

VOLUME NINETY-THREE

V THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL



Father

Betty Burton Choate

Father,

I stand here in my smallness as a human,

looking up and up

into the vastness of Your works,

Your trees,

soaring a hundred feet into Your sky;

Your sky

reaching out into the endlessness of space;

Your rain

falling, suddenly, abundantly,

to fill the thirsty mouths of all Your living things

over every inch of glorious earth

stretching out beneath my feet.

I am stricken, Father,

humbled

by the awesome gulf

between the might of Your great power

and my own nothingness.

I am awed,

Brought to my knees in wonder

at Your works;

Brought to my knees in wonder

that You put into my heart

that precious word,

“Father”....

The Years of Recorded Bible History

There are approximately 4,100 years of recorded Bible History
from Genesis through Revelation

Of Which



Old Testament
4,000 years



New Testament
100 years

4,000 years - are covered in the Old Testament

100 years - are covered in the New Testament

2,286 years - are covered in the Book of Genesis

2,000 years - are covered in Genesis 1-11

286 years - are covered from Genesis 12-50

1,714 years - are covered from Exodus - Malachi

1,814 years - are covered from Exodus - Revelation

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven”
Ecclesiastes 3:1

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THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST SALUTE YOU

(ROMANS 16:16).

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Deacons Serve

Louis Rushmore

Deacons are “servants” of the local congregation rather than “leaders” of the church. Instead, God determined that fully organized local congregations of the Lord’s church are to be led by “elders” or “bishops” who have been appointed in accordance with divinely stipulated biblically recorded qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Only indirectly, then, do deacons lead, comparable to the distinction in roles that God ordained between men and women for the home and for religion—today, the church (1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14). Hence, the qualifications for “deacons” pertain to males rather than to females (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Therefore, deacons do not have a leadership role in the Lord’s church above that of any other faithful male member. Deacons are not “junior elders,” and being a deacon does not necessarily mean that someday he will be promoted to being an elder. A deacon is a **servant**, and any decisions that he may make in keeping with his special assignment from the elders are likewise with the general permission of the elders. Those decisions are expected and necessary for carrying out his assigned responsibility in service to the congregation. Nevertheless, following, we purpose to examine what the New Testament reveals concerning the qualifications, appointment, work and office of deacons.

The English words “deacon” and “deacons” appear only five times in the Bible (“deacon,” 1 Timothy 3:10, 13; “deacons,” Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12). The two related Greek words translated “deacon” and “deacons” together appear about 67 times. The Greek *diakonos* is translated “minister” (20), “servant” (8) and “deacon” (3). The Greek *diakoneo* is translated “minister unto” (15), “serve” (10), “minister” (7)

and misc. (5). Greek definitions of these two words assign persons so described to **service activities**. The Greek *diakonos* means to run errands, to perform menial duties, table-server, supplier of material needs, a servant of someone or a helper. The Greek *diakoneo* means to wait upon, to care for and shares many of the same definitions of *diakonos*.

There is sufficient information within the New Testament to ascertain the qualifications, appointment, work and office of deacons. Numerous passages use the Greek words sometimes translated “deacon” to describe service activity when they do not refer to special servants called deacons. Qualifications for **special servants** called deacons appear in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

Deacons Serve

All of the original language definitions for our English word “deacon” pertain to **actively working**: to run errands, to perform menial duties, table-server, supplier of material needs, a servant of someone, a helper, to wait upon or to care for. Consequently, the words “minister” and “servant” or some form of these words is used to convey what they **do**.

Diakonos differs from *doulos* (slave). *Doulos* emphasizes one’s **relationship to his master**, whereas, *diakonos* emphasizes one’s **activity in his work**. Each office in the church is an **office of responsibility** rather than a position of honor. Preachers preach! Teachers teach! Elders rule (Hebrews 13:7, 17) or oversee (Acts 20:28)! Deacons serve!

Deacons have **work to do** in the church. It would be as useless and unbiblical for deacons not to serve in some particular activity as it would be for a preacher not to actually preach or for a teacher not to actually teach. The nature of the work of a deacon is primarily service orientated.

Other usages of the Greek words for “deacon” in the New Testament demonstrate the biblical meaning of the “deacon.” Note that the word translated sometimes as “deacon” is otherwise associated in Scripture with domestic servants (John 2:5, 9), civil ministers (Romans 13:4), Jesus Christ as a minister (Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:17), Christians as servants to each other (Matthew 20:26; 23:11), Gospel ministers (Ephesians 3:7; 6:21; Colossians 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7, 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Timothy 4:6), servants of the church (Romans 16:1) and servants to a king (Matthew 22:13). [The RSV translates (transliterates) *diakonos* as “deaconess.” Though it is apparent that Phebe was a special servant of the church, no woman can meet the marital specification of 1 Timothy 3:11.]

Qualifications of Deacons

Strictly speaking, biblical qualifications for deacons only appear in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The candidate for becoming a deacon includes being “grave” (KJV) or “reverent” (NKJV), which is serious and dignified, sober minded and conduct commanding respect. He must “Not double-tongued,” which is not talking two ways to suit the person with whom one is at the time, speaking one thing and meaning another or not using words deceitfully. In addition, the deacon must “not given to much wine” or not to engage in alcohol or acting as though under the influence of it. It is erroneous to conclude from 1 Timothy 3:3 that elders must abstain from all alcohol, but that deacons can have some alcohol and that other Christians have no restriction regarding alcohol. Rather, these and other passages forbid the pleasurable consumption of alcohol (so-called social drinking).

Qualifications continue with “not greedy of filthy lucre.” The deacon must be one who is not seeking ill-gotten gain, is the type of character who can faithfully manage money and who possesses an opposite trait of Judas (John 12:6). Further, he can be described as “holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” That means the deacon has a clear understanding of God’s Word and conducts himself accordingly; he is dependable to faithfully practice Christianity. The Gospel was called a “mystery” (Ephesians 3:3-11) before it was fully revealed. Other writers refer to a “pure conscience” (1 Peter 3:21; Hebrews 9:14; 10:22).

Prior to appointment as a deacon, a man must be “first proved” or “tested” by experience in Christian service; he has a history of being a good worker for Jesus Christ. Appointment as a deacon is not an honorary position. In addition, a deacon must be “blameless,” not deserving of public rebuke, unimpeachable and irreproachable. All Christians are to be blameless (1 Corinthians 1:8; Colossians 1:22).

The candidate for appointment as a deacon is married, the “husband of one wife.” He is not a polygamist. It is erroneous to conclude from this verse that a biblically remarried widower or divorced person does not qualify to be a deacon. The verse merely teaches that a man who would be a deacon could only have had one wife at a time—not a polygamist. Furthermore, those who would be appointed as deacons must be known to be “ruling their children and their own houses well,” that is, rightly governing their families, inclusive of one or more children.

Servants of Acts 6:1-7

One of the two Greek words translated “deacon” appears in this account, “serve tables” from *diakoneo*. The men in Acts 6:1-7 were selected to be special servants of the Jerusalem church, comparable in service activity usually associated with that of deacons. However, the qualifications for selection of those chosen in Acts 6 differs from the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Simply, they were to be honest and full of the Holy Spirit.

It is clear from Acts 6 regarding the caliber of men to be chosen to serve the church in an official capacity that they must be guided by God’s Word. The nature of the work of special servants or deacons pertains to physical activity (irrespective of what else they may do, e.g., teaching or preaching, Philip in Acts 8). The congregation is to choose men from among itself to serve.

Sub-Qualifications of Deacons

In order for a man to be qualified to be appointed as a deacon, his wife must possess godly qualities, too. A man’s wife may help him qualify or disqualify him from being a biblically acceptable deacon (1 Timothy 3:11). This principle is also true regarding other servants of the church. For instance, elders and preachers can be greatly hindered in their respective works if their wives prove to be detriments to their labors for the Lord.

The qualifications for wives of potential deacons are fewer than the number of qualifications for deacons. “Grave” means the same as for the deacon—serious and dignified, sober minded and conduct commanding respect. Also, Scripture says of her, “not a slanderer”; she does not slander. The deacon’s wife must be “sober,” not intoxicated, moderate in temperament and abstains from alcohol. The deacon’s wife is “faithful in all things,” trustworthy, not a revealer of confidences.

Conclusion

Deacons must serve. One cannot be a deacon unless he meets the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. His wife also meets specific qualifications. He is the head of his wife and children. He has a history of Christian service. There is a work for him to do, and he is willing and able to perform it.

A special reward is reserved for faithful deacons (1 Timothy 3:13)—“a good degree,” “good standing” or dignity. In addition, faithful deacons have “boldness” confidence or cheerful courage. All accountable souls ought to commit themselves to faithful, Christian service, but especially deacons must strive well in Christian service. 



The Christian and Angels

Jerry Bates

In today's modern world, we hear a great deal of talk about angels, and it seems that much of it is without any real biblical basis. Part of the reason is that the Bible actually speaks very little about angels. They are mentioned quite often, but no text specifically teaches about angels, and little is actually said about their role in God's plan. We hear few lessons on angels in the church. Consider the following thoughts on this subject.

First of all, we must realize that they are created beings; thus, they are not like God. Nehemiah wrote, *"You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host"* (Nehemiah 9:6). The host of heaven must include the angels; thus, they are created beings. We also read of the sons of God shouting for joy when God laid the foundations of the earth (Job 38:4-7). The sons of God must be a reference to angels since they were there when the earth and all its host (including man) was created. Angels are the servants of God with the power to do whatever God sends them to do. When Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, an angel shut the mouths of the lions (Daniel 6:22). Angels are not glorified human beings. Nothing indicates that when faithful children of God die, they become angels.

There is an unknown multitude of angels in existence. Jesus stated in Matthew 26:53 that He could have called twelve legions of angels to His aid. A Roman legion consisted of 6,000 men; thus, Jesus said He could have called 72,000 angels. While that number probably should not be taken literally, it does indicate that a vast number of angels are performing God's service. The writer of Hebrews said that Christians have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an *"innumerable multitude of angels"* (Hebrews 12:22). In John's vision, he said that the angels around the throne of God



numbered *“ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands”*

(Revelation 5:11). It seems that angels are higher than man, because the writer of Hebrews writes that when Jesus became man, He was made *“a little lower than the angels”* (Hebrews 2:7).

One common misconception regarding angels is that they are females flying around with wings. This is likely due to the fact we generally consider women to be kinder and more compassionate than men; thus, angels must be female. In actuality, angels are spirit beings, and therefore, are sexless. Jesus spoke regarding the resurrection in Matthew 22:30, *“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.”*

Another misconception is that angels are always good, but that is not true either. Some were not satisfied with their proper duty and station, and God reserves great punishment for them at the Judgment Day (Jude 6). We find that Satan also has his angels, and hell fire is reserved for them (Matthew 25:41). In the Old Testament, there are several examples of angels punishing the disobedient (2 Samuel 24:15-16; 2 Kings 19:35; Numbers 25:9; Ezekiel 9). While they are exceedingly powerful, they are under the control of God. In 2 Samuel 24:16, an angel stretched out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, but God spoke and said, *“It is enough; now restrain your hand.”* Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 that Jesus will come again *“with His mighty angels”* and take *“vengeance on those who do not know God.”* The writer of Hebrews said that God used angels as His ministers to cleanse like fire (Hebrews 1:7). Thus, the common perception of kind, loving angels only helping people is not truly biblical.

Angels also have a love for lost souls. The angels in Heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10). At the birth of Jesus, the multitude of the heavenly host praised God and said, *“Glory to God in the*

highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14). Only a deep love for the salvation of mankind would produce such a response. Apparently, angels serve a function for God’s children who die. When the beggar died in Luke 16:22, the angels carried him to Abraham’s bosom.

This brings us to our final consideration. What are the functions and duties of angels? Many have a conception that each Christian has a guardian angel. His purpose is to protect Christians as they go through life. If that were true, it seems that they are not doing a very good job, since Christians are continually plagued with misfortunes and accidents of various kinds and severity. However, angels do have a duty to render service to Christians, but we cannot be sure as to what that is. Angels ministered to Jesus at the major events of His life (e.g., temptation, Matthew 4:11; Garden of Gethsemane, Luke 22:43). The writer of Hebrews asked regarding angels, *“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”* (Hebrews 1:14). Furthermore, Jesus said regarding little children, *“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 18:10). So we can safely say that angels do provide a service for us as God’s children, but we simply cannot be certain as to what that service entails.

They also stand before God and worship; however, they are not to be worshipped by man. At the end of the Revelation, John fell down to worship the angel who had revealed all the things within the Book of Revelation to him. The angel immediately admonished him, *“See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God”* (Revelation 22:9). Thus, we see that as great as angels are, they are simply servants of God, just as we are. Only God is worthy to be worshipped.

While we may be somewhat fascinated by angels, let us not be distracted from our service to Christ. We should never be tempted to worship angels or magnify their greatness as if they are somehow similar to God. Nevertheless, this should serve as a sobering reminder to us, that *“if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment”* (2 Peter 2:4), how much more will God punish us if we live in rebellion to His will? 



1932—2008

The Doctrines of Calvinism

J.C. Choate

A man by the name of John Calvin was born in Noyon, France in 1509 to parents who were Catholic. As he grew into manhood, Calvin was converted from Catholicism and developed his own ideas of salvation in reaction to the doctrines most prevalent in Europe at that time. Though Calvin himself did not start a separate religious group, people who accepted his doctrines came to be known as “Calvinists,” and various denominations today include those beliefs in their manuals of faith.

