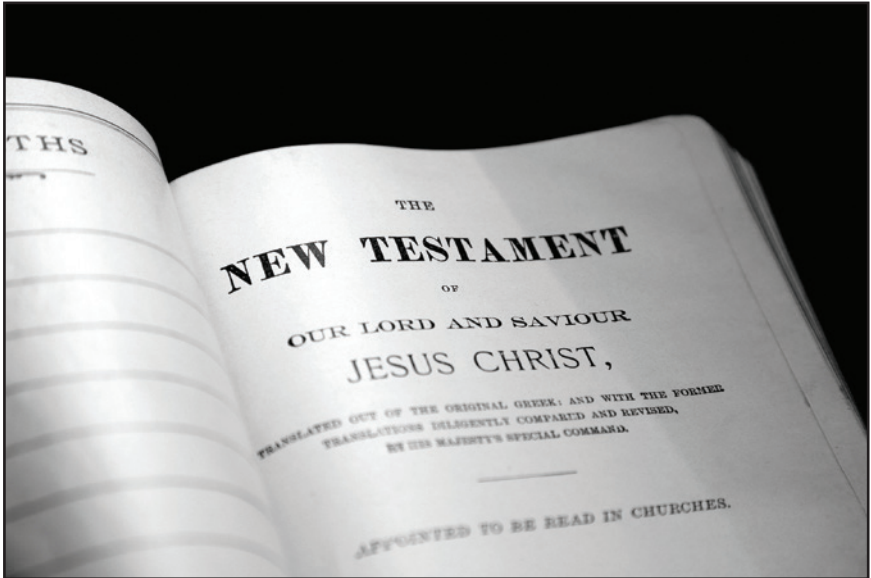


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DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Does God's Grace Annul His Law?

Hollis Miller



The apostle John wrote: *“The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17 NKJV). The wording of John’s statement should not be taken to mean that there was neither grace nor truth under Moses, but that both came in their fullness in Jesus Christ. That John had the Old Covenant law in mind is clearly evidenced by his affirmation that it came through Moses. No “law” of the Christian faith should be included in the apostle’s statement.

According to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, “nomos (law) means that which is assigned, a force or influence impelling to action or, by metonymy, books which contain the law.” In view of Vine’s definition, it can be said that God’s law is that which He has assigned to men. It can also be said that the assignment constitutes a force which influences men of faith to action that harmonizes with what has been assigned.

The apostles of Christ certainly understood how God’s grace functions. None of them thought grace excluded divinely specified action on the part of the New

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Covenant people, the church. Should the grace of God annul even one of God's assignments to men, love for God would be thrown into hopeless confusion, for Jesus said: "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). Not a single commandment is exempt from Jesus' statement. How can one possibly love God and at the same time claim that divine grace lessens responsibility to His commandments?

But God's grace is indeed a powerful and loving force in every Christian's life. Grace supplies that which is lacking in one whose heart and soul are intent on serving the Lord. It enables such a one to live beyond his or her strength. This is not cheap grace; it is real grace. Over and over again it was Paul's prayer that God's grace would be with his readers. The apostle was not expressing meaningless jargon (cf., Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:3; see also Hebrews 4:16). Truly, by God's grace we have all been saved (Ephesians 2:8).

If we are saved by grace, it follows that anything else the Bible declares saves us (e.g., faith, repentance, baptism) must be an integral part of what it means to be saved by grace. One cannot extol faith, repentance, and baptism at the expense of grace, but neither can he extol grace at the expense of faith, repentance, and baptism — or anything else essential to salvation.

God's grace can best be understood when viewed in context with everything the New Testament teaches about God's relationship with men and men's relationship with God. The teaching of Jesus and the apostles emanates as much from God's grace as it does from His love. "*The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world*" (Titus 2:11f). Jesus and God's grace are inseparable, for what Jesus taught, God's grace taught. Both Jesus and His teaching are God's assignment to men, and neither can be ignored. †

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

**God's grace can best be understood
when viewed in context with everything the
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Humor

Two little girls had been needing some new boots as winter approached, and finally one of the girls had gotten hers.

The mother of the other girl said, “Sara, I see you got new boots. Where did you get them?”

Little Sara answered, “At the store.”

The woman then asked, “Which one?”

The girl began looking at her new boots, paused, and said, “Both of them.”



Young Kathy Smith was almost crazy with her three kids. She complained to her best friend, “They’re driving me nuts. Such pests, they give me no rest, and I’m half-way to the nut house.”

“What you need is a playpen to separate the kids from yourself,” her friend suggested.

So Kathy bought a playpen. A few days later her friend called to ask how things were going.

“Super! I can’t believe it,” Kathy said. “I get in that pen with a good book and the kids don’t bother me one bit!”



A young preacher was pleased that a particular woman in his congregation always asked for copies of his sermons. One day his pride got the better of him, and he asked her about it.

“Oh,” she responded brightly. “They’re just the perfect size for the bottom of my bird cage!”



Some folks don’t think that dogs can count. If you are one of the doubters, just try putting three dog treats in your pocket and then give Fido only two of them.



People are always saying that New Yorkers can’t get along. Well, it’s really not true.

The last time I was on the way to the airport I saw some complete

PROVERBS 17:22

strangers on the side of the road, sharing a cab.

One guy was taking the tires, and the other guy was helping himself to the alternator, radio, and battery.



A lady who was speeding was pulled over to the side of the road by an officer. She didn't have her seat belt on, so as soon as she stopped, she quickly slipped it on before the officer got to her window.

After talking to her about speeding, the officer said, "I see you are wearing your seat belt. Do you believe in wearing it at all times?"

"Oh, yes I do, officer," she replied.

"Well," asked the officer, "do you always loop it through your steering wheel?"



Little Johnny was left to fix lunch. When his mother returned with a friend, she noticed that Johnny had already strained the tea. The two women then sipped their tea happily while having lunch.

"Was it hard finding the tea strainer in the kitchen?" Johnny's mother asked.

"I couldn't find it, so I used the fly swatter," he replied.

His mother nearly fainted, so Johnny quickly added, "Don't get excited, Mom — I used the old one!"

Some Points to Ponder

When we do what we can, God will do what we can't.



Those who are given to white lies soon become color blind.



Many people seem to think that opportunity means a chance to get money without earning it.



Fear and worry are interest paid in advance on something you may never own.



American journalist Jacob Riis said, "When nothing seems to help, I go to look at a stonecutter, hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times, without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet after the one hundred and first blow, it will split in two; and I know that it was not that blow that did it, but all that had gone before."



What A Disciple Is

Donny Weimar

Summarily, Jesus' Great Commission is *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”* (Matthew 28:19). Such converted souls as these are more than converts, and they are more than students. Pupils sit before their teacher merely to learn what the instructor has to say, but disciples are much more. Oh yes, they are certainly the Master's learners, but more than that, they apprentice His example and become teachers themselves. *“A disciple is not above his teacher,”* Jesus told them, *“but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher”* (Luke 6:40 ESV). Like his teacher. LIKE Him, that is, perfectly trained to emulate His very character, His life-model.

Disciples are three things, as described in John's account of the everlasting Gospel. **One:** They abide in the Christ's teachings. Jesus said to believers *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples”* (John 8:31). A person void of biblical understanding is empty of genuine faith because it *“comes from hearing the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17).

Two: Disciples love one another. The Master taught, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35). A Christian, devoid of love, is not a true disciple (1 John 4:20). God's children comprehend biblical love, for God is love (1 John 4:8). *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers”* (1 John 3:16).

Three: Disciples of Christ bear fruit. *“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples”* (John 15:8). Fruit bearing in the Bible has to do with a productive faith. Such faith yields two basic kinds of fruit: the fruit of righteousness (James 3:18), and the producing of more disciples for the Master (Philippians 1:22 et al). Every living creature multiplies (Genesis 1:22). Bearing fruit is the litmus for determining real disciples.

Being disciples of Christ takes learning Jesus, emulating Jesus, and sharing the Gospel of Jesus. Disciples make disciples, who make disciples. *“...Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28:20). †

Donny Weimar has written a book, *Christian with Bipolar Disorder*, <https://www.tate-publishing.com/bookstore>.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Come Home

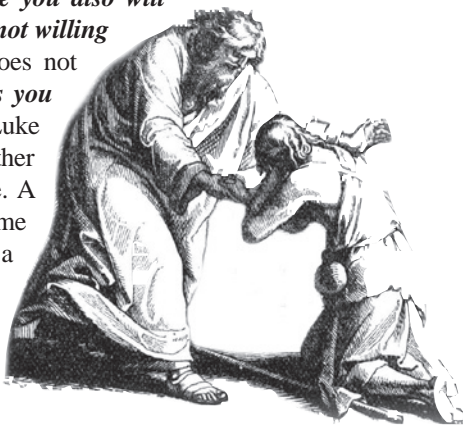
Darrell Powell

Jesus said, ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”*** (John 3:16). Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins proves better than anything else that God loves mankind and desires us to be with Him. John 1:12 reads, ***“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”*** Those of us who truly receive God and His Word are His children, and God wants His children to be near Him, both in this life, and throughout eternity.

In Luke 15, Jesus told the story of the prodigal son. We remember how the young man received his inheritance from his father and set out on his own. He then proceeded to squander his existence on the pleasures of the world. When he fell onto hard times, he was penitent in his heart for the way he had been living, and he remembered what it was like in his father’s house. So he returned with the spirit of a humble servant, yet he was received as a prince who had come back to his father’s kingdom. But what would the scene have been like if the son had returned without humility and without repentance?

Although God the Father adores His children, there is another side of His nature of which we must be aware. Paul said, ***“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off”*** (Romans 11:22). God ***“is not willing that any should perish,”*** but that does not change the fact that He said, ***“unless you repent you will all likewise perish”*** (Luke 13:3). Even the great love of the Father cannot cause Him to abandon justice. A child of God has not truly come home until he approaches the Father with a humble, penitent spirit.

If you are away from the Father’s house, why not come home today? He is there waiting for you with open arms. †



CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION



The Good Samaritan Law

Donald R. Fox

Along with the biblical “The Golden Rule”, the “Good Samaritan” stands out as a wonderful example for all civilized people who are confronted with the need to give assistance to one who requires medical or any type of help. This assistance is given because of one’s natural, inbred human compassion for one who needs his fellow human being in a time of emergency or pain.