The acronym for Calvin’s basic belief system is T.U.L.I.P. For what do these letters stand, and how do these doctrines compare with God’s Word?



T. Total Depravity teaches that all humans are totally depraved from birth, inheriting the guilt of Adam's sin, and that it is impossible for anyone to choose God on his own; only God can choose the humans that will be saved.

◆ **God's Word:**

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (Ezekiel 18:20)

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me." (Matthew 18:3-5)

"...each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." (James 1:14-15)

Psalm 51:5 reads *"...in sin did my mother conceive me..."* and is wrongly used to teach that a child is born WITH sin, but the writer was talking about the sin of his adult mother, not his own.

U. Unconditional Election means that God chooses who will be saved and who will be lost, and the individual has no choice in the matter; he is predestined to be saved or to be lost from the beginning, and his fate cannot be changed.

◆ **God's Word:**

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

"Come now, and let us REASON together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:10)

“...I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have COMMITTED unto him against that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12)

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore CHOOSE LIFE, that both thou and thy seed may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

If humans have no choice to respond to the preaching of God’s Word and to His invitation, is not God being deceitful to invite all who hear to come to Him?

L Limited Grace teaches that Christ died only for those He predetermined would be saved.

◆ **God’s Word:**

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of THE WHOLE WORLD.” (1 John 2:2)

“Who will have ALL MEN to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the Truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4)

“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)

Repeatedly, in Scripture, God says that the atonement is for ALL who will come to Him.

L Irresistible Grace means that the “chosen” cannot successfully resist the grace of God, bestowed on them through God’s predetermining that they would be saved.

◆ **God’s Word:**

“But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” (Romans 10:21)

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: me, and they are they which testify of me. And YE WILL NOT come to Me that ye might have life.” (John 5:39-40)

God plainly says that He grieves over the ones who will not come to Him, to have life.

P. Perseverance of the Saints teaches that those who are the “chosen” cannot be lost, and that if a person leaves the faith, he was not saved in the beginning.

◆ **God’s Word:**

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” (2 Peter 2:20)

Let God’s word be true, and refuse the doctrines of men. †

“*Whoever*” appears nearly 100 times in the New Testament, and in many of those verses “*whoever*” boldly and loudly shouts forth the falsity of Calvinism—TULIP.

“*And it shall come to pass That **whoever** calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved*” (Acts 2:21 NKJV).

“*To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, **whoever** believes in Him will receive remission of sins*” (Acts 10:43).

“*As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And **whoever** believes on Him will not be put to shame’*” (Romans 9:33).

“*For **whoever** calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*” (Romans 10:13).

“***Whoever** commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness*” (1 John 3:4).

“***Whoever** believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and **everyone** who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him*” (1 John 5:1).

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

“*And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. **Whoever** desires, let him take the water of life freely*” (Revelation 22:17).



5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

Paula Bates

Fear the Lord

1. Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who _____ in His ways.
Psalm 128:1
2. His _____ is on those who fear him from _____ to _____.
Luke 1:50
3. Then Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that _____ shows no partiality. But in every _____ whoever fears Him and works righteousness is _____ by Him. Acts 10:34-35
4. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with _____ and _____; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good _____. Philippians 2:12-13
5. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be _____, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with _____ and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28-29
6. Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His _____ and those who fear him, both _____ and _____!"
Revelation 19:5



-
- Answers:**
1. Walks
 2. Mercy, generation, generation
 3. God, nation, accepted
 4. Fear, trembling, pleasure
 5. Shaken, reverence
 6. Servants, small, great

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***A bit of Interesting “stuff”
One thing is for sure***

GOD IS GOOD!

Author Unknown

This is really interesting—enjoy!

⇒ When GOD solves our problems, we have faith in HIS abilities. When GOD doesn't solve our problems, HE has faith in our abilities.

⇒ One may observe God's accuracy in the hatching of eggs—those of the canary in 14 days; those of the barnyard hen in 21 days; eggs of ducks and geese in 28 days; those of the mallard in 35 days; the eggs of the parrot and the ostrich hatch in 42 days.

Notice, they are all divisible by seven, the number of days in a week!

⇒ See God's wisdom in the making of an elephant. The four legs of this great beast all bend forward in the same direction. No other quadruped is so made. God planned that this animal would have a huge body—too large to live on two legs. For this reason, He gave it four fulcrums so that it can rise from the ground easily. The horse rises from the ground on its two front legs first. A cow rises from the ground with its two hind legs first.

How wise the Lord is in all His works of creation!

⇒ Each watermelon has an even number of stripes on the rind.

⇒ Each orange has an even number of segments. Each ear of corn has an even number of rows. Each stalk of wheat has an even number of grains.

⇒ Every bunch of bananas has on its lowest row an even number of bananas, and each row decreases by one, so that one row has an even number and the next row an odd number.

Amazing! There's more...

⇒ The waves of the sea roll in on shore twenty-six to the minute in

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all kinds of weather.

- ⇒ All grains are found in even numbers on the stalks.
- ⇒ God has caused the flowers to blossom at certain specified times during the day. Linnaeus, the great botanist, once said that if he had a conservatory containing the right kind of soil, moisture and temperature, he could tell the time of day or night by the flowers that were open and those that were closed.
- ⇒ The lives of each of us may be ordered by the Lord in a beautiful way for His glory, if we will only entrust Him with our lives. If we try to regulate our own lives, we will have only mess and failure.
- ⇒ Only God who made our brains and hearts can successfully guide them to a profitable end.
- ⇒ When you carry the Bible, Satan has a headache; when you open it, he collapses; when he sees you reading it, he loses his strength, and when you stand on the Word of God, Satan can't hurt you! Did you also know...
- ⇒ Life without God is like an unsharpened pencil—it has no point.✝

**Let all the earth fear the Lord;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast...
Our soul waits for the Lord;
He is our help and our shield.
For our heart shall rejoice in Him,
Because we have trusted in His holy name.
Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us,
Just as we hope in You. (Psalm 33:8-9; 20-22)**

GOD
GOD USES TROUBLE

Gary C. Hampton

Paul, knowing the importance of continued teaching and encouragement, approached Barnabas about visiting the brethren in all the cities in which they had previously preached. Barnabas strongly desired to take his cousin John Mark on the journey. Paul did not want to go with the man who had left them at Perga (Acts 15:36; 13:13). Paul and Barnabas were so firm in their opinions, even to the point of being provoked to anger, that they had to separate.

God used the disagreement between these two great men of faith to produce two teams to go preach the Gospel. Barnabas went with John Mark to Cyprus, his homeland (Acts 15:39; 4:36). Paul took Silas, one of the leading men among the brethren at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). They went through Syria and Cilicia to southern Galatia, strengthening the churches along the way (Acts 15:40-41).

“The one redeeming note in this otherwise unhappy and regrettable episode is that neither party to the dispute permitted it to hinder the work of God” (James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Acts* 305). Paul later referred to Barnabas as a good example of one who worked to support himself while preaching. He also described John Mark as one who was useful in ministry (1 Corinthians 9:6; 2 Timothy 4:11).

Disagreements between brethren can be the devil’s tool to bring good works to a standstill. The Christian who allows some painful incident to become his or her excuse for sitting on the stool of do-nothing gives Satan the victory. The one who presses on in service to the King can see bad situations work out to the furtherance of the Gospel (Philippians 1:12).

There are two motivations for preaching the Gospel—selfish ambition or love. Our job is not to be heart inspectors seeking to correct every improper motive. Instead, like Paul, we should say, ***“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice”*** (Philippians 1:18). 

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

GOD

Christ the Creator

Keith Kasarjian

A little girl and her mother were discussing the child's Sunday School Class lesson and how that Jesus had gone up to Heaven and is now sitting beside the Father. A little while later the mother noticed a rainbow, and not wanting to waste an opportunity to mention God, said to her daughter, "Look at the pretty rainbow God has painted for us." The little girl agreed and then said, "And just think, He did it all with His left hand." Confused, the mother asked "Can't God use both His hands?" To which the girl replied, "Of course not. Jesus is sitting on His right hand!" The little girl was a bit misguided, but have you ever considered the creative powers of Jesus?

Christ is the Creator of our world. We know that *"by Him were all things made"* (Colossians 1:16) and that *"apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being"* (John 1:3). Add to that *"in Him all things hold together"* (Colossians 1:17). Jesus is both Creator and Sustainer of our world.

Christ is the Creator of our new life. By that we mean that He is the One who makes the New Life possible. *"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Without Jesus, we are dead in our sins, have given ourselves over to the lusts of the flesh and are children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3). However, because of Jesus, our life can be radically different. Thanks to Christ, we can live a new life characterized by love, joy, forgiveness and hope.

Christ is the Creator of our eternal reward. Jesus has said that He is preparing for us a place in His Father's house and that one day He will receive us there (John 14:1-3). Our life here on Earth is not always easy. It is sometimes filled with cares, troubles and difficulties. In fact, Jesus spoke the aforementioned words for the purpose of comforting troubled disciples. Yet, while this world has its troubles, Heaven gives us hope, motivation and reward. As we sing, "How beautiful Heaven must be!" As one man stated, "If it's taking Jesus this long to get it ready, it must be awfully nice!"

Christ the Creator! *"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"* (2 Corinthians 9:15). 

Keith Kasarjian is the Extension School Director of the Bear Valley Bible Institute in Denver, Colorado, USA.

GOD

Have You Grown Tired of God?

Therman Hodge

As it was in Malachi's day, so it is still the case today that many are willing to put personality over principle, and because of ignorance of the Scriptures, they are apt to go in any direction. Franklin Camp once observed, "When you leave the principle of the need for Bible authority, there is no end to where you will wind up."

Can we not see that this is true? Worship and moral issues would, then, be settled by what men want instead of what God wants (Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23; Leviticus 10:1-2; 1 John 2:3-5). God's people had come to embrace the sins of the day and wanted to find acceptance and popularity with the world. They decided to offer a truce of peace with the false religions of the day. It is no surprise, then, that God's people readily accepted idolatry. No wonder God would ask His people, "*Have you grown tired of me?*"

We can see the progression. Tolerance led to acceptance, and that acceptance eventually led to joint participation. My friends, these three things have not only influenced religion down through the ages, but they have also had an unsettling effect on things pertaining to moral issues. We will just mention two, homosexuality and abortion. When people of our day are willing to follow the false philosophies of the world and thus plunge headlong into immorality and into religious error, then, isn't it obvious that they also have grown tired of God (Romans 1:24-32; Proverbs 23:23). Micah, like Hosea, became disturbed over the hypocrisy of Jehovah's bride, Israel. He boldly preached to them. **We need that bold preaching today** (2 Timothy 4:1-4)!

Can we see three similarities between what had taken place in Micah's day and our day? Because of the ignorance of the Word of God, God's people were influenced by the world around them, and also by the false

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religions of that day and time. We recall their strong desire for acceptance of the world. We regret that God's people were willing to compromise truth to find that acceptance. Their lax attitudes toward truth led to departures in worship to God.

First, one of these had to do with improper attitudes in worship. They thought that they could simply go through the forms and not have to have their hearts in it. **Second**, they thought that they could observe rituals while they ne-



glected righteousness. **Third**, they thought they would do no harm in adopting into their worship some of the religious practices of their neighbors, yet obviously, this led to a departure from God and truth in their worship. Such a departure from God finally led them to idolatry. **Short steps from God's pattern led to long distances of apostasy.**

What about worship today? Has it become a ritual or habit? Are we active participants in worship or just observers? Are our hearts bowed in humility before the one true and living God? Am I still concerned about what is authorized in worship (John 9:24; Romans 1:9; Colossians 3:17)? Do we recognize the Godhead as the audience and that we are to offer in worship only what pleases God? Do we need to be reminded that the only way we can know what pleases Him is through what He has revealed in His Word. A good question for many today still is, *"Have you grown tired of God?"* †

Therman Hodge is a Gospel preacher and a short-term missionary to several countries. He resides in Meridian, Mississippi, USA.

Will the Earth Last Forever?

Kevin L. Moore

The English word “forever” essentially means “without end; ever-continuing.” However, the Hebrew word “*olam*,” from which it is translated, has various shades of meaning and must therefore be understood in light of the context in which it is used. Sometimes it carries the same sense as the English word (Psalm 29:10; 45:6). In the largest number of its occurrences, however, “*olam*” merely denotes simple duration. In this sense it can mean “day by day” or “continually,” as in Psalm 61:8, “***So I will sing praise to Your name forever [‘olam], that I may daily perform my vows***” (NKJV). It can also mean “in olden times” as in Genesis 6:4, “***the mighty men who were of old [‘olam]...***” It can be used to signify “for a long time,” such as Isaiah 42:14, “***I have held my peace a long time [‘olam]...***” It can carry the idea of “into the indefinite future” as in Deuteronomy 23:3, “***to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever [‘olam].***” It sometimes means “as long as one lives,” such as in 1 Samuel 1:22-28, “***then I will take him, that he may appear before the Lord and remain there forever [‘olam]... as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord***” (cf. Exodus 21:6; Deuteronomy 15:17; 1 Samuel 27:12).

When “*olam*” is used with reference to temporary things, it clearly carries the idea of that which lasts its allotted amount of time. For example, the Levitical priesthood was to abide “***forever***” (Deuteronomy 18:5), yet the priesthood was subsequently changed (Hebrews 7:12). The same idea is found with reference to the Israelite land promise and circumcision (Genesis 17:7-13; Exodus 32:13), the Passover (Exodus 12:14-17), the tabernacle’s lampstand (Exodus 27:21; Leviticus 24:3), the priests’ trousers (Exodus 28:43), heave offerings (Exodus 29:28), ritual washings

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(Exodus 30:21), the Sabbath (Exodus 31:17), grain and drink offerings (Leviticus 6:18-22; Numbers 15:15), offerings to the priests (Leviticus 7:34-36; 10:15), annual Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34; 23:31), feasts and offerings of firstfruits, Pentecost and booths (Leviticus 23:14, 21, 41), ceremonial bread (Leviticus 24:8-9), trumpet blowing (Numbers 10:8), sacrifice of purification (Numbers 19:10), the memorial stones (Joshua 4:7), Caleb's inheritance (Joshua 14:9), Israel as God's people (2 Samuel 7:24), the Temple (1 Kings 9:3), Jerusalem (Psalm 48:8), et al. Since the earth is not permanent (Psalm 102:25-26; Matthew 24:35; 2 Peter 3:10-12), whenever the Bible speaks of the earth abiding “*olam*” (“forever”), it simply means that it will last as long as it was intended to last—until Christ returns. †

Kevin L. Moore serves as director of missions studies at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, USA.



Robison's Rubies

Many people are fascinated with their historical roots, tracing their genealogies back as far as the courthouse record-books and online services will take them. It is fascinating to know from where we came.

Did you know that one of the great evidences for Jesus Christ's historical nature is the extensive genealogical record of the Bible? Matthew's Gospel traces it through one branch of His family, and Luke's traces it through another. The Old Testament records of Genesis and the books of Chronicles give a lot more detail. Christ was no myth or figment of people's imaginations. He was well-attested by common historical methods.

Andy Robison is the minister for the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ and the Director of the West Virginia School of Preaching in Moundsville, West Virginia, USA.

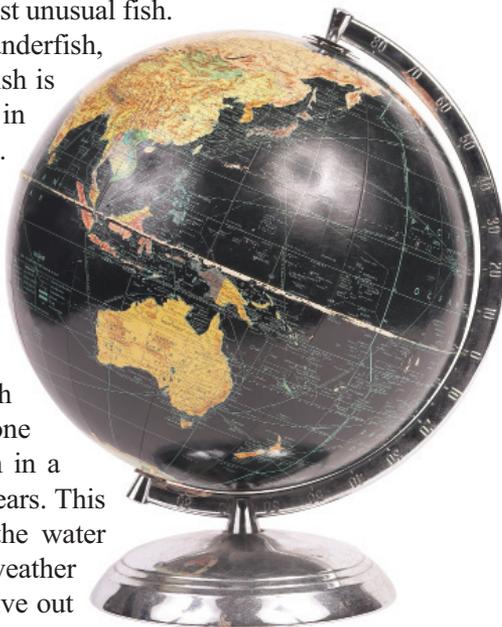
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Instant Fish

David Everson

Just add water to dirt and voila, instant fish in as little as 10 minutes! Sound like a commercial for some kind of new freeze-dried food product? Well, it's not! It is one of the most unusual creatures that God has created. Let's learn a little about this most unusual fish.

The fish is called the Salamanderfish, and it lives in Australia. This fish is about 2 inches long and lives in small ponds and shallow lakes. It appears to be just a normal fish on first inspection, but its most unusual feature does not become obvious until the long, dry, hot Australian summer occurs. For as the water in its pond begins to dry up, this fish disappears. It will remain gone until the rains return, and then in a matter of a few minutes, it appears. This fish could have been out of the water for several months until wet weather occurs again. How can a fish live out of water for months at a time?



It appears that this marvelous creation of God has been given the ability to breathe through its skin. While under normal circumstances it breathes like all fish with its gills, during these long periods of drought, the fish takes in oxygen directly through its skin. As the pond begins to dry up, the fish burrows down into the mud. Going deep enough that it never completely dries up, the fish can survive as long as its skin can stay damp. The fish probably goes into a period of dormancy, which slows down its

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metabolism and therefore its need for large quantities of oxygen. As water returns to soak the hard, dry ground, the Salamanderfish wiggles up out of the mud none the worse for the experience.

Scientists studying this incredible creature have also found that not only is its ability to survive out of water totally unique, but it is particularly hardy in several other areas that most fish aren't. During the course of a normal day in Australia, the temperature in the ponds where it lives varies as much as 30 degrees. This wide range of temperature tolerance is very unusual



in fish, and it is unclear how the Salamanderfish can survive in it. It also can tolerate an extremely large amount of acid in its environment, which is also unusual.

So, as the scientists and evolutionists try to figure how this lowly fish came to have such unusual abilities, we will agree with the psalmist. ***“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well”*** (Psalm 139:14 NKJV). ✝

David Everson is a retired biology teacher and conducts creation science seminars. He is also an elder in the church of Christ in Belington, West Virginia, USA.

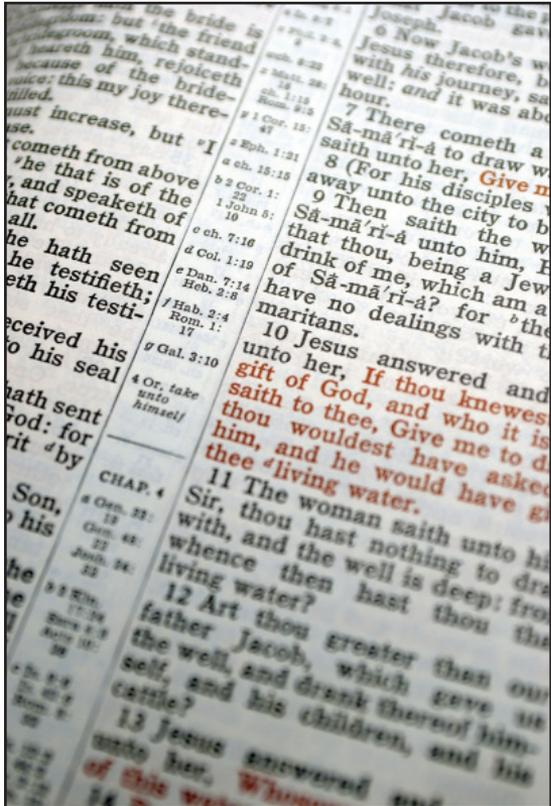
[**Editor's Note:** The Salamanderfish could not have survived long enough to develop its incredible and exceptional characteristics—even if evolution were true, which it is not. This little **creature** and its environment were **created** for each other. ~ Louis Rushmore]

Renewing Our Zeal for God's Word

Dan R. Owen

How do you feel about God's Word? How do you feel about reading it, meditating on it or hearing it proclaimed? Are you excited, apathetic, numb, eager, open, closed, interested or bored? What is your relationship with the word of God? How do you approach the Word in times of public and private devotion?

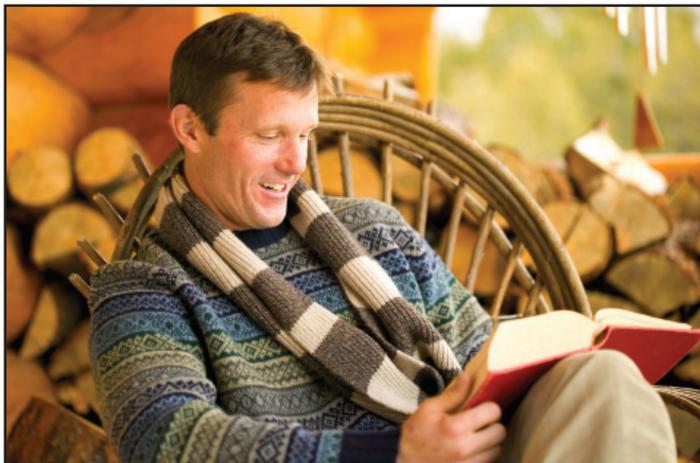
Being passionate about God's Word requires a certain attitude about it. We must appreciate what Scripture really is. It is God-breathed. It is the product of the Holy Spirit. The words of Scripture are the words of eternal life. They are divine words that lead us to God and salvation. Do you understand this? We



should also appreciate the wonderful benefits that Scripture brings to us. The Word of God leads us to salvation, keeps us from sin, strengthens us when we are sad, lights and directs our steps, brings us joy through God's promises, and comforts us in our sufferings. Knowing what Scripture really is and what it can

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do for us helps us to have the right attitude toward it.



Passion for the Word requires a personal acquaintance with it. We don't get excited about another person until we get to know him personally. It is the same way with God's Word. We must decide to seek it, really putting forth an effort to read it. Just do it, though it may be difficult at first. Memorize special little passages that mean a great deal, and repeat them often. Cling to the Word emotionally. Incline your heart toward it by really deciding to listen to what it says. Speak to others about what you read and hear. When you learn something, live it in your own life. These things lead to passion about the Word.

Several practical suggestions may help. Be an active listener with an open Bible, notebook and pen. Underline and write in your Bible. Take notes. Start in a particular book and read sequentially. First, read the selection (a chapter or whatever). Next, reread it carefully and underline anything of interest. Then, enter your thoughts and notes in a journal, including how the things in that section of text may apply to your own life. Pray over what you have read, and ask God to help you understand it and live it. Come to the Word with a humble and open heart, ready to allow God to mold and shape your mind and heart. Allow your sermon experiences to be just an extension of your daily fellowship with the Word. In this way, you can become a passionate seeker and doer of the Word instead of a passive and detached spectator. Being passionate about God's Word is a choice that each of us must make to be pleasing to God. 

Dan R. Owen works with the Broadway congregation in Paducah, Kentucky, USA.

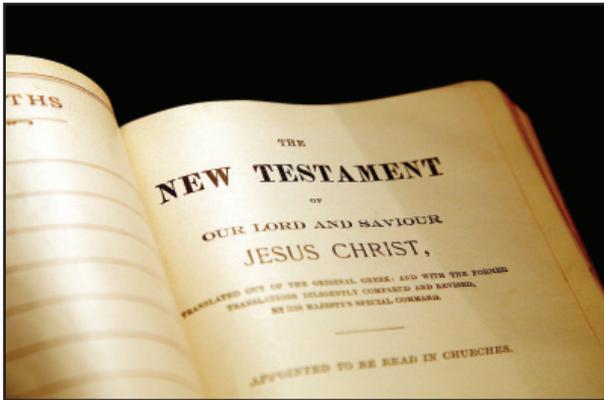
THE WORD OF GOD

God's Word

Cecil May, Jr.

The Word of God is the means by which God both communicates and acts. In the beginning, *“God said and it was”* describes His creative activity (Gen. 1-2). *“For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm”* (Psalm 33:9).

When Jesus was accused of *“making himself equal with God”* (John 5:18), He responded not by denying the claim but by demonstrating that the Father gave Him two things to do that only God can do: give life and execute judgment (John 5:21-23). Jesus accomplished both by the power of His word. For Him, as well as for the Father, He acted



by speaking. He caused things to be by telling them to be.

J e s u s declared, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of*

the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). He spoke of the power of His Word—the power of the Gospel—to transform the spiritually dead and to give them spiritual life.

He backed that up that by adding, *“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment”* (5:28-29).

We know the power of His word to raise the dead. His command,

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“Lazarus, come out,” put life back into a decaying corpse and brought Lazarus alive from the grave. As Marshall Keeble said, “If Jesus had not called Lazarus by name, everybody in that cemetery would have come out of the grave.” The word of that same Jesus, who is God, will at the last day, indeed, raise every person who has ever died out of whatever grave or state they may be in to a renewal of conscious existence.

A reformed, converted alcoholic was taunted by old drinking friends, “Do you really believe your Jesus turned plain water into good wine at Cana in Galilee?” “I believe He did,” the man said, “because the Bible says so. Besides, I saw him turn beer, wine and whiskey into food, furniture and clothes at my house.” That is the power of the Gospel to change lives today.

The Word of God, Scripture, is the seed from which we are born again (1 Peter 1:23). It is the light by which we are directed (Psalm 119:105), the food on which we feed (Hebrews 5:13-14) and the foundation on which we are built (Ephesians 2:20). It builds us up (Acts 20:32). It is the truth by which we are sanctified (John 17:17). It is the Word which is able to save our souls (James 1:21). It is the standard by which one day the whole world will be judged (John 12:48).

Never deprecate the Word of God. God acts through His Word. Gladly receive it to be saved and transformed by it. †

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



Kenney's Pennies

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV.)

If you are struck by the wondering of why He would do this, then you are prepared to worship the One who did so. It is not about what you get out of worship. It is about what you bring to the presence of God to give to Him! How sad when some seem to forget!

THE WORD OF GOD

“IS THERE ANY WORD FROM THE LORD?”

John Gipson

God’s prophet Jeremiah had been beaten and thrust into prison, where he remained many days. Finally, King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and questioned him secretly in his house. The one thing the king wanted to know was, *“Is there any word from the Lord?”* Without hesitation, Jeremiah replied, *“There is”* (Jeremiah 37:17).

At times, in viewing various preachers on television, it appears that many of them don’t really know whether there is a word from the Lord or not. They may lead their congregations in reciting a creed that declares full faith in the virgin birth of Jesus and His bodily resurrection from the dead, and then, a hymn or two later, they may preach a sermon explaining that Jesus was not really born of a virgin, or else that His resurrection was not a bodily resurrection. Excuse me if I become a little confused over their declarations and denials.