As I wrote the above, I kept wondering about current followers of radical Islam with their murderous teachings and with the violent dealings of the many who come near them. Not only is “The Golden Rule” missing in their lives, but also “The Good Samaritan Law”. To reject compassion for their fellow man is beyond civilized understanding. It is shameful to show hatred and brutality toward anyone who needs aid. To change and have deep empathy and kindness for their fellow man is our earnest prayer.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

“But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ And Jesus answering said, ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He that shewed mercy on him.’ Then said Jesus unto him, ‘Go, and do thou likewise.’” (Luke 10:29-37 KJV) †

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Love and Care

The greatest thrills of life and love
That fill us with content
Are gifts of grace we give away
And ask no compliment.
It might be just a helping hand
We give to one, in need,
Or just a gift of caring grace —
When nothing else succeeds.

A little bit of love and care
That comes from you and me
Can lift a heart of grief and tears
From days of misery;
And it is surely God-ordained
That we — of faith — impart
The love and care He gives to us
To share with crying hearts.

— by Michael Dubina



CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

BALANCE

Dale Grissom

People have always had difficulty in leading a balanced life. It is not easy in this modern time to practice moderation in the things we do.

Sometimes Christians have difficulty in reaching a balance in their worship. Some may become too demonstrative while others may not be stirred and seem to be untouched. Christians can be so rigid during worship that they don't allow themselves to enjoy it. There must be a balance, not overly demonstrative, yet not "unawakened" to the joy of worshipping and serving God.



When we obey the Gospel of Christ we are to truly give ourselves to God, absolutely putting God first in all that we do. This should bring a peace and joy into our lives that we have never experienced before. This should be something that continues for the rest of our lives. This will allow us to be happy and have balance in our public worship of our Creator.

Personal evangelism is an area which many Christians have no passion in doing; this is the major cause that the Lord's church is not growing. We must get back to preaching, talking, and teaching the Gospel in our homes, in our offices, and in our personal contact with people. We also need to make our Bible classes and pulpits more evangelistic.

We applaud personal evangelism overseas in underdeveloped countries and pray for its success. On the other hand, we show no interest in personal evangelism in our own communities. Where is the balance? Why should we rejoice over the soul of some person overseas more than the soul of someone in our community? Each and every soul is precious to God and should be to all Christians. †

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

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Facing a Hard Truth

Dwight Fuqua

We preach about sharing the Gospel with others. We talk about sharing the Gospel with others. We pray about sharing the Gospel with others, but we make little effort to share the Gospel with others. It is right to preach, talk, and pray about sharing the Gospel with others, but our good intentions are betrayed by our lack of action. For the most part, we only give lip service to the Great Commission.

We know better than we do! The Great Commission is our great Omission! The Master said, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:16). “Preacher, that commission was only given to the apostles.” Are you sure? In the Matthew account (Matthew 28:19,20), the Master told the disciples to go, teach, baptize AND *“teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (28:19, 29). What had He just commanded them to do? Go, teach, baptize, teach, baptize, teach. The Great Commission is self-perpetuating! Faithful men teach faithful men who teach faithful men who teach faithful men. *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* (2 Timothy 2:2).

We are talking about an evangelistic chain — a chain that must not be broken. The present state of the church in America can largely be traced to the evangelistic efforts of past generations. Now it is our turn! The church is not growing because we are not going! For the church to grow again we must go again! We can only be *“innocent of the blood of all men”* when we share *“the whole counsel of God”* with them (Acts 20:26,27). We must put the “go” back in the “Gospel.” We are facing a hard truth! Understand, please, that these thoughts are not intended to send us on a guilt trip. They are intended to remind us of our duty to share the Gospel with others and to move us from complacency to commitment and action. Do you feel guilty for not sharing the Gospel with others? Would you like to do something about it? Would you like to be more evangelistic? Would you like to make a difference in the lives of others? Would you like to help the church grow? Sow the seed of the kingdom! GO! GO! GO!

Yes, we “go” to the shut-ins, the wayward, and the faithful who are discouraged, but we most want to “go” to those who need to hear the Gospel of Christ. We not only face a hard truth, but the challenge to do something about it! The laborers are few! Will you be one? †

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



Delicate, Fragile Treasures

Have you seen them?

Those fragile,
minutely designed,
exquisitely colored flowers
God created?

Some are so tiny,
so thin of fabric,
so easy to be broken,

If I had made such fragility
I would have built around them
thick glass cases,
Protecting them day and night
From nature's harsh
and careless touch.

But God had different thoughts:
He planted treasures
— delicate, fragile treasures —
In the desert's heat and barrenness,
In the tundra's cold and wasted wilds,
In the jungle's wet
and monstrous growth.

And everywhere
God's jewels
survive
and thrive,
and seem doubly,
triplly precious
because they live
where fragile gems should never grow.
And in those wild and barren soils
They speak of God.

— Betty Choate

WORSHIP

Today was my coworker's turn to preach. However, before he ever got up to speak, a little three-year-old girl sitting in the pew in front of me "preached" the first sermon of the day.

As the collection plates were being passed around, this little girl was tightly clutching change she was going to sacrifice for the Lord. When the



plate reached her, she held her hand out over the plate and opened her fingers to drop her money in the plate. However, due to clutching the money so tightly, or because she had sticky hands, or a combination of both, the change stuck to her open hand. So she had to pluck the coins from her hand into the plate. As her dime and nickel fell into the plate, she handed the plate to the man who was collecting them, looked at him and said, "Thank you!"

"Thank you?" Doesn't that seem like an odd response after giving away your money? Usually it is the receiver, not the giver, who says "thank you." Because of that, this little girl sent my mind racing. When's the last time I gave thanks for the opportunity to give? I couldn't remember. But this little girl had it right. We should possess a spirit willing to give thanks for the opportunity we have to give.

You see, when we "give," we "get." Not that this is the reason to give. It's a serendipity; a by-product of our giving, not the aim. But we do indeed "get" when we "give." For example:

1. When we give, we get the opportunity to be like God (John 3:16).
2. When we give, we get blessings and happiness (Acts 20:35).
3. When we give, we get credit for the good that is done with that money (Philippians 4:17).

So, this morning I got to hear two sermons preached: one from my coworker, and the other from the little girl sitting in the pew in front of me. This morning, I was reminded in a way I won't soon forget, that "*God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Corinthians 9:7). †

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

WORSHIP

When I Come to Worship

Michael L. King

The writer James, in his epistle by the same name, acknowledged the goodness of God and the natural response to it by means of worship. This epistle has been referenced as an “exposition of practical Christianity.” He certainly lives up to this expression in James 1:18-22.

James depicts God as being the source of heavenly gifts (verse 17). Whatever is good in life has come from God; whatever is evil has come from man himself. In actuality, man can receive nothing except it come from heaven (John. 3:27). Man would have been oblivious to God’s goodness and gift-giving without the Word of truth having been given to enable us to receive His providing, enabling us to become producers as His creatures (James 1:18). Since the will of God is good

and infinitely pure, it is natural to expect all that is produced thereby to be pure and holy as well. An astonishing harvest has been reaped, both among the Jews and Gentiles, from the time of the establishment of the new covenant which was promised hundreds of years before by Jeremiah (31:31-34) and realized through being in Christ (Ephesians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:3). It is by being in the Lord’s church that we learn about and acknowledge through the avenue of worship how good and perfect those gifts are, just how much we appreciate them, and that we are indebted for them.

When we come to worship and pay tribute to the great Gift-Giver, we are to be “swift to hear”. There is an old rabbinical adage that says, “The righteous speak little, and do much; the wicked speak much, and do nothing.” There is a correlation between wisdom and refraining the lips. Sin is found in a multitude of words, but the wise restrain their speaking (Proverbs 10:19). Adam Clarke observes that, “Those who are hasty in speech are generally of a peevish or angry disposition” (notes on James 1:19).



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The hasty person does not consider what he says and is more likely to be soon angry. When entering into a “divine worship service” to communicate our love and devotion to God, we must be free of anything that would void that worship (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2). The wise man warned that because we are of the earth, we should not be rash with our words or let our heart be hasty, so “*let [our] words be few.*” When the wrath of man collides with the righteousness of God, man shorts out his attempt to honor the Gift-Giver for “*every good and perfect gift*”. Man’s learning of God comes in patient listening to His Word, not in impulsive empty verbiage.

Dragging sin into the presence of God is a negating force in our lives as well. James had spoken in verse 15 about the “three generations of evil”: lust, sin, and death, and that the progressive capturing of our bodies would eventually lead to spiritual death or severance from God. In verse 21, he demonstrates that the Word cannot be received as long as the heart is filled to overflowing with naughtiness. It is similar to a child having gorged himself on candy and not having an appetite at dinnertime. When our “*hunger and thirst for righteousness*” (Matthew 5:6) has been foundered by passions and fruits of “*overflowing wickedness*”, we no longer crave righteousness or our “*Father of lights*” from whom all heavenly blessings flow without varying (James 1:17). So, we must “*lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*” (Hebrews 12:1). Peter agreed with James and instructed accordingly, “*... laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking...that you may grow thereby*” (1 Peter 2:1,2).

They had heard the true doctrine of righteousness and believed it, but they had not put it to any practical use (James 1:22ff). Hearing and belief are inadequate in and of themselves, but require doing (James 2:14-19). Jesus informed those who would be followers of His that, “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven*” (Matthew 7:21). One who is born of God cannot sin, for God’s seed remains in him (1 John 3:7-10). He who hears and does is like the man who built his house upon a rock, but the foolish man’s affections are base, and he settles for a sand foundation, constituting his ultimate ruin (Luke 6:46-49).

When we come to worship, it should be our ambition to hear from our Heavenly Father, respond by speaking less and listening more, eliminating everything that resembles naughtiness and would interfere with our devotion to God, and get down to serious business in being doers of the Word. †

Michael L. King preaches for the New Albany congregation in New Albany, Mississippi, USA.

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Proxy Worship

Kevin L. Moore

The two Mormon “elders” I was having discussions with agreed to attend mid-week Bible class with me if I would accompany them to one of their Thursday evening gatherings. It turned out to be a truly eye-opening experience. The entire Mormon service was a satellite broadcast from Salt Lake City, including performances by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. At the end of the meeting the whole assembly was invited to sing along, and I must admit that it was the most pitiful congregational singing I had ever heard. I realized that these people were so accustomed to letting the choir do the singing for them that they had never learned how to sing for themselves.