Why is it that, after reading their text to the congregation, some preachers spend most of their time explaining why Scripture doesn’t really mean what it says? By the time the sermon is finished, God’s Word is so disguised and disfigured that it is hard to recognize.

Oliver Wendell Holmes once wondered what would happen to mathematics if two meant two to him, but twenty-two to another and two hundred to another. Based on some of the things I’m hearing in the name of Christianity, I think I could tell him.

How refreshing it would be to ask the question, *“Is there any word from the Lord?”* and hear the answer, *“There is.”* If I understand the apostle Paul correctly, a preacher’s job is to “preach the Word.” 

John Gipson works with the Windsong congregation of the Lord’s church in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA.

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Why Live by the Bible?

Larry Murdock

Why should you allow the Bible to direct your life? There are critics who ridicule people who live by principles found in the Bible. The critics mock Bible believers calling them by prejudicial names—names like “Bible-thumpers,” “stupid,” “ignorant,” “judgmental” and perhaps the most despised name of all, “intolerant.” When I choose to believe in the Bible as a guiding principle of my life, then I risk being called by these names. But **why** should I allow an ancient book to direct my life? **Why** should you?

People who genuinely believe **in** the Bible as God’s Word want to live by the Bible’s principles. These people believe the Bible’s principles have come from God. When people practice Bible principles, they become the finest examples of human behavior anywhere in the world! That’s right! That is a good reason to **follow** the teachings of the Bible because they are the best principles in the world by which to live.

Jesus’ half-brother James put it this way:

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13-18)

This is an excellent description of a Christian who is basing his or her life on Jesus Christ and His biblical principles for living. Does that

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mean that every believer in Christ is living by Jesus' principles? No! Unfortunately, not every so-called Christian believes in living by the Bible.

James shows us that there are two kinds of conventional wisdom in the world. James calls one of them **earthly** whereas the other is **heavenly**; heavenly wisdom comes from God. The earthly wisdom is based on *getting ahead* in life. It's all about me! My behavior will be unspiritual and even devilish when I live out of jealousy and selfish ambition. On the other hand, if I live by heavenly principles, then those principles will first be **pure**. That is, heavenly principles are lived *without* selfish ulterior motives. Instead of clashing with the ambitions of other people, my actions will be ***“peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”*** Don't you like to deal with someone with those characteristics? Friend, if you are **not** a Christian, and yet you behave according to those *heavenly principles*, then by some means you have learned that this is the best way to live life. In fact, by treating other people this way, you are practicing Jesus' Golden Rule by treating others the way you wish to be treated (Matthew 7:12).

Jesus' apostle Peter had this to say to Christians:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (1 Peter 2:11-17)

Friends, Peter's advice came from the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians were ridiculed in the first century just like they are today. Christians were living lives that the majority thought was completely ridiculous.

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Yet, those Christians were following heavenly wisdom; through the inspired apostles they had gotten their instructions from Heaven! That's right! Yes, you should follow the Bible because it gives guidance about the best way to live on earth.

In the next chapter of his letter, Peter continued this same kind of reasoning about how to conduct one's life.

Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For [Peter now quotes from his Bible!] Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. (Psalm 34:12-16). Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:8-17)

Yes friends, one great reason to live by the Bible is because living by those principles brings the greatest joys of earth and peace for your soul.

However, there is another reason for living life according to Bible teaching. The reason is simple: **There is a life after this one!** That's right! There is a life **after** this earthly life, and it is a reward for those who obey Jesus Christ in this world! The Bible prepares a person in this world so that he can receive *“a place among them that are sanctified*

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by faith” (Acts 26:18) in Jesus Christ. Jesus said there was a reward waiting in the age to come. The apostle Peter said to Jesus one day, “*See, we have left everything and followed you.*” Jesus said:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:28-30)

Whatever a person leaves behind for the sake of Christ and the Gospel will be multiplied a hundredfold in **this world**. However, there is something else that person will receive in the age to come; that person will receive “*eternal life.*” An eternal existence with Christ is waiting for those who will live in this world by Christ’s principles for living. Friends, those principles are contained in your Bible, and especially in that part of the Bible called the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is a great promise indeed. Allusions to it even appear in the Old Testament. The old prophet Malachi, in the last book in the Old Testament, had this to say.

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. “On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.” (Malachi 3:16-18)

God sees the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Can you? The Bible is the book that makes this distinction clear! Consider these words about the wicked.

In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak who are caught in the schemes [the wicked] devises. [The Wick-

THE WORD OF GOD

ed Man] *boasts about the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked man does not seek [God]; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. [The Wicked Man's] ways are always prosperous; your laws [O God] are rejected by him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me." He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."* [The Wicked Man's] *mouth is full of lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent. His eyes watch in secret for his victims; like a lion in cover he lies in wait. He lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength.* [The Wicked Person] says to himself [or herself], *"God will never notice; he covers his face and never sees."* *Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless.*" (Psalm 10:2-12)

The God of Heaven will **not** forget the helpless, and neither will He forget the wicked! Two different lifestyles—two different philosophies of life! There is the honest person, and there is the liar. There is the giver, and there is the taker, the thief. There is the selfish, self-seeking person, and there is the person who cares about helping others. There is the person who is covetous for every dollar he can get, and then there is the person who will give away his last dollar to someone who needs it more than he does. There is the one who will crush you, and then there is the one who will lift you up! The Bible teaches, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others"* (Philippians 2:3-4).

Two different lifestyles—two different destinies! Why don't you adopt the Bible as your guide for life? Let Jesus Christ be the Captain of your salvation! Don't face the next world without Him! Visit a church of Christ near you where the great principles of the Bible are believed and taught.✝

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Verse Search



1 CORINTHIANS 8: 1-13

Jerry Bates

1. What does knowledge do to a person, and what does love do to a person? (8:1)
2. What is the worth of an idol? (8:4)
3. How many true Gods are there? (8:6)
4. Concerning Jesus, Paul said, “through whom _____ all things, and through whom we _____.” (8:6).
5. Paul says that the consciences of those who think it is wrong to eat meats offered to idols are _____. (8:7)
6. What happens to their consciences if they eat of those meats that they think they shouldn’t? (8:7)
7. Does food make a person more pleasing to God? (8:8)
8. A person must beware, because one’s liberty might become a _____ to those who are weak. (8:9)
9. If someone who thinks it is wrong to eat those meats sees you eating, what might they be tempted to do? (8:10)
10. If they go ahead and eat, what will happen to them? (8:11)
11. What happens to the spiritually strong person who goes ahead and eats in spite of knowing what might happen to the weak brother? (8:12)
12. What did Paul say he would never do if it would make his brother stumble? (8:13)

(See the back cover for answers.)

VERSE SEARCH

1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

NOTE: In this passage, Paul discussed our responsibility to our fellow Christians. Some Christians believed that since an idol was nothing, then the meat offered to an idol was good to eat. Paul referred to these brethren as the strong. On the other hand, some were weaker, and they believed that if one ate meat that had been offered to idols, then he was somehow engaged in worshipping that idol, and thus sinning. Paul pointed out that what one ate had no effect on one's spirituality.

The real problem was not whether one should eat. Rather, the problem was the strong's lack of concern or compassion for the weak. They displayed a lack of love for their brethren and cared little that their actions might cause their weaker brethren to stumble. If one violates his conscience, he commits sin. However, Paul also said that if our actions encourages another to violate his conscience, then we sin against him and against Christ, even though our actions themselves might not be wrong. Thus, the question one must consider is not merely, "Is this action right or wrong?" Instead, we must also ask, "What effect will my action have upon a fellow Christian?" If an action might cause another to stumble, then we must, out of love, refrain from doing it.

Five Groups at the Judgment

E. Claude Gardner

“The most serious thought that ever entered my mind is that I must face God in the Judgment” was spoken so soberly by Daniel Webster, a popular American statesman. That sentiment should express the sincerity of every heart. Yes, “When the roll is called up yonder I will be there.”

The Judgment is certain at God’s appointed time. **“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27). No one is too isolated and insignificant to escape the future. Jesus preached, **“And before Him shall be gathered all nations”** (Matthew 25:32). This will gather the American nation plus the entire world. Every person who has been a citizen will be there, and no one will escape, regardless of one’s desires. Paul warned, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”** (2 Corinthians 5:10). Each person will answer for himself and not for another—family or friends. One cannot answer for or blame husband or wife, mother or father, or son or daughter. This will be frightening to those who relied on others about 100 percent of the time.

Heaven and Hell

Jesus declared two final destinies: Heaven and Hell. At the universal judgment when everyone for all time will be present, He will separate mankind in two destinies. He informed **who** and **what** will come when He said, **“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”** (Matthew 25:46). A **bad** and a **good** place is revealed. Eternal punishment and eternal life are of the same duration. Hell will have no expiration. It will endure the same length as Heaven, which is **“everlasting.”**

Jesus illustrated final destiny by contrasting two ways. This vivid comparison gives a solemn warning. **“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**

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which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

These two destinies, coming at the end of time, have five located groups. With the power of choice, one can choose in which group one will appear [except for babies and persons who have always been unaccountable]. The five groups are babies, the nonreligious, professors of religion, unfaithful members of the church and faithful Christians.

Infants and Irresponsibles

Infants, and those not developed mentally, are not lost. They are **safe** and were not **saved**. What benefit is Christ to them? Through Him they will have the guarantee of the resurrection. **“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive”** (1 Corinthians 15:22). They have no sin and do not need forgiveness. They cannot inherit sin because sin is an **act** and not an **inheritance**. John declared sin is an act. **“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”** (1 John 3:4).

It is repulsive to think that a baby has inborn sin. This doctrine of inherited sin was taught by the famous Protestant reformer, John Calvin. He promoted this false theory in the 1600’s, and it lingers in modern religion today. David Hester gives a description of the atrocious theology.

John Calvin believed that all babies are born in sin and that their nature had to be changed. In his Institutes, he wrote that babies “bear with them an inborn corruption from their mother’s womb” (Institutes II, 1340). “Indeed, their whole nature is a seed of sin: hence it can only be hateful and abhorrent to God” (Institutes I, 251). Calvin stated that “they must be cleansed of it before they can be admitted into God’s kingdom, for nothing polluted or defiled may enter there” (Institutes II, 1340). He contended, “original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature” (Institutes I, 251).

If babies cannot **“believe,”** they cannot be baptized. Jesus said, **“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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Never Professed to Be a Christian

Multitudes do not and have never professed to be Christians. What is their condition, and what will be their eternal abode?

“...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Why do these never accept Bible teaching? They may not think they are required to be subject to the Bible. They may not realize that they are subject to the Gospel. However, all of humanity is accountable. ***“All men”*** everywhere are required to repent. ***“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent”*** (Acts 17:30).

Why are people lost? Are they lost because they have rejected the Gospel that they have heard? It is true they will be lost for refusing to obey the Gospel, but the basic reason they are lost is because they have sinned. The Gospel was not given to make people lost. They are lost in sin because they are sinners.

When we go to “dark Africa” or some other blighted nation, it is not to make people lost but it is to extend the “Gospel rope,” hoping they will take hold of it. They are in a drowning condition (drowning in sin) who need deliverance. If one drowns, it is because he is in a drowning condition. The Gospel can rescue man. The Gospel is remedial. This answers the question why the heathen are lost and need the Gospel. They are in sin and in a drowning condition. We must “throw out the lifeline” to them.

Professed Christians

This is a religious notion of many who claim to be Christians. Regrettably, many such devout and sincere people have not obeyed the Gospel. They may want to “explain away” teaching of the Bible that requires them to obey the Gospel (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; John 3:5-7). Jesus said there will be religious persons who claim they have done things in His name.

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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. Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:21-23)

He said, *“I never knew you.”* It is imperative that we continue to teach Matthew 7:21. **We are not the judge**, but rather the Judge is Christ. *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48).

Have Been Christians

At one time they truly obeyed the Gospel and lived faithfully for a time. These persons sincerely repented and made the right confession of Christ and were baptized believers. They did as Paul stated, *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered”* (Romans 6:17). They turned from their true confession back to the hopeless world. *“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning”* (2 Peter 2:20). When one starts the Christian walk, it is urgent to continue to work for the Lord. Many need to come back to renew their pledges of allegiance to Christ.

God has provided a law of pardon for the wayward and the careless. *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). One should repent and pray. *“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you”* (Acts 8:22).

Remained Faithful

These are those who followed the example of the three thousand on

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the day the church began.

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” 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. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” ...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:36-39, 47)

These will hear Christ’s glad welcome at the Judgment. *“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’”* (Matthew 25:34).

Which Group

Of the five groups that will be at the Judgment, it is worthwhile to think about the group in which you will be found. May we take our position with faithful Christians! 

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Did You Know?

Rebecca Rushmore

In Genesis 45:18, Pharaoh instructed Joseph to send for his father’s household. Genesis 46:26 tells us this totaled 66 people. In that time, it was customary to include parents, grandparents, married children with their spouses and children, unmarried children, servants/slaves and their children, and any stranger who resided with the family for a period of time as part of a household.



SALVATION

Bent by God

Denny Petrillo

“Consider the work of God. For who is able to strengthen what He has bent?” (Ecclesiastes 7:13). Solomon calls on us to *“consider”* the work of God. What God has done in creation is worthy of contemplation because there is so much to learn. The wise man most certainly did *“consider the work of God.”* When he did, he noted the following truths.

First, **there are things that God has bent.** When God created His world, He established some immutable principles. Birds need air, fish need water. Man needs food. Survival is contingent upon these elements.

However, what does it mean that He *“bent”* some things? It means that there are aspects of God’s divine plan that are wrong (bent) and will always be wrong. Earlier Solomon had noted *“what is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted”* (1:15). Men may foolishly believe that they have the right or power to change God’s laws. Such is not the case.

Paul told Timothy that he needed to *“handle accurately the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15). People of God today recognize that they need to study God’s Word to discover God’s immutable spiritual truths. In Romans 7:7-8, Paul said that he didn’t know coveting was wrong until he came to realize the commandment of God. God declared covetousness as *“bent.”* Only when we seriously consider the Bible will we comprehend all of those things God has bent.

Second, **there are things that man tries to straighten.** Despite the fact that God set in place immutable spiritual laws, men still foolishly try to change or undo these laws. They do this because they do not like living under the legislation of God. Jesus spoke of these types of people. *“Everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed”* (John 3:20). You see, God already

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had “*exposed*” these deeds. They’re bent. They’re evil. They’re wrong. Regardless of what men may do, regardless of **how many** men may do it—they are still wrong! Furthermore, God does not look kindly on those who try to straighten what He has bent. God said through Isaiah, “*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil*” (Isaiah 5:20). Homosexuality and abortion are wrong, regardless of those who say they are good. Premarital sex is evil, period. It doesn’t matter that men have said that it is good.

In view of the fact that all men will face God in the Judgment (Revelation 20:11-14) and will be judged on how they have followed His instructions, we’d better stay out of the bending and straightening business. This belongs to God and to Him alone. Solomon asked “*who is able*” to straighten what He has bent? The answer? No one! Woe to him who tries! 

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Building on a Firm Foundation

Martha Lynn Rushmore

How do you build a house? Do you build on the sand or on a firm foundation? A foolish man builds his house on the sand. The wise man builds his house on a rock. We are told in Matthew 7:24-27 to build on a firm foundation. Jesus is our firm foundation.

We are to build our lives on Jesus and His Word. The biblical blueprint is to be obeyed, just like when a builder has a blueprint to erect a house. If the plans are not followed exactly, the dwelling will not come out right. If we do not follow the plan of salvation, to hear (Romans 10:17), to believe (Acts 2:38), to repent (Luke 13:3, 5), to confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10) and to be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16), we have not built on a firm foundation, regarding salvation. Lastly, we must remain faithful (Revelation 2:10).

So, are you building on the firm foundation of our Lord Jesus Christ? Or, would you say that your life is built on the sand? 

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SALVATION

Some Things That Will Not Be at the Judgment

Neal Pollard

What will the throne of judgment look like? What will Christ, the Judge, look like? Will the Judgment be experienced through the sense of sight? What will be different there from this life? What will be changed?

The Bible speaks often about the moment of reckoning, when the righteous and wicked dead (John 5:28-29) and all living (Matthew 25:31-33) will stand before the King of kings to give account for their conduct in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10). As we attempt to paint a mental picture of the Judgment Day, some things shouldn't be envisioned, because they won't be there.

There will not be an unbeliever at the Judgment (Philippians 2:10-11). With an introduction only Heaven could produce, John said that Jesus will come with clouds, every eye shall see Him and all nations of the earth will wail because of Him (Revelation 1:7). No person will be able to continue in unbelief. Faith will be permanently past tense. Evidence of God's power and the power of His promises will be beyond the realm of the hopes for and in the arena of the finally seen (Hebrews 11:1). Jokes scoffing the Divine will not slip off the sin-darkened hearts of the defiant. No skeptics, no agnostics, no doubters and no infidels will be at the Judgment.

There will not be a material possession at the Judgment (2 Peter 3:10). The inhabitants of this planet seem to be more engrossed daily with things. The Lord calls things "*corruptible*" (1 Peter 1:18) and inferior treasure (Matthew 6:19). People seek material things to provide them a life of joy, peace and comfort. We will give an account for our stewardship of material things. We will answer "yes" or "no" when asked if we robbed God (Malachi 3:8), but no person will bring his possessions or amassed wealth into the venerable court of justice.

There will not be a mistrial at the Judgment (Acts 17:31). Each of us will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Romans 14:10). We will each "stand trial" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Christ, the "true" (John 8:16), universal

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(Acts 10:42), righteous (Acts 17:31), God-ordained (Romans 2:16) and ready (1 Peter 4:5) Judge will sit to hear the case of every mentally accountable person to have lived. Jesus will judge without bias (Ephesians 6:9) by relying on Heaven's unabridged record of the individual's life (Revelation 20:12). He will judge according to *"the perfect law of liberty"* (James 1:25). No one will be able to legitimately cry "foul." When the law book is closed and the last judgment is handed down, no one will be able to find a loophole or mistake in the proceedings that will allow him or her to go free or be retried. There will not be any miscues or oversights.

There will be no secrets at the Judgment (Romans 2:16). God now knows every man's secret sins (Psalm 90:8), and He shall bring such things to the Judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14). God sees every secret place (Jeremiah 23:23). He reveals the deepest, darkest secrets (Daniel 2:22). At the Judgment, such things will be judged (Romans 2:16). *"...All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do"* (Hebrews 4:13b).

There will be no baptistery at the Judgment. Most people will go into eternity not having been washed, sanctified and justified (1 Corinthians 6:11). As Christ divides the sheep from the goats, it will matter whether a person has fully obeyed the Gospel (1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians



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2:12; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Acts 22:16; Mark 16:16). Perhaps people will cry out for another person to baptize them. The angst of many who bargained for a later date to be baptized will be realized when they stand before Christ without His blood covering their sins.

There will be no invitation song at the Judgment. When the trumpet sounds, no sermon will be preached to convince the lost to obey the Gospel. There'll be no pleading with the lukewarm and unfaithful Christians. No song leader will stand before that numberless crowd to appeal to the lost and erring. Legions of hearts will be melted by the power of God. Fearful realization will fill those unready to meet Christ. Perhaps many will cry out for another chance, but the last opportunity will have passed.

There will be a righteous Judge who will give a fair trial to every individual. All will give an account. An eternal sentence will be handed down based upon one's life and acceptance or rejection of Christ's sacrifice. There will be no parole, stay of execution or pardon for the lost. We all will need abundant grace to be able to stand at His right hand side, but Scripture tells us how that is extended. We must prepare for that in this life (Hebrews 9:27). †

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Robison's Rubies



It has forever been a problem that societies can get things upside down. Even God's people did this. They got to a point that they even offered infant sacrifices in the days of Jeremiah. In Isaiah's day, about 700 years before Christ, Isaiah said, ***"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"*** (Isaiah 5:20). Sometimes we fail to contemplate just how low mankind can sink when godly principles are forgotten. What do you think? Are we at a time when people call evil good, and good evil?

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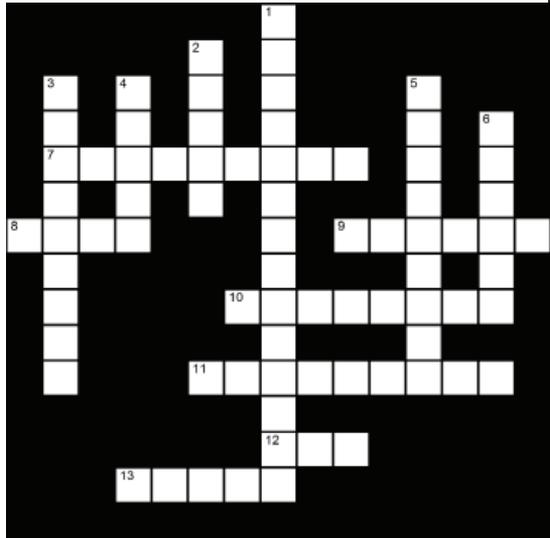
Bible Find

Martha Rushmore

LIFE OF CHRIST

Across

- 7 Joseph's trade (Mark 6:3)
- 8 Jesus' mother (Matthew 1:18)
- 9 Model in Matthew 6:9-13
- 10 City where Jesus grew up (Luke 2:39)
- 11 City where Jesus was born (Matthew 2:1)
- 12 Months between Jesus and John (Luke 1:36)
- 13 Joseph took Jesus at birth where? (Matthew 2:13)



Down

- 1 Prepared the way for Jesus (Matthew 3:1)
- 2 Times Jesus tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11)
- 3 John's father (Luke 1:67)
- 4 Days Jesus was in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1)
- 5 John's mother (Luke 1:57)
- 6 Jesus' earthly father (Matthew 1:19)

The Church at Corinth

Dennis Guldedge

The church at Corinth began the same way all churches of Christ begin. Acts 18:8 says, *“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”* What do we learn? We know the audience—citizens of the city of Corinth. We know their method of contact with the Gospel—“hearing” (Romans 10:17). We know their reaction to the message—they “believed” it. We know how they responded to the message—“and were baptized” (Mark 16:15-16). We know the result: These Christians assembled at Corinth, thus becoming a “church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2). They were *“called [by the Gospel] (2 Thessalonians 2:14) to be saints”* (1 Corinthians 1:2). They were in the grace of God given them by Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:4). They were in the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9).



THE CHURCH

Does all this mean that the church at Corinth was perfect? Far from it! Just like some congregations today, the church at Corinth had many problems. They were so problematic that we might wonder why Paul and the Lord were so patient with them. Paul loved them as a minister and as an apostle, and he sought to correct their problems. Gospel preaching does not avoid church problems, but it offers Bible solutions (2 Timothy 4:2).

Some preachers must love to capitalize on the trouble-ridden church at Corinth. An objection to the restoration plea is usually to ask, “Which church do we want to restore? The Jerusalem church with its prejudice against Gentiles? The Corinthian church with its problems?” This popular view implies that restoration is impossible as long as individual members are less than they should be in spiritual maturity. Some preachers appear to view the Corinthian church as the prototype of the modern liberal congregation with its diversity in doctrine and practice. Their point is that if we can tolerate the church at Corinth in its extreme divergence of beliefs and practices, we can certainly fellowship anything that some brethren today might teach or do.

There are two basic reasons why churches have problems. **First**, the church is made of people on differing levels of spiritual maturity. Some are babes (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Others are giants. The possibility of falling exists for all (1 Corinthians 10:12). Spiritual immaturity allows false doctrine to gain a foothold in churches (Romans 16:17-18).

Second, the church exists in the hostile environment of the world (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). As to Corinth, the church was in the world, as it had to be, but the world was also in the church, as it ought not to have been (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Corinth probably more nearly resembles our present day situation than any other church in the New Testament.

A study of the church at Corinth is significant because of their problems and of the solutions set out by Paul. First Corinthians was written for the benefit of the Corinthian church and for ***“all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus”*** (1 Corinthians 1:2). That is, the lessons from the church at Corinth are important for us today. 

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THE CHURCH

What Is the Church?

Dwight Fuqua

“And I say also to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The word **“church”** appears more than 100 times in the New Testament. It is spoken about with such distinction that there is really no reason for misunderstanding.

The word **“church”** (ekklesia in the Greek) means “the called out.” The church consists of those who have been called out of the world by the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). They have been **“translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love”** (Colossians 1:13-14). They have been **“sanctified”** or set apart by God (1 Corinthians 1:2).

The church consists of those who are saved. The Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). How about the contention that one can be saved out of the church? Ridiculous! The church is the saved! This contention only serves to illustrate the great amount of misunderstanding that exists about the church.

In the New Testament, the word “church” is never used in reference to a denomination. Why? First, because the Lord’s church existed hundreds of years before denominations came into existence. Second, because one can (and should) be a member of the Lord’s church without being a member of any denomination.

Note also that the word “church” is never used in the New Testament in reference to a physical building. Men can build meetinghouses, but Christ built the church (Matthew 16:18). The church is a spiritual house composed of Christians (1 Peter 2:5).

How does one become a member of the church of Christ? When the people on Pentecost heard and believed the Gospel, they asked

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what to do to be saved (Acts 2:47). They were told to repent and to be baptized **for** the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). When they complied with God's will, their sins were forgiven and the Lord added them to His church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Do you want to become a member of the Lord's church? **You can become a member of the church today the same way men and women did two thousand years ago!** 

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

A Nameless Church

Hugo McCord

Many churches have special names, but the New Testament church has no name. Denominations have proper names. The word "denominate" means to "name" something. The New Testament church is called the house of the Lord, the family of God, the body of Christ and the kingdom of Christ (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:15), but it has no proper name.

The individual members of the New Testament church have a proper name. Their name is not "disciple," though they are disciples (Acts 9:1). Their name is not "brethren," though they are brothers and sisters (Acts 9:30). Their name is not "saints," though they are saints (Acts 9:32). Their proper and divinely given name is "Christian" (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16), but to call the church the "Christian Church" is to denominationalize that great institution.

To speak of the New Testament church as "the church of Christ" is right as it is to speak of it as "the church of God" (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2), but neither is a proper name. To speak of "Church of Christ" congregations, "Church of Christ" preachers, is to denominationalize that church. The New Testament church has no proper name. 

Hugo McCord (1911-2004) had been a longtime professor of Bible at Oklahoma Christian University in Edmond, Oklahoma, USA.

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New Testament

Christianity in the 21st Century

Robert Johnson



In recent years, we have seen various religious groups ignore doctrine to unite in fellowship and purpose. In a politically correct society, where acceptance is the watchword, doctrine doesn't matter anymore to most people.