Years later I was having Bible studies with an Anglican vicar, and he was surprised to learn that Christian worship in the New Testament consisted of a cappella singing (i.e., without the accompaniment of musical instruments). He then relayed the following story. The organ player of this particular Anglican

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church had died, and no one else in the congregation knew how to play the organ. It was suggested that a musician from the community be hired until a replacement could be found, but the conscientious minister would not allow an unbeliever to participate in leading their worship. He told his congregants that for too long they had relied on the organ to worship for them and that it was now time they learned how to use their voices to praise God. He then confessed that over the next few months, without the added organ music, the singing significantly improved. But when an organist was eventually found, they reverted to their former routine. I asked my vicar friend, “If the singing was so much better without the organ, why did you start using it again?” He had no answer.

More recently, while visiting relatives out of town, my family and I went to worship with a nearby congregation. As the service began, several men and women with microphones lined up across the stage behind the song leader. As the assembly was led in singing with the assistance of this “praise team”, I couldn’t help but notice that most of the people sitting around me were either barely mumbling the words or were not singing at all. It dawned on me that while the praise team may have been intended to “improve” the singing, in reality it was having the opposite effect. Many in the congregation seemed content to merely sit back and listen to others do the singing.

These experiences have impressed upon me the wisdom of God’s elemental design. Man’s attempts to externally assist or enhance worship, whether with choirs, musical instruments, or praise teams, have actually proven to be distractions and hindrances. Worship that is supposed to be “*in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23,24), directed to God from each accountable worshiper, is actually impeded by these human innovations.

Biblical authority is still the bottom line concerning all that we practice in religion, and the simple pattern of the New Testament just cannot be improved upon. “*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*” (Colossians 3:16). †

Kevin L. Moore, former missionary to New Zealand, teaches Bible and Missions at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee USA.

Biblical authority is still the bottom line concerning all that we practice in religion, and the simple pattern of the New Testament just cannot be improved upon.

Climbing

Charles Cash

“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippines 3:14). Press on! Grow! Aspire! Set high goals! Don’t be satisfied, contented with less than our best. These are God’s instructions for each of us! There is no premium on mediocrity or being average. Average is only the best of the worst and the worst of the best. It has been said, “Not failure, but low aim is a crime.” I like the way J. Wallace Hamilton said it: “This world has too low a ceiling for aspiring men.” Your aim should always exceed your grasp. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote: “Hitch your wagon to a star.” When you reach for the stars, you may not quite get one, but you won’t come up with a handful of mud either. As you look back, has your reach exceeded your grasp? Have you had meaningful aspirations? Or, has it been just the same old status quo? You’re not any worse to speak of, but no better to speak of either.

To change the analogy a little, Longfellow and a friend were admiring a beautiful blossom-filled pear tree in all its white, magnificent splendor. The friend turned to Longfellow and said, “I don’t believe I have ever seen that pear tree more beautiful than it is this year.” Longfellow replied, “That pear tree grows a little new wood every year.” Have you grown some new wood this past year?

Life then becomes for the aspiring person a gradual climb upward; it becomes a life of growth, progression, and achievement. The summit is not reached in a single bound, but round by round.

On occasion, we sing these words:

“I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day,
Still praying as I onward bound,
‘Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.’”

“The rung of the ladder,” wrote Thomas Huxley, “was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man’s foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher.” Consider the life of the author of our text, the apostle Paul. There was no mediocrity in Paul’s life, either in his life as a Jew or as a Christian. Of his life as a Jew he said: *“You have heard of my way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for*

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the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:13,14). He shares a long list of his credentials as a Jew in Philippians 3:4-6. When Paul was converted to Christianity by the Lord he was just as zealous, and even more so, for this new-found cause or religion. When He wrote our text he was under “house arrest” in Rome. This man had already preached the Gospel and established churches all around the Mediterranean Sea from Jerusalem to Illyricum. In addition to his past preaching ministry, he had already written some ten books of the New Testament.

Now back up two verses prior to our text and find Paul saying, *“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me. Brother, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it”* (verses 12,13). Paul is simply saying, “I have not arrived; I have not finished.” Paul had put his ladder up against *“the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus”* and continually climbed each day toward the summit. He aimed each day toward planting his feet on higher ground than they were on yesterday. In fact, he said, *“This one thing I do... I press on toward the goal to win the prize.”* What a man of God! What a godly man for us all to emulate.

These principles of aspiration and growth will hold true in any endeavor or sphere of life. God expects us to do our best, and always be our best at work, at play, in business, and everywhere. But, nowhere are these principles as vital and important as in our climb to the spiritual summit, *“the prize of our high calling.”*



As I see it, spiritually speaking, we have one of two main problems. We either set our aim too low and become satisfied, or we lean our ladder up against the wrong wall. †

Charles Cash works with the Bella Vista Church of Christ in Bella Vista, Arkansas, USA.

Cloak-Spreading

Graham Walker

We live in a world that is increasingly disposed to the idea of self-gratification. People are looking at ways to satisfy their egos by continually looking out for “number one”. Yet we, as followers of the order Most High, can make a difference in a desert of selfishness.

There is a tale often told of a man whose selfless chivalry epitomizes how men should react in times of need. English explorer and courtier Walter Raleigh (1554-1618) is the central character to this tale. The story, in brief, describes how, when walking the corridors of London, he found it difficult to avoid the puddles of mud that so littered the streets. Pondering upon the problem one day, he happened to look up and noticed Queen Elizabeth traversing the quagmire-patterned street. His immediate thoughts centered upon helping her negotiate a particularly large puddle that hindered her progress. What might he do?

You can almost imagine him exclaim, “I will lay down my cloak across the ugly impediment so that she may cross in dignity.”

This he did, thereby creating a bridge of dry, scarlet material for Her Majesty to cross. The queen’s response was to ask her entourage who the gallant gentleman was.

“It is Walter Raleigh, ma’am,” replied her maidservant.

“His endeavor shall be rewarded,” said the queen.

Indeed, he was knighted for his efforts, and from that day forth was known as “Sir Walter Raleigh”.

Our monarch will reward us seven times seventy for such service done in His name. *“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”* (James 1:27). The further explanation is given in chapter 2:14-16: *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?”*

Jesus summed it up this way in Matthew 22:37-39: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”* †

Graham Walker preaches the Gospel in Palmerston North, New Zealand

Spiritual Challenges

Hardeman Nichols

We are living in a world full of challenges. Some are of little consequence; others affect us eternally. There is a constant battle going on everywhere for the souls of all the people in the world. Though it is not a war waged with guns and weapons of military arsenals, it is nonetheless a real war. ***“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,”*** said the apostle Paul (Ephesians 6:12). That term ***“high places”*** is elsewhere translated ***“heavenly places”*** and appears several times in Ephesians. It is a term which denotes the spiritual realm, where the real struggle is being waged for the souls of men.

If one expects to win in this struggle, there must be the proper equipment for the fight. The weapons are spiritual weapons, but they are very powerful. The Bible says, ***“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”*** (2 Corinthians 10:4,5). The only offensive weapon which is provided is ***“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”*** (Ephesians 6:17).

For the individual Christian’s defense, the whole armor of God is to be worn. This includes the truth girding his loins, the breastplate of righteousness, the preparation of the Gospel of peace upon his feet, the shield of faith to deflect all the fiery darts of the wicked, and the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:13-17). In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul calls that helmet ***“the hope of salvation”***, and he describes the ***“breastplate of faith and love”***. It may seem strange to some that in the midst of all these figures of war and struggle, that it would be emphasized that this warfare is fought with the ***“gospel of peace”***. Without harming anyone, God wants the forces of truth and love to change the course and destiny of mankind from sin to righteousness.

All of us are in this battle, whether we like it or not. There is no middle ground. Jesus said, ***“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad”*** (Matthew 12:30). Each must choose. The challenge is for us to be on the side of right against wrong, opposing sin with righteousness, and defeating errors of every kind with the Word of God. But that involves our submission to God. ***“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”*** asked Paul in Romans 6:16. He then expressed

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his thankfulness that though they had been the servants of sin, they had changed sides in the battle, and had become servants of Christ. This was accomplished by their obeying the Gospel and being baptized into Christ as he had discussed previously in the sixth chapter of Romans in verses 1 to 6. He then said, ***“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness”*** (verses 17,18).

Now that one is on the Lord’s side, it is imperative to accept the challenges that will make a difference in His cause. Paul concludes, ***“For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness...But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life”*** (verse 19-22).

This battle calls for a fight in God’s good and noble service. We are challenged, ***“Fight the good fight of faith”*** (1 Timothy 6:12). To do this we must ***“cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”*** (2 Corinthians 7:1). It is a sobering thought when one realizes that he must really battle against whatever sin has bound him in the past. What a shame that it takes some people far too long to put away sinful habits. Realizing we are in a war ought to help us to see that we give aid and comfort to our enemy, the devil, when we allow him partial control of our thoughts and deeds. Let us put these away.

One of the greatest spiritual challenges before us is a need for total consecration of our talents to the cause of Christ. God needs capable teachers and preachers of truth. Just as Jesus trained the apostles for three and one-half years, leaders today need to spend the amount of time necessary to be fully equipped for greater service. They also have an obligation toward the training of the next generation. Paul said, ***“The things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”*** (2 Timothy 2:2).

Our challenge is for greater Christian service. We are instructed to help the weak and unfortunate. This calls for a spirit of sincere concern for others. The Bible teaches, ***“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient toward all men”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

These challenges call for a life of consecration and loyalty to Christ and His church by obeying the Word of God. We must live our religion daily, supporting the preaching of the Word to all the world. Let us make our lives shining examples. ✚

Hardeman Nichols is a Gospel preacher living in Dallas, Texas, USA.

Be Submissive

Loy Mitchell

“Be submissive therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Submit to God!

Man is filled with pride and thinks his way is right or better. That is not the case. God opposes the proud (v. 7). God, being the Creator of man, knows what is best always: Be submissive. The word translated “submit” is associated with the idea of rank or order as in the army. Thus we are told to put ourselves in the ranks as soldiers under the chief. We will do whatever He commands. This is true of matters of salvation, worship, and lifestyle. **Be Submissive.**

Resist the Devil

The devil is the ruler of this world. *“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me”* (John 14:30). When the devil rules our lives, we follow our fleshly desires and are children of wrath. *“...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others”* (Ephesians 2:3).