In fact, one noted denominational preacher put it bluntly: "We've got to get past this thing about doctrine." To many, all that matters any more is accepting God as Father and Jesus as the Son of God; to them everything else is simply extraneous and optional.

This is all fine for denominations who do not acknowledge the authority of Scripture anymore anyhow. However, the Lord's church will not participate in such, if it holds true to its calling. Jude candidly pointed out that we are to ***"contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"*** (Jude 1:3). There is only one faith that God has given, which leads to salvation (Ephesians 4:5), not many variations of it. To abandon it is to pervert the Gospel of Christ and to subvert the work God accomplishes through it (Galatians 1:6-9). Obedience through faith to the revealed will of God is what He desires (Matthew 7:21-23).

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To be candid, but honest, denominationalism is not of God, but it is of humanity, and it will not commend one to God. There is only one church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). While we may share certain tenets with denominations, **the Lord's church is not a denomination**, but it is Christ's blood-bought church, which alone is to be *"the pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15). Our responsibility

is not to join them, but to bring them to the knowledge of the truth, to faith in the truth and to obedience to the truth, so that God may add them to His



church in truth. This is what is unique about the New Testament church. It is not the invention of human will, but that established by God through Christ (Matthew 16:18), revealed in Scripture and identified by its submission to God's authority.

A noted preacher in our brotherhood told me several years ago, "The church of Christ will be the last denomination!" By that, he was lamenting our lack of fellowship with the denominational world. I would amend his comments to say, "Christ's church alone is His church, and will never compromise His truth to become a denomination." **If we follow the teaching of Christ revealed in Scripture, we are what we say, the church of Christ, and by remaining faithful to this calling, we can have every confidence in the salvation that we hold dear.** As Peter exhorted, we likewise urge, *"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Peter 4:11). ✝

Robert Johnson preaches for the Lord's church in Longview, Texas, USA.

Convert to What?

Owen D. Olbricht

To what or to whom should we convert others? Jesus condemned scribes and Pharisees because their proselytes—their converts—were worse than they were before they were converted to Judaism (Matthew 23:15). They were converting them to be faithful followers of Jewish traditions instead of being servants of God.

Wrong Conversions

“Convert” is translated from *epistrepho*, a word that means “turn.” Peter and Paul stated that people should repent and “turn” (Acts 3:19; 26:20).

The wrong basis of conversion can include converting to a doctrinal viewpoint, a church, a preacher or many other things. These might attract people, but they should not be the primary basis for conversion.

A conversion to something that is secondary is not wrong in itself, but is wrong if it is the only basis of the conversion and does not lead to what is primary. Secondary attractions may make possible the opportunity to teach something that is primary, but obedience to what is primary must be the basis for a conversion.

Primary Basis

Jesus and the early church taught that the primary goal for Jesus’ followers should be to convert people to Jesus. If people are converted to Him as Lord and Christ, then the result should be a willingness to obey Him as Lord (Luke 6:46).

What Jesus Taught

Jesus stated that He had been given all authority in heaven and in earth; therefore, His disciples were to go to all nations to make disciples, followers of Him, after which they were to teach them to observe all Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus expected His followers to persuade people to be His disciples, baptize them and then teach them how to obey Him.

What Peter Taught

In the first sermon in which forgiveness was preached in Jesus’ name,

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as Jesus had predicted (Luke 24:46,47), Peter gave an introduction (Acts 2:14-21) and then presented a message about Jesus that ended with the conclusion that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Act 2:22-36). Those who were converted to Jesus as Lord and Christ were cut to the heart and wanted to know what to do. Peter told them to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:37-38).

The heart of Peter's message to the Jewish leaders (Acts 3:12-26) and to Cornelius was Jesus (Act 10:34-43). Peter's beginning point in his sermons was Jesus; his message was Jesus, and his conclusion was Jesus.

What Philip and Paul Taught

Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ to them (Acts 8:5). They heard, believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12).

Philip began at Isaiah 53, the passage an Ethiopian was reading, and preached Christ to Him. When the Ethiopian learned about Jesus, he requested baptism (Acts 8:30-39).

Paul's obedience to Jesus, after He appeared to him on the road to Damascus, is testimony that at that moment Paul was fully converted to Jesus (Acts 26:16-19). Having been converted, Paul was three days later baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). He became dead to self but alive to Jesus after he was baptized (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:3-8).

The heart of Paul's preaching was Jesus and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-3). His goal in preaching was to bring every thought of his hearers *"into captivity to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Conclusion

We can convert people to many good things in Christianity, but the primary conversion must be to Jesus as both Lord and Christ, after which all others things to which they may be converted will have meaning and value. Converting people to Jesus as the Christ must be the heart, soul and center of our effort. If converting people to Christ is not our goal, we have missed what should be the primary goal of our mission as followers of Jesus. ✝

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Editors' Note: The way in which the word "convert" is used in this article is *not* equivalent to salvation but refers to turning, which in biblical accounts led to salvation.

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Conformity With the World

Greg Tidwell

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:8).

“The Sermon on the Mount,” notes the British writer J.R.W. Stott, “is probably the best-known part of the teaching of Jesus, though arguably it is the least understood, and certainly it is the least obeyed.”

Perhaps the key to this sermon can be seen in God’s continual demand for holiness. In all of Scripture, God calls His people to be set apart from the world.

This commitment to holiness undergirds the Mosaic Law, as we read in Leviticus 18:2-4: ***“I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall do my ordinance and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God.”***

This charge begins and ends with the reminder: ***“I am the Lord your God.”*** Who God is outlines what His people should be. Our holiness is a reflection of the awesome holiness of God Himself.

God’s people, however, soon compromised their distinctiveness. Rejecting God’s rule, they asked for and received a king so as to ***“be like all the nations”*** (1 Samuel 8:20). The downward spiral continued with the addition of idolatry. ***“Let us be like the nations,”*** the people said, ***“like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone”*** (Ezekiel 20:32).

Against this backdrop of disobedience, God sent gracious warnings through His prophets and through divine chastisement. Finally, God spoke through His Son, Jesus Christ. ***“Do not be like them,”*** Jesus warned against accepting the world’s approach to prayer, ***“for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”*** Ultimately the point of His message was to live by faith and not in conformity with the world. 

Greg Tidwell is the preacher for the Fishinger and Kenny Church of Christ in Columbus, Ohio, USA as well as serves as the Editor of the *Gospel Advocate*.

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Living the Resurrection

Bobby Dockery

At dawn, on a distant Sunday morning, grieving women, on their way to visit the grave of Jesus, came upon an incredible sight. They found the stone rolled away from the mouth of a deserted tomb. Suddenly, they were confronted by two men in dazzling apparel who asked, ***“Why do you seek the Living One among the dead? He is not here but is risen”*** (Luke 24:5-6).

He is not here...! These words sum up the hope and glory of the Christian faith (1 Peter 1:3, 21). Christianity centers on a blood-stained cross and an empty tomb! The resurrection lies at the very heart of what we believe, practice and live as followers of Christ.

Unfortunately, some would-be Christians find the doctrine of the resurrection more of an embarrassment than a cause of celebration. The apostle Paul found this to be true in his day. His proclamation of the

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resurrection was met with jeers (Acts 17:32), with sneers (Acts 26:24) and with angry fears (Acts 23:9). It is still so today. In Britain, the Anglican Church was recently plunged into controversy by the appointment of a bishop who openly denies the historical truth of Christ's resurrection. In America, the "Jesus Seminar" has expended a great deal of effort and ingenuity to show that the resurrection could not actually have happened. A seminary professor voiced the doubts of many when he said, "I no longer believe it is possible to take the resurrection myth seriously."

Yet, we must take the resurrection seriously if we are to take God and His Word seriously! If Christ was not raised, Paul insisted, then preaching is vain, faith is vain, we are of all men most miserable, and we are yet in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:15-17). **We must not only believe in the resurrection as a fact of history, we must make it real in our own lives** (Philippians 3:7-11). **It is not enough merely to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead 1900 years ago. Our belief must make a difference in our lives. We must proclaim our faith in the resurrection by the way we live.**

It is unspeakably tragic that many Christians are carrying on their lives as though Christ were still dead. Their basic attitudes, values and lifestyles are not really different in any substantial way from those of their unbelieving neighbors.

To really live our faith in the resurrection, we must live changed lives. We must no longer conduct ourselves as though this life were all that mattered. Instead, we must learn to see this world against the backdrop of eternity. If we really take the resurrection seriously, it will give us a new standard of values, a new way of judging things, a new sense of proportion. If we truly begin to live the resurrection, we will set giving above getting, serving above ruling and forgiving above avenging. We will learn to look at things, not as they appear to our contemporaries, but as they appear to God!

The resurrection is real. On a far away Judean morn, two angels really did greet a band of women at the tomb of Jesus with the words, "**He is not here but risen...**" **Do you believe it? Are you living it?** 

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

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses (Leviticus 10:3)

“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day” (Exodus 19:10).

“By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified” (Leviticus 10:3).

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

“...Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” (Mark 9:42).

Our clothing can often be a visual statement of our attitude toward God. As Christians, are we mindful that we must not take God’s name in vain, even in “OMG” or “oh my gosh,” etc.

Let us, as Christians, remember that **we** represent **our Lord** in this corrupt world.

There is growing casualness in the dress among Christians as they enter the presence of God in worship. While it is true that we live under the “New Covenant,” not the “Old Covenant,” we owe no less reverence and respect to the God of the universe than was due in the past.

Instead of wearing the “dress” clothes that would be typical of attire for a wedding or a funeral, occasionally a man will wear shorts to worship; there have even been instances of “waiting on the Lord’s table” in such casual attire.

Following the world’s culture, some women wear “dressy” totally immodest clothes in their everyday attire and walk in to worship in pants so tight they are like a second skin, in tops with spaghetti straps or so low that cleavage is staring onlookers in the face, causing real problems for the men who must walk by them to serve the Supper, and skirts so short and tight they hide very little.

Let us be careful to be “Christ-like” in our choice of clothing on the Lord’s Day and every day. If all a person owns is “rags and tatters,” he is offering God the best that he has, even when he comes to worship in such attire. Yet, we need to keep in mind that God does expect our *best* always in our offerings to Him.

The Soldier, the Athlete and the Farmer

Glenn Colley

Paul was in a Roman prison, knowing his death was probably near, and by inspiration he wrote to young Timothy. In 2 Timothy 2:3-6, he compared the preacher's work to three common occupations of the time—soldier, athlete and farmer. So, here is the question: “How are preachers—or Christians in general for that matter—similar to these people?”

“You therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

No soldier who gives up when the going is tough is going to be of any use to his commanding officer. In fact, the commander needs to know that his soldiers will do their duty even if it costs them their lives. This was not mere rhetoric. Paul was about to suffer martyrdom for our Lord. Lord, help us never complain when we face our hard days as Christians and our faith is challenged, and help us to never give up.

“No man who wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” The soldier needs to be free from any distraction that would keep him from his assigned duty. The Christian is the same. How many through the years have been so attached to the things of this world that they simply didn't have enough time for their duty to the next world? Remember Demas (2 Timothy 4:10).

“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” This refers to the Grecian games, much like the Olympics today. A man who makes it to the finish line first to the roar of applause still

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doesn't get the award unless he competes according to the rules. To cheat forfeits the hope of winning. A preacher who wishes to grow a church but compromises the teaching of the New Testament may win applause, but he will forfeit God's approval in the process. Remember, we are sanctified by the Truth (John 17:17), and it is the Truth that makes us free (John 8:32). The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).



"The husbandman who labors must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Timothy 2:6). This appears to be a comment on what Paul had earlier taught in 1 Corinthians 9:14, *"Even so has the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."* Timothy was to strive well, hold to his duty to teach Christ's Gospel and be supported by the church in his work. ✝

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How are preachers or Christians similar to soldiers, athletes and farmers?

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Winning Souls for Christ

Dale Grissom

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17). The church grows when believers are baptized into Christ, and God adds those who are being saved to the church (Acts 2:47). Christians moving from one congregation to another does not constitute church growth. There is no growth until a believer obeys the Gospel plan of salvation.

If the church in our community is not growing, it is because we are not confronting people with the Gospel of Christ. We make the excuse that no one will listen, but how do we know? Have we really tried? We have no problem talking about sports or material things, but we can offer only excuses about why we are not spreading the Gospel. We simply must learn to talk about spiritual things and to lovingly confront the lost about where their souls will spend eternity.

It is easy to dream about serving the Lord, but giving ourselves wholeheartedly to Christ takes real effort on our part. The eternal destination of so many souls depends on our willingness to put forth that effort. May each of us resolve to do our part in winning souls! Let us pray that the Lord will fill our hearts with love for lost, so much so that we will be willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to take the Gospel to a lost and dying world.

Jesus Christ, the greatest role model, commanded His disciples to spread the Gospel. *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:19-20). **The world begins just outside the door!** 

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

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Called to Lead or to Serve?

Claude Thompson



The words “Leader” and “Leadership” are overused and too often misapplied in the church today. Therefore, they are very likely misunderstood. Too often we identify only the elders or preacher as “leaders” of our congregations, or we may say a brother “leads” us in worship at communion or in prayer. We normally define “leadership” as administering or directing and the “leader” as the boss or one in command. However, the Bible presents a completely different picture of true spiritual leadership.