When we are friends of Satan and he rules us, we become enemies of God. *“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4). Pay no attention to the devil. He is a liar. He is in the business of deceiving. He knows he will be cast into the fires of hell, and he wants us to go there also. **Resist him!**

He Will Flee from You

How does this take place? Submit to God. Resist the devil. Is the temptation too hard? Is there a way of escape? *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

When we are submissive to God and resist the devil, we need not fear. *“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. ✠*

Loy Mitchell, preacher of the Gospel, has served for many years in Zimbabwe, Africa.

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AN OLD COUPLE'S SERMON LIVES

Rudi Risher

Throughout the years I have heard many wonderful sermons which I have forgotten, but ONE SERMON that I have seen has remained in my heart to this day. It happened on a Sunday morning when I was on my way to a small congregation in Munich, Germany. It was a cold and windy Sunday in the month of November.

After I got out of my warm bed, I looked through the window that was covered with ice. New, deep snow had fallen during the night and had covered the streets of the city. I tried to decide whether I should go to the worship service or whether I should stay at home and just read my Bible. I realized that the congregation would miss me, for I was the only song leader they had. On the other hand, I would have to walk a half block to catch the bus to the meeting place. Finally, I decided to go, but only because I had to lead the singing.

While I was riding the bus, I looked through the window and noticed two people trying to make their way through the deep snow. I recognized the people, and I also knew where they were going. They were brother and sister Trollman, a faithful couple who attended services every Sunday. Brother Trollman was a man in his eighties who had lost his eyesight. His only guidance was his seventy-eight year-old wife who was lame in one foot.

Here I was — sitting in a warm bus, unwilling to go to worship, forced only by my duty as song leader and there, outside in the cold weather, two old people driven to worship by their love for the Lord. I was not able to do anything but cry, ashamed of myself and the weak faith and love I had proven for my Lord. I felt like an evildoer in court, judged by my own conscience.

This old couple, without knowing and without saying one word, had taught me a greater lesson than ever could be said with words in the pulpit. Through their example and influence, I realized one thing: the only true motive of a Christian attending any worship service is his **STRONG LOVE** toward God. †



Growing Old Gracefully

Randall Caselman

Age is relative, isn't it? In our own way, we still search for the fountain of youth. We resist the aging process by camouflaging the spots and wrinkles. Still, aging continues its relentless march.

God places a premium on age. God intends for us to be useful and active in our golden years:

- God asked Noah to build an ark when he was 400 years old.
- Moses was 80 when he led Israel out of Egypt.
- Proverbs says: *"Gray hair is a crown of splendor"* (16:31).
- We hear Job declare: *"Wisdom comes with age and with length of days comes understanding"* (12:12).

David writes: *"Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come"* (Psalm 71:18).

Paul addresses the aging process: *"Though your body is decaying, the mind is renewed daily. We are working toward an eternal glory. For we know when this earthly body is aged out, God has a body for us not made with hands, eternal in heaven"* (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Truth is, wherever we are in the aging process is okay, because that is exactly where God wants us to be. And for us to waste our time, energy, money, and talent attempting to change that state, that season of life, is not God-pleasing. Being dissatisfied with our age only frustrates us, and frustrates His purpose in our life. God had a purpose for us when we were young, and He has a purpose for us now that we are older. It's ridiculous to attempt to go back and relive an old purpose.

How do we grow old gracefully?

Understand change. If we want everything to stay the same, life is going to be continually miserable. The senior citizen's world is full of change. Now change is not always bad. But when you pack too much change into a short space, it can be devastating. Our purpose has changed. The ambitions of climbing career ladders and plans for raising and educating our children are over. There are health changes, financial changes, changes in our energy level. There are some things we can no longer do, and shouldn't try to do. We must not allow these to overwhelm us.

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We need to lose ourselves in something bigger than we are. One of the problems in retirement is that attention is turned to self. The focus is no longer on children, career, church, but directed inward. This creates serious problems at any age. John Gardner, one-time Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, said, “People can achieve meaning, only if they have a commitment to something larger than their own little egos; be it family, fellowmen, careers or religion.” I think Jesus gives us the answer: Serve Others! There are hospital and hospice visits to be made, nursing home patients that need encouragement. Think about volunteering at one of these institutions. There are numerous ministries at church that can use our expertise.

Don’t kill today with yesterday’s guilt. Some of us spend our time grieving over our mistakes we’ve made until we kill the joy of today. We spoil the golden years with resentment from the past. Sure, all of us have made mistakes, serious ones, but

there is no reason to allow these to rob us of today’s joy. *“Forgetting what is past I press on to the goal, the high calling of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:13-14).

Will to die young. Douglas McArthur had this essay on his wall: “Youth is not a time of life, it is a state of mind.” Grandma Moses was still painting when she was 101. Oliver Wendell Holmes was still serving as a Supreme Court Justice at 90. Conrad Adenauer was Chancellor of West Germany at 87. Noah Webster was 70 when he published his dictionary. Golda Meir became Prime Minister of Israel when she was 71. Paul Southern of Abilene Christian was still teaching college in his nineties. Tillit S. Teddlie was still writing church music and preaching when he died at 101. Mother Teresa died serving others at age 87.

God has providentially brought each of us to this point, and this place in our life for a specific purpose. The question is: Will we allow Him to use us for that purpose? Indeed! The best is yet to come! †

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE TO 100?

E. Claude Gardner

When asked, “Would you like to live on earth to be 100?”, some will emphatically answer, “No.” Others may comment that they like it here and would like to stay here longer, conditioned on their physical and mental health.

The Bible is explicit in revealing that we cannot know the number of our days. None will rival Methuselah’s record of 969 years, nor can we expect a promise of fifteen additional years as was granted Hezekiah (2 Kings 20). The proverbial life span is 70 or 80 years (Psalm 90:10). If so, octogenarians and more are living on borrowed time. Thanks be to God.

“*My life is wind*” (Job 4:7) and a fleeting vapor (James 4:14). Here today and gone tomorrow! James states, “*if the Lord will*” (4:15), which suggests that God may determine how long we live on earth. It was God’s *mercy* protracting the life of Epaphroditus. “*For indeed he [Epaphroditus] was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow*” (Philippians 2:27). We cannot know *why* and *how* God in His perfect goodness gives this blessing.

The classic paragraph on the shortness of the life span is James 4:13-16. “*Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*”

“*Go to now*” draws us to the reality that none can live forever on *terra firma*. At once we are impressed that our pilgrimage on earth is contrasted to the future, which is everlasting life (John 3:36; Matthew 25:46).

The foolish man made *definite* plans for a business venture. He planned place, purpose, and profit. He is not condemned for making a profit for merchandising. Neither is it improper for a merchant or business to make a legitimate profit. Furthermore, he is not faulted for making future plans. It is wise to plan for the future by securing an education, saving resources, and developing a vision for the years to come. It is doing things “*decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14:40). But his problem was that he left God out of his plans. By doing so, he was a failure, and also arrogant or boastful. Thus, he sinned. He ignored God, and he

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should have conditioned his plans on “*if the Lord will.*” On any plan and budget, we should either *express* or *imply* if it meets God’s approval. It is wholesome to follow the practice of making any plan subject to God’s wishes. We must not be frivolous, as one teenage girl was wont to say; “If God wills, and Momma don’t care, and the creeks don’t rise, I will do thus-and-so.”

The rich farmer is another prosperous citizen who worked hard and wisely, but in his planning he forgot to include God. He is not condemned for being industrious, or for preserving his produce, but for ignoring God who had so blessed him. For that he suffered the death penalty. “*Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God’*” (Luke 12:16-21).

Paul was always conscious of God’s plan for him in his thousands-of-miles journeys. This he expressed to the Ephesians (Acts 18:21). He also wrote the same to our other brethren (Romans 13:32; 1 Corinthians 4:19).

Why Should One Desire To Live Longer?

Whether a person is young, middle age, or old, one must live to the glory of God (2 Peter 3:18; Colossians 3:17; Galatians 6:14). As one adds to the years of living, the normal person will become conscious of numerous regrets and mistakes in judgment. It is a blessing to live long enough to finally repent of those regrets. Another reason to pray for more days is to devote time to unfinished work. Relatives and friends are not Christians, and some may be wayward who need to yield to God’s will. It affords more time to work and pray for these loved ones (Romans 10:1).

God’s grace is abounding to permit a sinner to become a Christian. Grace will motivate unfaithful children of God to return home. They are blessed with **today**; **yesterday** is past, and **tomorrow** may never come. “*For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Now is the time to confess faults (James 5:16) and confess the precious name of Christ (Matthew 10:32). †

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He began at the age of nine (1739) to work at the potter's wheel. He received little schooling, but he read much. His study of Caylus inspired him with ambition to reproduce and rival classic ceramic forms, and in 1753 he started his own business at the Ivy House Works. Within ten years his potteries were annually exporting 550,000 pieces to the Continent and North America. Catherine the Great ordered a dinner set of a thousand pieces.

Talk about quality control! He insisted on good workmanship. An early biographer described him as stamping about his shop on his wooden leg, and breaking with his own hand any pot that showed the least flaw; usually in such cases, he chalked on the careless artisan's bench the warning, "This won't do for Josiah Wedgwood."

Somehow this reminded me of the apostle Paul speaking to the Ephesians. Apparently, after they became Christians, some of them were still living like the Gentiles. Either there had not really been a change of life, or else they were falling back into their old self-indulgent habits. They were callous, given to licentiousness, and greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. In effect, Paul said, "This won't do for Jesus Christ." His actual words were, "*You did not so learn Christ*" (Ephesians 4:20).

The old corrupt manner of living must be discarded. There must be a transformation. "*Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*" (Ephesians 4:23,24).

Anything else won't do.



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5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

ONE WAY STREET

Paula Bates

1. Neither is there _____ in any other: for there is none other _____ under heaven given among _____, whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:12
2. And he _____ us to _____ unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of _____ to be the _____ of quick and dead. Acts 10:42
3. For there is _____ God, and _____ mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 2:5
4. For you are all the _____ of God by faith in _____. For as many of you as have been _____ into _____ — have put on Christ. Galatians 3:26, 27
5. And he is the propitiation for our _____: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the _____. 1 John 2:2
6. Jesus said unto him, I am the _____, the _____, and the _____: no man comes unto the _____, but by me. John 14:6



1. Salvation, name, men
2. Commanded, preach, God,
3. One, one
4. Children, Christ Jesus, baptized, Christ
5. Sins, world
6. Way, truth, life, Father

To Spank or Not to Spank

Betty Burton Choate

Child psychologists in the last half of the twentieth century almost unanimously spoke against physical discipline. Hopefully, the pendulum is beginning to swing back the other way, as the false philosophy has had time to prove itself wrong. The lives of generations of people have been greatly harmed because of a lack of proper training and discipline.