The Greek word translated “lead” (*hodegeo*) means literally “to travel with” or “to guide” someone. It may be correctly applied metaphorically to teaching and teachers, whether of truth (Hebrews 5:12) or of error (2 Peter 2:1).

Yet, the New Testament seldom uses the words “lead” and “leader,” and when they are used, it is more often in a negative context. Jesus called

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the spiritual teachers of His day “*blind leaders of the blind*” (Matthew 15:14). Our Lord specifically advised us not to identify ourselves nor any others as our leaders or “masters” because He, the Christ, is our only Master (Matthew 23:10). When initially calling men to start and lead His church, Jesus selected fishermen rather than sea captains and workers rather than administrators (Matthew 4:18-21). He needs and desires laborers instead of foremen for His kingdom (Luke 10:2), men and women qualified and willing to serve others. Such are the true leaders of the church—“*the leader is as one who serves*” (Luke 22:26).

Jesus calls us to serve rather than to lead. Although fully God and worthy of all honor (Revelation 4:9-11), He fully exemplified the servant role and taught that the servant was greater than the master (John 13:5-16). Those who Jesus recognized as greatest in His kingdom were those who expressed faith (Matthew 8:10-13) and those who quietly served (Matthew 26:10-13). Christians are created by God and recreated in Christ to do His works of service (Ephesians 2:10).

Spiritual service is to be motivated by love rather than recognition or reward. God Himself is the great example of serving that is based on love (John 3:16). Christians are to serve one another through love (Galatians 5:13). As followers of Jesus, we are to love even our enemies (Luke 6:35). When we serve others, it is as if we are serving God, and it must be sincere service from our hearts (Ephesians 6:5-6).

Spiritual service has its recognition and reward (1 Corinthians 3:8). Christians are to acknowledge with honor those who lead them in service, whether in the secular/physical world (Ephesians 6:2; Romans 13:7-8; 1 Timothy 6:1) or in the spiritual world (1 Corinthians 12:23-25; Philippians 2:19-20; 1 Timothy 5:17). Regardless of any recognition we may receive here in this life on earth, our highest and more important honor will be given to us in Heaven (Matthew 5:11-12; Revelation 11:18). We are to work patiently, awaiting our reward (James 5:7). Christian servants must take care that we are not performing our spiritual activities to be recognized by our fellow men, but as honest praise and service to God (Matthew 6:1-6). †

Claude Thompson lives in Dallas, Texas, USA.

WORSHIP

Worship that Really Matters

Rodney Nulph

For faithful, devoted children of God, worship is certainly the highlight of each week. It is a blessed privilege and an honor to bow before **the Great I Am**. Jesus placed worship as a high priority (Luke 4:16). Sadly, far too often worship has been decreased to merely a “ritual” or an empty routine (Matthew 15:7-8). God is the Audience in worship, and as such, He not only deserves, but He demands our full attention and devotion. How tragic when individuals fail to really worship the God of Heaven. Many professing Christians merely go through a series of **rehearsed actions** only to walk away without ever biblically worshipping. Jesus spoke regarding worship that really matters as He sat by Jacob’s well and conversed with a Samaritan woman; *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24).



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Firstly, worship is aimed at the **proper person**; *“God is a Spirit...”* **What is often passed off as worship in the 21st century is simply entertaining the attendees.** Man has become “center stage,” and he must be dazzled and astonished. We rate the preacher’s performance, the song leader’s abilities and the “feel” of the building that surrounds us. We give the worship a grade, much like we would grade a movie at the *big screen*. All the while, we miss the scriptural fact that it is God Who is center stage; it is He Who we must aim to please and not ourselves!

Secondly, worship involves **participants**; *“...and they that worship him...”* Worship is **hard work!** We have become accustomed to padded pews and temperature controlled buildings to the point that many view worship as a **relaxing time**—a time to get comfortable and unwind. However, worship that really matters tests our minds, our concentration levels and even our physical stamina. Singing, studying, praying, giving and remembering our Lord requires effort and energy. We must be rested, both mentally and physically, in order to really participate as God demands. The very word “worship” denotes prostrating one’s self, as a peasant falls before a king. That is quite a different picture than someone relaxing in a padded pew!

Thirdly, worship includes a prescribed pattern; *“must worship him in spirit and truth.”* *“Spirit”* involves the emotions and will of the worshipper. Worship that does not prick the emotions is not worship in spirit! How can a true worshipper not be affected when he or she considers what great love and sacrifice was given on behalf of each of us? *“Truth”* involves that which God demands as far as the **acts of worship. Both truth and spirit must be present in order for worship to be biblically correct.**

Worship is **serious**. God is outraged when people attempt to worship and fail to do it properly (Leviticus 10:1-3). Never are we closer to our Creator than when we fall before Him and worship! However, the opposite is true as well. May worship that really matters ever be our priority, and may we daily, *“enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise...”* (Psalm 100:4a). 

Rodney Nulph is a Gospel preacher and the Associate Editor of *Gospel Gazette Online* magazine. He resides in Spencer, Wisconsin, USA.

WORSHIP

Where Will You Be?

Dalton Key

Worship is for the soul what good food is for the body. It is vital to our spiritual growth and wellbeing. As we lift our hearts to Heaven in prayer, blend our voices together in song, reverently remember the cross of Calvary in partaking of the Lord's Supper, give of our means and learn of God's will, we are both fulfilled and filled full of renewed hope, strength and godly consecration.

David was happy to hear the words, *“Let us go into the house of the Lord”* (Psalm 122:1). Paul tarried in Troas seven days, until the Lord's Day, in order that he might come together with the disciples in worship (Acts 20:6-7). Earlier, in Philippi, Paul and Silas, confined within the *“inner prison”* with their feet fast in stocks, had made good use of their time as they *“prayed and sang praises to God”* (Acts 16:24-25).

The spirits of the righteous have always been made stronger by means of pure and heart-felt worship. Worship is good for the soul.

In light of this truth, we are not surprised to read this stern, inspired admonition: *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:25).

Where will you be this coming Lord's Day? Will you be meeting with the saints in worship? If not, why not? †

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Did You Know?

The Temple built by King Solomon was 60 cubits (90 ft.) long, 20 cubits (30 ft.) wide and 30 cubits (45 ft.) tall (1 Kings 6:2). The Temple built by Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:3-4, Ezra 6:3-12) was 60 cubits (90 ft.) tall and 60 cubits (90 ft.) wide.

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WORSHIP

Ten Commandments for Improving the Worship Service

Author Unknown

Have you ever heard someone say, “I just don’t get much out of the worship service”? Sometimes this is more of a commentary on the person than on the service. Here are some suggestions that may help you improve the quality of your worship when you gather with the saints on the Lord’s Day.

- 1. Make Sunday a priority.** It is the most important commitment of the week. It is nothing less than a meeting with God.
- 2. Don’t bring God leftovers.** God has always demanded the “first fruits.” He cannot be satisfied with scraps. Get plenty of sleep on Saturday night and come to worship with an alert and refreshed mind.
- 3. Prepare your mind.** Discipline begins in the mind. So does discipleship. Train your mind to concentrate on things of the spirit.
- 4. Be on time.** Rushing in late makes it difficult for you to settle into meditation and disturbs other worshippers. Get up a little earlier if necessary.
- 5. Bring your Bible.** Coming to worship without your Bible is like going out to drive your car without keys.
- 6. Open your mouth and sing.** Singing is not an option. It is a command. Those who violate this command are just as guilty as if they neglected the assembly in the first place.
- 7. Sit close to the front.** Experience has shown that some marginal church members would rather switch congregations than change pews. Research indicates that the level of emotion and mental participation decreases as one moves closer to the back.
- 8. Before and after service—be friendly.** Worship is enhanced when done as a family. Family members should know and love each other.

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- 9. Listen carefully to the sermon.** Taking notes may help. Follow along in your Bible. Take the message seriously. It will help you. It will encourage the speaker. It will show non-Christians that you are serious.
- 10. Make your worship God-centered, not man-centered.** Worship is primarily a giving situation. Those who say, “I don’t **get** much out of worship” are wrongly focused. It is in the **giving** of ourselves that we **get**. **No Giving—No Getting.** †

The Object of Our Worship

Louis Rushmore

The object of Christian worship is Almighty God (Exodus 20:1-6; John 4:23) and Him alone (2 Samuel 20:21; Matthew 4:10). He, then, is the audience as Christian worshippers “worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). That means Christians are required to worship God in the way in which He through the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21) has indicated in the New Testament. Therefore, human preferences and inclinations regarding Christian worship are less significant than what God expects from His children. Hence, what the child of God puts into worship is more important than what he perceives he gets out of worship. Yet, those spiritually attuned to worshipping God when and in the way He desires ought to derive gratification from that worship as well.

It is not necessary to spice up worship or to attempt to make it more spiritual. Nothing could be more spiritual than worshipping God in the ways that He appointed for mankind to worship Him. Obviously, many today change worship practices to suit themselves rather than God or to attract greater numbers of people. However, the New Testament church was able to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6) with the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ. The pure Gospel without adornments (Galatians 1:6-9) “is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16) for all men. In it only can one discern how to worship God acceptably (Matthew 15:8-9). †

PROVERBS 17:22



A wife says to her husband one morning, “We’ve got such a clever dog. He brings in the daily newspapers every morning.” Her husband replied, “Well, lots of dogs can do that.” The wife answered, “But we’ve never subscribed to any papers!”



A one dollar bill met a twenty dollar bill and said, “Hey, where’ve you been? I haven’t seen you around here much.” The twenty answered, “I’ve been hanging out at the casinos, went on a cruise, and did the rounds of the ship, back to the United States for a while, went to a couple of baseball games, to the mall, that kind of stuff. How about you?” The one dollar bill said, “You know, same old stuff—church, church, church.”



Alice’s car was frequently unreliable, and she called her husband Al for a ride every time it broke down. One day Al got yet another one of those calls.

Al: “What happened this time?”

Alice: “My brakes went out. Can you come and get me?”

Al: “Where are you?”

Alice: “I’m in the drugstore.”

Al: “And where’s the car?”

Alice: “It’s in here with me.”



A junior high student was studying astronomy and enjoying it greatly. One morning at breakfast she mentioned, “On Friday we’re having a quiz on the moon.” Her little brother piped up, “Are you gonna let her go, Mom?”



Little Johnny asked his grandmother how old she was.

Grandma answered, “Thirty-nine and holding.”

Johnny thought about that and then asked, “Well, how old would you be if you let go?”

PROVERBS 17:22



Six-year-old Becky was having a conversation with her grandmother while eating breakfast.

Becky: “Nanna, I’m a fat old man.”

Grandmother: “Becky! What did you say?”

Becky: “I’m a fat old man.”

Grandmother: “Now Becky, why would you say something like that?”

Becky: “Well, everybody says I look just like my daddy.”



A man wrote a letter to a small hotel in a town he planned to visit sometime in the next few weeks.

He wrote: “I would very much like to bring my dog with me. He is well-groomed and very well-behaved. Would you be willing to permit me to keep him in my room with me at night?”

An immediate reply came from the hotel owner: “Sir, I’ve been operating this hotel for many years. In all that time, I’ve never had a dog steal towels, bedclothes, silverware, or pictures off the walls. I’ve never had to evict a dog in the middle of the night for being drunk

and disorderly. And I’ve never had a dog run out on a hotel bill.

“Yes, indeed, your dog is welcome at my hotel. And, if your dog will vouch for you, you’re welcome to stay here, too.”



My friend’s six-year-old grandson called his mother from his friend Charlie’s house and confessed he had broken a lamp when he threw a football in their living room.

“But, Mom,” he said, “you don’t have to worry about buying another one. Charlie’s mother said it was irreplaceable.”



I changed my car horn to gunshot sounds. It’s interesting—people get out of the way much faster now.



I didn’t make it to the gym today. That makes five years in a row.



I just read that 4,153,237 people got married last year. Not to cause alarm or worry, but shouldn’t that be an even number?

How Do You Measure Up?

And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”

He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

Matthew 19:4-10

Making It to Heaven

Wes McAdams

People tell me that their main goal in life is to go to Heaven when they die. In fact, I'm quite certain I've said the same thing myself. I've always thought that was the very best goal a person could have, but I've changed my mind. The more I think about that phrase, the more I think it often reveals a misunderstanding deep in our hearts.

What exactly do we mean when we talk about our goal of making it to Heaven? When we have a goal, we must have some way we hope to achieve it, right? If I told you that my goal was to lose 15 pounds, then you might ask me, "How do you hope to achieve that goal?" Then, I would answer with a list of all the good behaviors I was going to implement in order to try to accomplish my goal. Sadly, many of us think this way about going to Heaven.

We tend to think of all of our good behaviors as an attempt to be good enough to make it to Heaven, which leaves some of us feeling pretty confident we've done all that God requires to make it in. Yet more often, it leaves many of us in constant fear that because of our imperfection, we've not been good enough. Some are trying to do the minimum, and others are trying to do the impossible. These are indications that many of us simply do not understand the Good News of Jesus Christ.

UNDERSTANDING GRACE

We live in a culture (thankfully) where if we want something, we can usually save up our money until we can afford to purchase it. In biblical times, though, there were many things that the average person simply could not purchase. These things would be inaccessible to people on the lower rungs of the social ladder.

If the average person needed something that he could not purchase, he would ask for a "favor" from a generous person in upper-class society. If this wealthy person chose to grant the request, he would become the

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man's patron or benefactor. The favor he bestowed was known as "charis," which is the Greek word we translate "grace."