Solomon said, ***“Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell*** (Proverbs 23:13,14). God’s Word does not lie!

What type of discipline is best? Of course the answer varies with the child and the situation. Sometimes a simple distraction to another matter will eliminate a developing conflict with a small child. Sometimes being sent to one’s room is sufficient punishment. At other times, the temporary loss of a privilege may work better, or the enforcing of extra duties. I have found also that dealing directly with the offending part can work well: as we slap the meddlesome hand of a baby, on very rare occasions when the mouth of an older child is being particularly sassy or defiant, a swift *controlled* smack across the lips can bring sudden silence. Temporarily taking away whatever is being used in disobedience can also be effective: TV that is watched too much, video games that interfere with obedience, entertainment that supersedes responsibilities.

But if nothing else works, what should be used in physical punishment? My choices after the child grew large enough that the hand became more of a punishment for me than for him/her, have been the little toy paddle without the rubber band and ball, or a belt, or (as Mother used to describe it) “a keen little switch”. The switch is probably most effective with the least amount of real hurt. Somehow the memory of the sting lingers as a deterrent, and most of the time in our house the switch lived on the top of the refrigerator, out of reach of little hands, but always available and — for that reason — seldom called into use!

There are two ways to administer discipline: (1) Decisively. When Daddy pounced on us, it was sudden and certain (I remember getting only one “swat” from him, but that one lasted an entire childhood!), and we had instant changes of mind. (2) Aggravatingly. We knew a lady who would count: “If you don’t mind by the time I count to three, I’m going to spank you. One...two...two-and-a-half...two-and-three-fourths...” She spanked the same way, not in full control

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or whole-heartedly intending to achieve obedience, so her children were usually half-defiant all the way through the confrontation. Such discipline may do more harm than good because it aggravates an already bad spirit and poor child-parent relationship without ever once establishing and enforcing control.

In response to discipline, the child may try his own form of parent-punishment: sulking, crying inordinately long and loudly, or doing other contrary things. None of these should be allowed. When Daddy spanked one of us, we were allowed about three good snubs, and then we had to swallow the rest. I thought, then, that it was unfair to spank us and not even let us cry, but as an adult I've seen children be allowed to cry long after the spanking wore off, and it was nothing but a subconscious attempt to punish the parents. With my children, I would say, "Now you go stand in the bathroom until you're ready to be good." Without an audience in sight, they usually came out apologetic and with damp smiles in a few minutes!

How often, though, through our lack of discipline or being in control do we create daily problems in the family relationship and also cause harmful developments in the child's personality? A child who whines and cries, and learns that this is a method of wearing down parents to get his way will not grow into a cheerful, positive adult. (Remember, parents, you are not raising "children"; you are raising *adults* into what they will be as husbands and wives!) Outright defiance and rebelliousness in a small child will bring untold heartache when the teen years are reached and the inexperienced teenager comes face-to-face with crucial problems and temptations, without any accompanying controls.

In preference to corrective guidance, rewards for good behavior are so much better, when that is possible. Doing things together, cooking a favorite dessert or meal, giving something he has wanted, saying words of appreciation and parental pride in his behavior are some of the rewards that can reinforce good behavior.

Parents can grow weary in well-doing, waiting for the child to "round the corner", and finally deciding that no corner is there. A mother had a talk recently with her son. He was concerned about parental laxness he thought he was seeing toward his younger brother. His mother answered, "I think I'm tired. Sometimes it seems like all the effort doesn't do much good." He answered, "But, Mother, you remember all the times you kept on with me, even though it seemed I wasn't hearing you. But the teaching was going into my mind; it was registering, and it's there now as my guide." He was right. We have to continue teaching and molding, even though the shape may not develop as quickly as we would like. We can't give up. Their lives and souls depend on our perseverance. †

Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, partner in his life and work.

Love and Marriage

Dalton Key

The church and the world have dramatically different views concerning the bond of marriage. In fact, the world no longer appears to look upon marriage as a bond at all, but rather views it as a loosely-drawn, easily-exited arrangement of convenience. Whereas couples once pledged faithfulness “as long as we both shall live”, many of them now opt, at least in practice, for a more self-serving, “as long as we both shall love.”

And the “love” itself is all too often both fickle and short-lived. Reports have been circulating for some time now concerning the increasingly high ratio of divorces to marriages. Many records reveal divorces granted as actually outnumbering marriage licenses issued.

However, divorce is not the only threat facing marriages today. Too many marriages holding together legally are nonethe-



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less tearing apart practically. Today's more jaded observers scoff at the phrase "happy marriage", considering the words little more than an obvious oxymoron. It has been estimated that a full fifty percent of all married partners have been unfaithful to their spouse at least once during the course of the marriage. And whereas the number of unfaithful husbands once greatly exceeded the number of unfaithful wives, the margin separating the two has nearly disappeared.

The problem is not helped by current television and movie fare. Most marriages portrayed on screens small or large are stereotyped as painfully boring. Many of the actors and actresses themselves, both on and off screen, seem to change marriage partners (and bed partners) with as little thought as is given a routine costume change.

Yes, the world is unashamedly making a god of sex and a mockery of marriage. Jumping from partner to partner, from mate to mate, from bed to bed is becoming more rule than exception. "Free love", the mantra of yesteryear's counter-culture, is now largely expected if not accepted by today's society's mainstream; and like the apostates of Jeremiah's day, today's hedonists are "*not at all ashamed, neither can they blush*" (Jeremiah 6:15).

Today's flippant attitude toward marriage is nothing new. According to Edward Gibbons, the renowned historian, the divorce problem was one of five underlying causes contributing to the fall of the Roman Empire. Seneca spoke of Roman women as married to be divorced and divorced to be married. Many citizens of Rome were said to have marked the passing of time more by the names and number of their spouses than by months or years. The apostle Peter spoke of those who "*having eyes full of adultery...cannot cease from sin*" (2 Peter 2:14). Sadly, some things never change.

But neither has divine truth changed: "*And he answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder*" (Matthew 19:4-6).

Regardless of what society may say, regardless of what the media may attempt to mandate, we are not beasts, controlled by nature's baser instincts; we are God's handiwork, created in His image, after His likeness (Genesis 1:26).

Don't forget: Animals mate; people marry.



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Getting Back to the Basics: Some Suggestions for Parents

Ken Tyler

Purpose: To help every parent do a better job with the most difficult job in the world.

- I. Set the right example before your children. Realize that children follow the example of their parents (Luke 1:6).
- II. Teach your children the importance of being Christians. Make them understand that serving Jesus is the most important thing in the world (Romans 3:9,10,23; 6:23; Philippians 1:1).
- III. Teach your children the importance of daily Bible reading. Show them what the Bible will do for their lives (Psalm 19:7-11; 119:11; Acts 17:11).
- IV. Teach your children the need to pray. Instill within them dependence upon God (Matthew 6:9-13).
- V. Teach your children the value of souls. Show them the urgent need to help others be saved (Mark 8:36,37).
- VI. Encourage your children instead of destroying their spirit. Don't find fault with everything they do (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).
- VII. Teach your children that the first obligation with their money is to God (Proverbs 3:9,10; Matthew 6:33).
- VIII. Teach your children that making money is not as important as serving God (Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:10,11).
- IX. Teach your children how to be successful in life (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Help them to have a good attitude. Be positive and optimistic before your children (Philippians 4:13).
- X. Spend time with your children. They will be gone from home before long (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

Conclusion: Many parents are failing today because their priorities are out of order. Children are being raised in homes without prayer, Bible study, and regular church attendance. The humanistic philosophy found on television, the computer, and in music is destroying each generation. **We must wake up before it is too late!** †

Ken Tyler preaches for the church of Christ in Arab, Alabama, USA.



How Do You Measure Up?

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 6:10-17



“Whatsoever Is Not of Faith Is Sin”

Maxie B. Boren

It should be apparent when studying the context of Romans 14 that Paul’s usage of the word “faith” in verse 23 is not the same as “the faith” of Jude 3, nor is it the same as a Christian’s personal faith in God (Hebrews 11:6). This “faith” of verse 23 is a reference to one’s conviction on various things—matters of individual conscience.

Please observe that Romans 14 is largely a discussion of not being judgmental of a brother in matters of conscience. *“Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls”* (v. 4 NKJV). *“But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ”* (v. 10). And, *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way”* (v. 13).

What kind of matters were they concerning which the apostle cautioned Christians to not be judgmental? Primarily, (1) The eating of meats (v. 2,3,6,14,15,20,21) and (2) the esteeming or not of one day over another (v. 5,6). Paul taught that the kingdom of God is more than *“food and drink”* (v. 17). What really matters is *“righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* So each one should concentrate on serving Christ in a manner well-pleasing to God (v. 18) and *“follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another”* (v. 19 ASV).

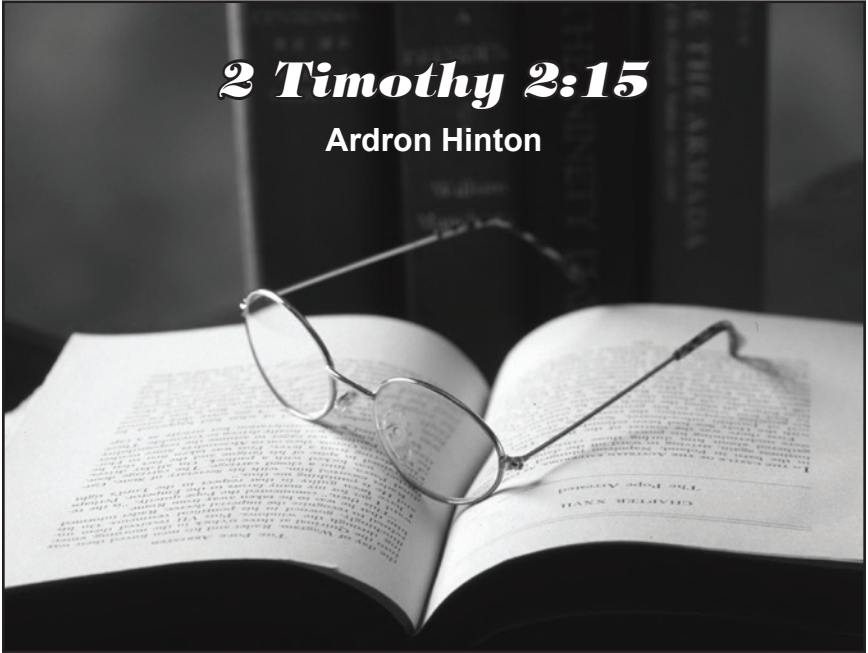
But inspiration’s hand stresses one other very important matter in this chapter, culminating with the phrase which is the caption of this article and given in other verses too: *“Let each man be fully assured in his own mind”* (v. 5b ASV). While Paul made it clear that there are those things that are not wrong within and of themselves, *“but if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean”* (v. 14 NIV). *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin”* simply means that Christians should not violate their consciences in these or similar matters. R.L. Whiteside observed, “If a man even has a doubt about the rightfulness of a certain thing, he should not engage in it.” And again, “If a Christian does a thing without being fully persuaded that it is right, he sins” (*Whiteside’s Commentary on Romans*, 276). The whole chapter of Romans 14 is worthy of much careful and prayerful thought by each of us. †

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TEXTUAL STUDIES

2 Timothy 2:15

Ardron Hinton



“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

“STUDY”

This involves not just casual reading, but deep meditation on the meaning of the subject being studied. One of the basic commands of the New Testament is found in this verse. Too many people in our day are busy entertaining themselves, and there is no study in them. This is such a simple command. There seems to be no reason for neglecting the serious study of God’s Word. We have an abundance of methods to aid us in our study and expand our knowledge of it.

TEXTUAL STUDIES

“APPROVED”

We must be concerned with God’s approval. How do we know when we have God’s approval? It is when He tells us what our attitude toward Him should be, and our attitude is right. When He gives us instructions that are to be followed and we follow them we can be sure we have His approval.

“WORKMAN”

A workman is someone performing a job or a task. As workmen for the Lord, we have specific assignments. We are to fulfill these assignments doing what the Lord wants done the way He wants it done. Notice Galatians 6:10, *“therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* The Bible has many examples of things we can do that are covered by this text.

In Matthew 28:19,20, we are given our teaching instructions. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

In our day and time, we have a multitude of ways to fulfill this command of Jesus. This means God will hold us accountable for using these resources He has supplied to spread His teaching throughout the world.

“RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH”

God has given us work to perform and duties to fulfill, and He expects it to be done according to His instructions. Knowing this, we need to study in order to learn and understand exactly what He expects.

CONCLUSION

Notice how demanding these words sound. A life that is acceptable to God demands our best and just naturally calls for work and continual study of the instructions for carrying out that work. These words are not very popular in our day and time, but they are essential to having God’s acceptance. †

(Editor’s note: Ardron Hinton (1929-2015) preached the Gospel of Christ for 68 years, and we have been privileged to include in several issues of *The Voice of Truth International* numerous articles that he wrote.)

Parable of the Householder

Joe W. Nichols

An often overlooked parable in the Scriptures is the Parable of the Householder (Matthew 13:52). This parable follows the Parable of the Sower, the Parable of the Good Seed and Tares, the Parable of the Grain of Mustard Seed, the Parable of the Treasure Hid in the Field, the Parable of the Merchant and Goodly Pearl, and the Parable of the Net Cast into the Sea. One cannot understand and appreciate fully the Parable of the Householder until he has studied thoroughly the six preceding parables.

Each of the parables of Matthew 13 enriches one's understanding of the significance and value of the kingdom of God. Through their simple teaching, the learner is led from the standpoint of the seed, the Word of God, conceiving the convert and progressing him to the point of understanding and appreciating the kingdom of Heaven to benefiting from it eternally.

After Jesus finished the first six parables, He asked His disciples, "*Have you understood all these things?*" (v. 51). He had just condemned the Jewish religious leaders for being blind and not understanding (v. 14,15). He had also pronounced a blessing upon His disciples for their understanding at that present time, by saying, "*For verily I say unto you, that many of the prophets and righteous men desired to see these things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear those things which ye hear, and heard them not*" (v. 16,17). The disciples answered Jesus' question of verse 51 by saying, "Yes!" They had, through the parables and other teaching, a storehouse of knowledge and spiritual understanding.

The Parable of the Householder (Matthew 13:52)

The disciples, having accumulated so much teaching, are compared by Jesus to a scribe having been made a disciple to the kingdom of Heaven. Subsequently, the scribe is compared "*to a man who is a householder, who brings forth out of his treasures things new and old.*" The storehouse of new and old would spiritually be a vast knowledge of the Old Testament treasures and new knowledge treasures made known by Christ — an understanding of the blessings of the spiritual, eternal kingdom of God and all aspects of it. The idea of the abundance of the treasures is that of more than enough — they never fail!

The apparent lesson for us today is of one who masters to a degree the contents

TEXTUAL STUDIES

of the Bible. He in a sense has become a householder with many treasures new and old. The Sacred Writings have become his treasures, and he properly understands what he has and is able to bring them forth for the enjoyment and benefit of others. By such treasures of knowledge the people of Pentecost were taught (Acts 2:37-42), the Ethiopian eunuch was made to understand to the point of baptism (Acts 8:26-39), and the Philippian jailer and his household were saved (Acts 16:31-33).

Truly, today, there must be householders—brethren who are made to be teachers, preachers of the Word, missionaries to the world, those who are able to distribute their treasures liberally to all who seek them. It is stated by Paul the apostle that he “*shrank not from declaring... anything profitable... the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:20,27).

What a blessing there is for all who are privileged to sit at the feet of knowledgeable preachers and teachers, those like the scribe as a householder, able to bring forth from the spiritual treasury of God’s Word that which fits one for the kingdom of God, and ultimately eternal salvation.



May they never cease from the land!



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Judas – Loyal, Traitor, Bargainer, Betrayer, Suicide

Robert R. Taylor

The names of the twelve apostles are given in Matthew 10, Mark 3, and Luke 6. Judas Iscariot, uniformly, is listed last. Both Matthew and Mark refer to him as the betrayer; Luke calls him the traitor. The names of the eleven are enshrined in our hearts as real heroes of holiness, gallant men of the Gospel, but the name of Judas Iscariot lives in infamy. We can scarcely speak his name without evoking feelings of repulsion, scorn, and distaste. Judas was not born that way; he was not even that way when first called. He became that way when he gave in to sin.

Judas — Loyal: Prior to being named an apostle, Judas was a “disciple”, which means “student, follower, learner, observer.” So were the other eleven. Then came the point when Christ called them to a more lofty level — that of “apostles”. Apostles were appointed; they were to be sent; they were to be Christ’s envoys. Judas was qualified for such, else the Lord would not have given him this place of spiritual priority. Judas was clothed with powers to heal, cast out demons, cleanse lepers, and even raise the dead. The Lord would not have bequeathed such powers to one already in league with Satan. Judas was loyal to the Lord at first; he just did not retain this loyalty. He lost it; he sold his soul to sin.

Judas — Traitor: Judas became a traitor in heart before he became one externally. Out of the heart flow the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). Judas failed to do what the first part of that proverb enjoins — keep his heart with full, dedicated diligence. In Matthew 12:35, Jesus asserts that “*an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*” Judas allowed evil to enter, permeate, and then dominate his heart. Satan was not always in him. We read in Luke 22:3, “*Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.*” Judas extended him the welcome mat and in he came! He acted out of a heart that had become filled with treason against truth. He was a full-fledged traitor to truth — its betrayer.

Judas — Bargainer: The bill of sale had to be finalized now. His covetous, grasping, greedy ways drove him to his would-be partners in crime — the scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and elders. They agreed to pay thirty pieces of silver for the sure delivery of the despised Galilean into their murderous midst. The foul deed now only awaited convenience of an opportune time (Matthew 26:14-16).

BIBLE CHARACTERS

Judas — Betrayer: Judas had the audacity to appear with the faithful eleven at the Last Supper in the Upper Room. Judas, after having been pointed out by Jesus as the betrayer, exited into the darkness of that Thursday night. He knew that plans for that night called for the Lord to go to Gethsemane — a garden on the western slopes of Olivet where Jesus frequently resorted when in the Jerusalem area. Judas headed for his allies in crime. He led them to Jesus and identified Him with a kiss. It was the kiss of treason, the kiss of betrayal, the kiss of hypocrisy to the greatest degree! From that day until now we have had the Judas kiss as a sinful symbol of insensitive betrayal, and hypocritical treachery.



Judas — Suicide: When the awful deed was done the coveted pieces of silver became less inviting to Judas, and he sought to return the money to his comrades in crime, but they treated him with a cold sneer. He was no longer useful to them. In desperation he threw the now despised coins to the temple floor and went out and hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). Later his body fell to the ground, head first, and his bowels gushed out as a result of the impact (Acts 1:18). Judas went to his own place — Hadean punishment. He is destined for Eternal Gehenna from Judgment onward, as Acts 1:25 states; *“That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”*

Lessons Learned:

1. Sin is always worse than we first imagine it will be.
2. Judas could have repented; instead he only regretted what he had done.
3. Tragedy stalks every person whose soul is for sale.
4. A child of God can so sin as to be eternally lost — look at Judas.
5. There is never any real comfort or loyalty from one’s associates in crime.
6. A man can prove unfaithful in the very area where he is unusually talented. Judas did it in the money-handling business. †

Robert R. Taylor is a longtime preacher of the Gospel, primarily in the states of Mississippi and Tennessee, USA.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

A Work in Progress

Betty Tucker

We need to take a look at the man called “Saul of Tarsus.” We find him in the crowd, watching with approval as Stephen is stoned for his faith (Acts 7:58).

Saul was born a Roman citizen and educated in Greek culture. He was a man with a mission to persecute Christians and destroy the church (Acts 9:3).

Being zealous in his threatenings and slaughter against those who upheld the teachings of the Lord, Saul sought and received authority from the high priest to travel to Damascus to wreak havoc upon Christians (9:2).

On his way to Damascus, Saul was astonished to meet Jesus Christ. You know the story ... the bright light, his fall to the ground, and the Lord’s question to him... “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?*” (verse 4).

Upon learning that he was speaking to Jesus, Saul asked what he should do. He was told to go into the city and he would be told what to do (verse 6).

Now sightless, Saul was led into the city. Ananias was the preacher whom God sent to teach Saul. He restored Saul’s sight, and then Saul was baptized (verse 18).

A New Direction

Saul now embraced the faith of the Christians whom he formerly victimized.

The people were astounded at the transformation! This one who had gone from house to house dragging Christians to prison now preached the very doctrine he had so despised.

Finally, the Jews formulated a plot to kill him, but Saul escaped by being lowered over



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BIBLE CHARACTERS

the wall of the city. He fled to Jerusalem, where he made known his desire to join the ranks of the disciples, but they were afraid of him, because they knew of his actions against Christians (verse 26). Barnabas interceded for Saul, convincing them that this man now knew the truth.

We learn in Acts 13:9 that Saul's name was changed to Paul. He traveled extensively, teaching and establishing churches wherever he went. He suffered many hardships. In 2 Corinthians 11 he mentioned some of the many beatings, imprisonments, and other difficulties that he suffered because of his commitment to Jesus Christ.

At last Paul was taken to Rome to stand trial. He was a prisoner there for two years, even preaching the Gospel while a prisoner.

This former enemy of Christ wrote several letters, including some while in prison. In his last letter to Timothy, Paul indicated that his end was near. The Bible does not record his death, but a historian from the fourth century, Eusebius, affirms that Paul was beheaded in Rome in A.D. 67.

The Finishing Process

Paul did not instantly become the great spiritual leader overnight. Rather, it was a gradual process.

Notice Paul's own account of his struggle with sin, as he says in Romans 8:19, *"For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do."*

Paul was only a man, subject to temptations of this world like the rest of us. It was not always easy for him. But notice what he became able to say with satisfaction, *"...I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (Philippians 4:11).

The trials and tribulations were necessary to grind and chip away those character flaws that made his pathway to heaven treacherous. Sometimes, he took two steps forward and one step backward.

We can learn a valuable lesson from this stalwart man of God. As we look back at his life we see him stumble in the face of persecution, such as he had himself wielded upon Christians before he espoused the teachings of the Lord. But, he held to his faith and accomplished great things in the kingdom.

When we find ourselves in the midst of trials of our own, when our heads are bowed low in depression, we must remember Paul. Our strength is small, but our hope is founded in the One who died for us. We, too, are works in progress. †

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



Vashti

Bonnie Rushmore

Across

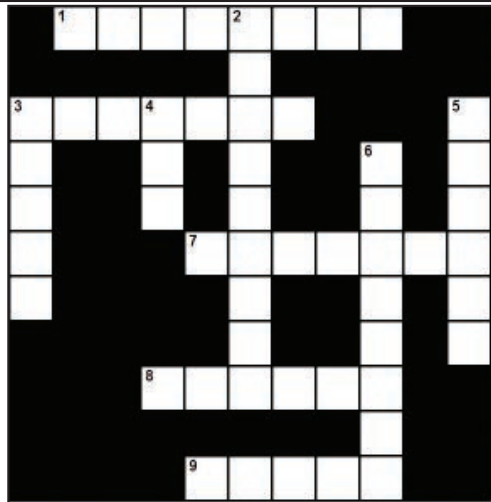
1. The king's advisors thought the queen was a bad example for women toward their _____.

3. Where was the palace?

7. The queen _____ to appear before the king.

8. Who was the queen?

9. What did the king want the queen to wear when he asked her show her beauty?



Down

2. Who was the king in the Book of Esther?

3. How long (days) did the king's feast for the people of the city last?

4. How long (months) did the king's feast for his officials and servants last?

5. From what type of vessels did the people at the feast drink?

6. "...and let the king give her royal _____ to another who is better than she."

What About Abortion?

Albert Gardner

Since abortion on demand became the law of the land in the USA, millions of abortions have been performed with the approval of the State. Even though it is legal, does God approve of it? Human life is sacred. Cain killed his brother, but covered him in the sand in order to hide his sin. God said, *“The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground”* (Genesis 4:10).

Gambling is legal in most states, but the very basis of it is wrong. It is promoted by envy and greed. It rejects the teaching that we should work to make a living (Ephesians 4:28).

Divorce is legal and granted for nearly every cause, or even “no-fault-divorce”, but just because it is legal does not make it right. Jesus gives one cause for divorce and remarriage. *“Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”* (Matthew 19:9).

The abortion issue raises the question as to when a baby is a baby. Let the Bible tell us. When Mary went to visit Elizabeth, her cousin (Luke 1:36), who was six months pregnant, *“when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb”* (Luke 1:41). Notice, the unborn child is called a “babe”.

The shepherds were directed to Jesus. *“And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”* (Luke 2:12). He is called “a babe”. The same Greek word is used to describe a child before birth as well as after birth. They call the unborn simply a “fetus” in an attempt to justify a sinful practice.

A professor at the UCLA medical school asked his students this question: “Here is the family history: the father has syphilis. The mother has TB. They already have four children. The first is blind. The second has died. The third is deaf. The fourth has TB. The mother is pregnant. The parents are willing to have an abortion if you decide they should. What do you think?” Most of the students decided on abortion. “Congratulations,” said Professor Agnew. “You have just murdered Beethoven.” †

Albert Gardner (1928-2012) was a preacher of the Gospel for many years in the USA, and he also involved himself in many foreign missionary efforts.

BIBLE QUESTIONS

Was the Thief Baptized?

Keith Parker

Have you ever met a thief? Have you ever been robbed or stolen from? If so, you know that thieves are hard to love.

On one occasion, Jesus expressed His love to a thief. To the thief on the cross He said, *“Today you shall be with me in paradise.”*



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Some people point to the thief on the cross as an example of a sinner being saved without baptism. Although Jesus plainly said in Mark 16:16, *“He that believes and is baptized shall be saved,”* religious people say, “Look at the thief.”

Was the thief baptized? Brad Graham writes, “I believe that the thief was a baptized believer. From what I read in the Bible, there is definitely more evidence supporting that he may have been baptized than evidence supporting that he may not have been baptized.” Brad gives five reasons why he believes such is the case:

- 1. The Bible does not tell us that the thief wasn’t baptized.** He is described as a “thief,” a “robber,” a “criminal”... a sinner. I am a sinner AND I am a baptized believer. I am both... why couldn’t the thief have been both a sinner and a baptized believer?

BIBLE QUESTIONS

- 2. The thief feared God.** When the other criminal was insulting Jesus, the thief said, “*Don’t you fear God since we are under the same sentence?*” (Luke 23:40).
- 3. The thief understood the kingdom of Heaven.** The thief says in Luke 23:42, “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*” Many people thought Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom (and some still believe that today). Many people closest to Jesus. How would the thief have known that Jesus was leaving this world to enter another kingdom if he had not been taught?
- 4. The thief rebuked the other criminal.** We are told in Matthew 27:44 and in Mark 15:32 that both criminals mocked and heaped insults on him. If

I were hanging from a cross with spikes in my hands and feet, I can guarantee you that I would not have a happy, Christian attitude, either. But in Luke 23:40 we are told that the thief at some point rebuked the other criminal



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for what he was saying to Jesus. Why would the thief have done that if Jesus had not had some special impact on his life?

- 5. The thief knew he had sinned.** In Luke 23:41 the thief says, “*We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man had done nothing wrong.*” Was the thief repenting here?

It is interesting to me what the Pharisees heard. “*The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John*” (John 4:1). How many did John baptize? I don’t know. Matthew 3:5-6 indicates a high number, and Jesus baptized more. Who is to say that the thief was not among them? †

Keith Parker works with the church in Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA.

BIBLE QUESTIONS

What Happens When You Die?

Dr. Demar Elam

A young man, 16-years-old, is walking across the gym floor at his high school on his way to P.E. Suddenly he crashes to the floor, hitting his head. Others realize that something is very wrong with him. A teacher rushes to the youth and lifts his head, but the young man is dead. He has suffered a heart attack.

The doctor walks out of the examination room and asks the parents of his 14-year-old female patient to be seated. He says, “I am sorry. She has cancer and there is nothing we can do. Your daughter has only weeks to live.”

The anchorwoman on the evening news reports, “There was a fatal crash this afternoon involving five vehicles. Four of the victims are in intensive care. A 17-year-old and a 13-year-old died in the fiery crash. The names are being withheld pending notification of family.”

What is the purpose of these illustrations? Each tragic event testifies that the young also die! Many young people live life daily with little thought of dying. Many sober-minded youths realize that death comes to the young as well as the aged. Inquiring youths have asked, “What does the Bible say about death?” and “What happens when you die?”

First Corinthians 15

Many desire to know the answers to these questions that are important to young people who, like people of all ages, are touched by death on a daily basis. God’s Word has the answers. Our study will focus on 1 Corinthians 15, referred to as the great “resurrection chapter” of the Bible. The people of Paul’s day, like we today, asked the same questions.

The Bible gives us many assurances that there will be not only a resurrection, but also a BODILY resurrection (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). It is rather startling to discover how many today have not comprehended the Bible teaching on this subject. God’s Word declares that our vile bodies will be changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body in the resurrection (Philippians 3:20, 21). Flesh and blood will not enter the eternal kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50, 54), but in the heavenly abode we will definitely have bodies — spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-49).

Every Christian should read 1 Corinthians 15 often. The resurrection should thrill our thoughts with the grandeur that is to come and cause us to prepare

BIBLE QUESTIONS

accordingly. The Bible doctrine of resurrection is not exclusive to the New Testament. It was first made evident in the Old Testament scriptures (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:8-37; Genesis 5:21-24). Abraham *“... waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11:10). David said: *“But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me”* (2 Samuel 12:23). Daniel stated that, *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Daniel 12:2). It is in the teachings of the New Testament that a clear picture is revealed of the bodily resurrection of man.

Jesus Taught a Bodily Resurrection

Jesus spoke to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, and said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live”* (John 11:25). If one embraces the Bible as being the inerrant, Holy Spirit-inspired Word of God, then the resurrection cannot be denied. Did Jesus rise BODILY from the tomb? *“And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty”* (1 Corinthians 15:14). The Gospel of Christ consists of the death, burial, and resurrection: *“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures”* (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). The empty tomb, where Christ was laid, bears testimony of Christ’s BODILY resurrection. Man must believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ or forfeit eternal life.

When Jesus walked this earth, He spoke these words: *“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”* (Matthew 22:32). The BODILY resurrection of Jesus is one of the most substantiated truths in history. To deny the bodily resurrection is to deny the evidence. The tomb of Christ remains empty and unexplained unless He did, in fact, arise from the dead and bodily ascend back to Heaven, as the Bible states He did (Acts 1:9). Just as certainly as Christ was taken up into heaven, He will come again in like manner (Acts 1:11).

When you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, transforming power occurs in your life. Unless you believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be (God’s Son) you cannot be saved (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24). *“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”* (1 Corinthians 15:17). Your belief in the resurrection will determine where you spend eternity. †

Dr. Demar Elam works with Amridge University, living in Athens, AL, USA



Scavenger Hunt Through the Book of Genesis

Rebecca Rushmore

1. Name the two types of birds Noah sent out the window of the ark.
2. Name the four rivers that bordered the Garden of Eden.
3. Name the two people to whom Abram/Abraham stated that Sarah was his sister.
4. Name the king, who was also a priest, that blessed Abram.
5. How old was Ishmael when Isaac was born?
6. Name Abraham's second wife and the number of children she bore him.
7. Name Jacob's only daughter.
8. Which of Joseph's brothers planned to save him from the others?
9. Which brother did Joseph put in prison in Egypt?
10. How many days did it take to embalm Jacob?

See answers on inside back cover

Counting the Cost

Luke 14:25-33

J.C. Choate

Introduction:

- A. Some enter the Christian life blindly.
- B. They do not stop and consider what it will cost them.
- C. Need to consider two things:
 - 1. What it will take.
 - 2. What it will bring.
- D. There must be determination to live the Christian life.

I. Discussion:

- A. Salvation.
 - 1. It is free.
 - 2. But it costs much.
- B. What Salvation Cost Others.
 - 1. Cost God His Son.
 - 2. Cost Christ His life.
 - 3. Cost the apostles much.
- C. What Salvation may cost us.
 - 1. Changing our way of life.
 - 2. Giving up the religion of man.



CHARTS AND OUTLINES

3. Family.
 4. Job.
 5. Persecution.
- D. Should Count the Cost.
1. Buying in the bazaars.
 2. Buying land.
 3. Buying a house.
 4. Price to be a Christian.
- E. Paying the Price.
1. Leave all to follow Christ (Luke 9:23).
 2. Obedience (James 1:22).
 3. Becoming a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1, 2).
 4. Being faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10).
- F. Reward of Salvation.
1. Remission of Sins.
 2. Gift of the Holy Spirit.
 3. Spiritual blessings.
 4. Peace.
 5. Hope.

Conclusion:

- A. Better not to begin than to start and quit (2 Peter 2:20-22).
- B. A great decision to make.



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

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’” (Luke 14:26-30 NKJV)

Cruciformity: Living A Cross-Shaped Life Philippians 2:5-11

Bobby Dockery

Introduction:

- A. As the ordeal of the cross drew to a close, Jesus cried, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*” Matthew 27:46
- B. He was at that instant tasting eternal death for all those willing to come to the cross in obedient faith to receive the benefits of His blood.
- C. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, takes us to the cross, and then urges, “*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*” (2:5)
- D. “Mind” refers to a way of thinking that leads to action.
- E. In the 1600’s the word “cruciform” entered our language. It comes from the Latin *cruce* – “cross” and *formis* – “shape” or “mold.”

I. Body:

- A. Living Intentionally
 1. Jesus came into the world on a mission. (John 6:38; Luke 2:49; Mark 10:45)
 2. Jesus made it His purpose to do the will of the Father. (Luke 22:42; John 9:4)
 3. Even at the age of 12, He said, “*I must be about my Father’s business.*” (Luke 2:49)
 4. The challenge of the cross is to become “*conformed to the image of the Son.*” (Romans 8:29)

II. Living Humbly

- A. The cross was all about humility: Christ emptied Himself and clothed Himself in humanity to die for our sins. (2 Corinthians 8:9)
- B. Cross-shaped humility will preserve peace and order in the church and the world

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

III. Living Lovingly

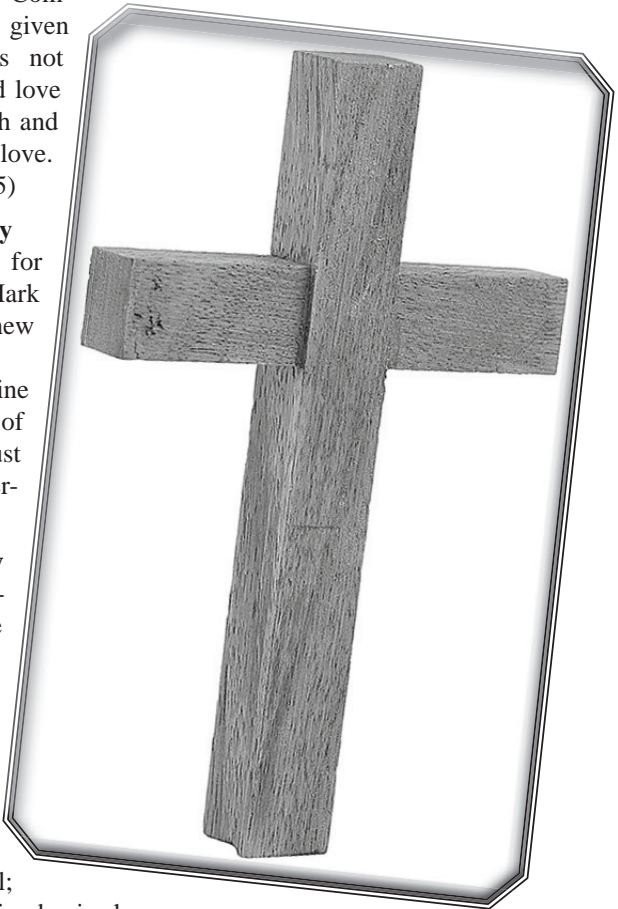
- A. Jesus is the ultimate demonstration of what love is. (John 14:9)
- B. The “New Commandment” given by Jesus was not that we should love – but the depth and extent of that love. (John 13:34-35)

IV. Living Sacrificially

- A. Jesus lived for others. (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28)
- B. To be genuine followers of Christ, we must learn to be servants.

V. Living Obediently

- A. The cross revealed the price we should be willing to pay for obedience. (Hebrews 5:8-9)
- B. Obedience is foundational; really, everything begins here.



Conclusion:

- A. To live the Christian life, we must be reshaped by the cross!



Bobby Dockery is a writer and preacher living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA, and has been heavily involved in mission work for many years.

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

Meaningful Worship 1 Chronicles 16:23-41

Andy Jooste

Introduction

- A. Jesus and the Samaritan woman – discussing true worship (John 4:19-24)
- B. Worship means different things to different people.
- C. Understanding biblical concepts honors God and edifies man (1 Corinthians 14:26).

I. The Event of Biblical Worship

- A. Worship involves a specific act – not perpetual action (Romans 12:1,2).
- B. Biblical examples of worship
 - 1. Abraham went “yonder to worship” (Genesis 22:5).
 - 2. The Ethiopian Eunuch was returning from worship (Acts 8:27,28).
 - 3. The early church conduct in worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:25)
 - 4. The logical service of a transformed mind (Romans 12:1,2)

II. The Object of Biblical Worship

- A. Worship directed to God (Psalm 45:11; Matthew 4:10)
- B. Worship directed to Christ (Revelation 14:6,7; cf. John 1:1; Revelation 5)
- C. Worship in spirit – not worship of the Spirit (John 4:24; John 16:14)
- D. The Spirit not the Object; He focuses attention on Christ as the Word.

III. The Spirit of Biblical Worship

- A. Worship in “holy attire” – beauty of holiness, including dress (Psalm 29:2)
- B. Keeping silence – respect – before the Lord in His holy temple (Habakkuk 2:20)
- C. Orderliness relates to edification (1 Corinthians 14).

Conclusion

- A. The lame man healed – later found worshiping in the temple (Acts 3:8)
- B. Appropriate sign in church building: “Enter to worship – leave to serve.”
- C. Logical action calls for transformation (Romans 12:1,2; Acts 3:19). †

Andy Jooste preaches for the Lord’s church in Mount Vernon, Ohio, USA.

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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”.
- * Is there a source for buying Bibles in your community? Though the Bible has been translated into most languages, villages seldom have bookstores. For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- * If you have found the Truth and are a Christian, is there a bookstore from which you can order additional study materials? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.

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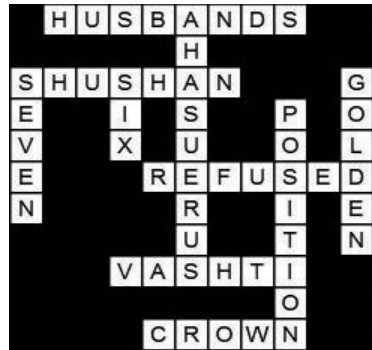
ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

Verse Search (page 28)

Answers to 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

1. Foolishness, perishing
2. The message of the cross or the Gospel
3. Isaiah 29:14
4. Foolishness
5. Sign, wisdom
6. Stumbling block, foolishness
7. The power and wisdom of God
8. Wiser, stronger
9. The mighty or noble

Bible Find (page 97)



10. Foolish

Scavenger Hunt (page 103)

11. Weak things
 12. So that only God would receive the glory
 13. Righteousness, sanctification and redemption
 14. Lord
 15. Jeremiah 9:24
1. raven, dove (Genesis 8:7,8)
 2. Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, Euphrates (2:10-14)
 3. Pharaoh, Abimelech (12:11-20; 20:2-5)
 4. Melchizedek (14:18-20)
 5. 4 (16:16; 21:5)
 6. Keturah, 6 (25:1,2)
 7. Dinah (30:21)
 8. Reuben (37:21,22)
 9. Simeon (42:24)
 10. 40 days (50:2,3)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Oh, Father, Give Us....

Oh, Father,

Give us eyes to see

The vastness of horizons

You would open up before us;

Give us strength

To walk the nearer plains,

The endurance

To scale the mountain peaks

That bring new vistas into sight;

Give us songs

Worthy of the singing

On brilliant days

When everywhere is sunshine

And skies so blue

The heart must ache in gratitude

To be alive;

Give us, within ourselves,

Capacity for love

For all mankind,

That we may radiate Your love

And be Your greatest gift

— except Your Son —

To dying man.

— Betty Burton Choate