This granted favor came with certain expectations. If someone showed you grace, it became your life-long duty to spread his fame and also to loyally serve him whenever he needed you. This was NOT an attempt to repay the favor; it was simply the proper response of a grateful recipient.

The New Testament says, ***"God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved..."*** (Ephesians 2:4-5). This is how salvation works—God gives it as a gift (vs. 8). God is the unbelievably generous and wealthy benefactor who shows favor to sinners who desperately need what only He can give—pardon and forgiveness.

UNDERSTANDING GOOD WORKS

In the first-century world, one of the worst things a person could be was ungrateful. If you accepted someone's "charis," but you were not faithful to him, you would become a social outcast. No one would want to show you any additional favor because you had proved yourself to be an ungrateful recipient.

The ideas of grace and gratitude are inextricably linked. In fact, it's not hard to see that even in modern English, the words "grace" and "grateful" share the same root. This is because "grace" used to be not only the word for the gift that was given, but it was also for the proper response to the gift. We still sometimes call praying before a meal, "saying grace." In Spanish, the word for "thank you" is "gracias." When someone shows you grace, you respond gratefully.

That is what our obedience to God is all about. That is why we do good works. That is why we sing His praises. That is why we tell our neighbors about the Gospel. We are NOT trying to make it to heaven. We are showing our gratitude, because he has ***"seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"*** (Ephesians 2:6).

Doing the will of God must NEVER be seen as an attempt to make it to Heaven, but it should be seen as works of gratitude because He has given us a seat in Heaven by His grace. We should want to do whatever God wants us to do because we are incredibly grateful for what He has given us.

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DON'T BE AN INGRATE

An “ingrate” is someone who does not show gratitude for the things he has been given. An ingrate is someone who either lives in a way that dishonors his benefactor or who boasts as if he earned the things he has. Ingrates will find themselves cut-off from God’s grace.

There were Christians in Galatia who showed themselves to be ingrates by accepting a false gospel, which taught that a person could justify himself through law-keeping. Paul wrote, **“You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace”** (Galatians 5:4). Rather than gratefully accepting the gift (of justification), they tried to earn it through their own efforts.

Similarly, the Hebrew writer said, **“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries”** (Hebrews 10:26-27). When we continue deliberately in sin, we prove ourselves to be ingrates, unworthy to receive the gifts God has promised to His children.

BOTTOM LINE

If we have—in repentant faith—put Christ on in baptism (Galatians 3:27), then God has graciously given us a seat with Him in Heaven: **“... God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:4-7). In Christ’s death, He has already accomplished what was necessary to get us to Heaven; so, we need to get a new goal! Our goal needs to be to show Him gratitude through undying praise and faithful service.

If we persevere in grateful service, we have nothing to worry about, because we are saved by **His** merits...not by ours. 

Wes McAdams: Radically Christian: Crosstalk Podcast

THE SAD DILEMMA

(A woman's perspective)

Samuel Matthews

How times have changed! Once there was a time when society expected a woman to be a faithful wife and a good mother. Once there was a time when infidelity was cause for disgrace. Women were expected to be virgins at marriage, and women who lived with a man out of wedlock were labeled and shunned. How far from reality these standards and expectations are in America today!

One morning, I happened to catch a portion of a talk show in which the person being interviewed was a woman who was wanting to have a child. So far, so good. The only problem was that the man with whom she had been living for seven years (out of wedlock) did NOT want to have children. The solution she had come up with was to have artificial insemination and have a child. The man declared that if she did, that he would move out. She said that was fine with her; she didn't need him anyway! The audience berated him for wanting to leave. What an ungodly situation!

Out of the entire audience, one woman dared to stand up and suggest that the woman should first find a man she loves, marry him, and then, after a suitable period of adjustment, have a child with him. Yes, I thought. Good for you for saying that! However, what followed was typical, sad and unbelievable. Immediately, many in the audience verbally disagreed. The host of the show then made a statement something to the effect: "Where did this woman come from? Is she living in the twentieth century?" Of course, everyone laughed and agreed. Her suggestion of the proper, godly formation of a home was laughed out of the auditorium!

These are the sad times in which we are living. The abnormal has become the normal. No wonder women have become so confused about their role in society! God's role for woman has been deliberately obliterated in the minds of people. Satan has been at work!

What are we going to do about it? Will we sit with folded hands, saying

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nothing for fear of the ridicule that we will surely receive if we speak up? Will we adjust our own lives to “fit in,” to blend with society? Sadly, many so-called Christian women do just that. I believe that “setting a good example” alone is not enough. As I see it, women must have the stamina and the courage to stand up and be counted—counted as being for God and for the role He has given them.

Just as there will always be “**wars and rumors of wars**” in this world (Mark 13:7), the same is true in the Lord’s church. There are those who love power, desire control and seek change. The church is Satan’s favorite target. During the years that I have been a New Testament Christian, I have wept many tears over outbreaks such as “the man, not the plan”; the charismatic movement; the Crossroads controversy; the marriage, divorce and remarriage issue; “unity in diversity”; the New Hermeneutic and now—the woman’s role.

“THE BOOK” (the Bible) is the only book that will keep us from altering God’s Word and His plan for both men and women. It is the only Book to follow in our God-given roles, roles that date back to the beginning of time and which will last until the end of time! Beloved sister in Christ, I plead with you: don’t let Satan have his way with you as he did with Eve. Let us not lead God’s people into additional sin by promoting a “new way,” a false way, as suggested by Satan.

As I read of “new truth” (?) as expounded by some, it is as though the devil were saying concerning women, “*Has God really said you cannot be elders and preachers? Do you think God still wants you*



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to follow an old, outdated commandment in today's progressive world—to actually be in subjection to your husbands? Surely you are intelligent and educated enough in this enlightened age to know better than that! Why, every real scholar knows a woman can do anything a man can do! Why should a female be restricted from leadership positions in worship when she has so much ability? How can you consider wasting your talents by remaining in your old-fashioned, traditional role from the dark ages? If you will just listen to me, I will make you wise and liberated.”

Yes, Satan wants women to believe that! He still wants to win the victory as much as he ever did. He loves power and position and he is attempting to cause Christians to question God and His way. Women, please do NOT let Satan deceive you as he did Eve in the Garden of Eden. Let us all recommit ourselves to our God-given roles. They are valuable ones—precious and fulfilling. May we cherish the wisdom of God, His love for us and the spiritual blessings He gives to all women who truly love Him.

My fervent prayer is for the safe deliverance of all of God's people when, at the end of time, our battle with Satan will at last be over! We shall celebrate the victory and enter into that unspeakable joy that God has prepared for those who love Him. God's woman should praise Him for His wonderful Word and His unchangeable plan. 

Samuel Matthews is a missionary in the Lord's church in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

God's perfect plan from Creation: And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (18) And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. (21-22) Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (24)

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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 Jesus Christ—is to be 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).

Disciples **love one another** (2). 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, absent 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).

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). Every living creature multiplies (Genesis 1:22). Bearing fruit is the litmus for determining real disciples.

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

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SEMPER FIDELIS

David A. Sargent

U.S. Marine Cpl. Caleb Earwood wanted a moment with his bride-to-be Maggie before their wedding ceremony on Saturday, May 23, 2015. However, they also wanted to stay true to the tradition of the groom not seeing the bride before the wedding on wedding day.

Just before the wedding ceremony began in Asheville, North Carolina, Caleb was guided to a cabin where Maggie was waiting. Without facing her and breaking the well-known tradition, he backed up to the open doorway where she stood. He reached his hand back, and she grabbed it. As they held hands and bowed their heads in opposite directions, Caleb led them both in prayer to God to seek His blessings on their marriage. Caleb prayed for the couple's marriage, asking that their union be strong enough to serve as an example for young couples. Maggie was trying to hold back her tears. "It broke me down," Maggie said, "to know that we felt the same way about God. It just made me happy."

"We were about to take our first steps in life together, and we didn't want to take a step without it being in God's will," Caleb Earwood, 21, told TODAY.com.

To ask for God's blessings and to build one's marriage upon God and His Word is the most important factor in a strong and lasting marriage. Actually, it is the most important thing for ANYONE—married or single, young or old—to build their lives on the Rock of Jesus Christ. ***"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock"*** (Matthew 7:24-25).

Our sin condemns us (Romans 6:23), but God is ***"not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"*** (2 Peter 3:9). He gave His Son to die for us so that we can be saved and receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:16).

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As Caleb prayed, don't take a step without it being in God's will. Jesus said, ***"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"*** (John 6:40).

It is the will of God that each of us ***"look to the Son"*** and place our faith and trust in Him (Acts 16:30-31), turn from our sins in repentance (Acts 17:30-31), confess Him before men (Romans 10:9-10) and be baptized (immersed) into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). Those who choose to follow His will and accept His offer of salvation on His terms will receive God's forgiveness and the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23). Those who continue to follow His will with the attitude of "semper fidelis" (always faithful), will be continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7).

Won't YOU follow God's will? 

David A. Sargent, Minister Church of Christ at Creekwood, Mobile, Alabama, USA.

* Information gleaned from "Semper Fidelis" by Billy Alexander in Start2Finish (<http://start2finish.org/semper-fidelis/>), www.abc7.com, and www.usatoday.com.

Robison's Rubies

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah lived in the years leading up to the ruin of Jerusalem by Babylonian armies in 586 B.C. He was sent by God to prophesy to the people who were steeped in wickedness, bringing this judgment upon themselves. In Jeremiah 2:13, he painted a poetic picture, "For my people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water."



People in many cultures reject the morals and instructions of God, not realizing those points of guidance bring life and joy—as they are fountains of living water. At the same time, they invent for themselves their own standards, which lead to despair and degradation—cisterns that can't even hold water! Only God's way provides life, peace, and hope!

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Living for Christ Modestly

Martha Lynn Rushmore

When we become Christians, we are saying to the world that my life is to be for Christ and not for Satan. I am going to live and act differently than I did before I put Christ on in baptism.

How do you live for Christ as a Christian woman? Maybe you are a daughter, a wife, a mother, a mother-in-law or a grandmother? As Christian women, we can be more than one of the above at any given time. We must remember

how we live and act lets others know if we want to live for Christ or for Satan! We are being watched by our families, friends, acquaintances, neighbors and even by



others that we have never met. Let us think, act and live more like Christ.

Living for Christ as a teenage young lady is hard because one wants her classmates and especially the boys to like her. Sometimes we let wanting to be popular with our friends lead us down the wrong path of life. We dress or should I say **undress, go places and do things that are not becoming of Christians**. We should be a better influence on our friends instead of letting them lead us to be more like the world. Unfortunately, our dress can be revealing with low cut tops, spaghetti straps, exposed midriffs, short-shorts or miniskirts. At other times, we may wear pants

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that are so skintight that there is nothing left for boys and men to imagine. Unfortunately, this applies to ladies of all ages, whether thin or heavy. This kind of dress is sinful because it is immodest.

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul wrote to the young, ***“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”*** Young people, you can have a great influence on the older generation—as well as upon your peers!

Unfortunately, mothers and fathers do not teach their teenage daughters to dress properly. The daughters are permitted to leave the house improperly dressed. We as parents have a very grave responsibility to teach our teens how and why they should dress properly. We as parents are to lead these young ladies to respect themselves and most importantly to respect God’s Word. Therefore, parents ought to dress modestly, also. We cannot expect our teens to dress properly if we as parents neither teach them nor set the right example.

First Timothy 2:9-10 reads, ***“In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”*** The definition of modesty is not bringing excessive attention to oneself. We should dress in a way that professes godliness. This verse is for all women of all ages and all women around the world.

Older women are to teach younger women through instruction and example. Paul penned in Titus 2:3-5, ***“The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”***

Ladies, let us all put on holiness—living for Christ and not living for Satan. Our souls depend on our way of life! The souls of our daughters may very well depend on our way of life, too. 

Martha Lynn Rushmore is a Staff Writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and *Gospel Gazette Online*. She and her husband teach extensively stateside and abroad. They reside in Winona, Mississippi, USA.

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“Alas Master, For It Is Borrowed!”

Michael L. King



There is a powerful Old Testament lesson that teaches some New Testament truths. The sons of the prophets were feeling crowded in their quarters as they were being trained to become prophets. They came to Elisha (the “man of God”) requesting permission to go to the Jordan River and cut beams and extend their quarters to better accommodate the men. Permission was granted, and as one of the men was cutting down a tree, the ax head flew off and sank to the bottom of the Jordan. The young man was concerned and declared, *“Alas, master! For it was borrowed”* (2 Kings 6:1-7). There was some unusual concern for it was not his ax, but it had been borrowed from someone else. Had it been his, he would have had to answer to no one other

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than himself. When what had happened was reported to Elisha, he asked where it had fallen. The young man was instructed to cut a stick and cast it into the water. When he did, the ax surfaced and floated.

We should feel some of the same consternation today when pondering the responsibilities that we have for ***“...bringing our children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”*** (Ephesians 6:4). Make sure we are not derelict like Eli by refusing to restrain his evil, vile sons (1 Samuel 3:13). A similar burden should be felt when rereading the “Great Commission” accounts in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16 and Paul stressing that it is the responsibility of the church to declare the manifold wisdom of God to the world (Ephesians 3:10). In each of these passages, the inherent responsibility that we have is the saving of the souls of men. We have only temporary care and custody for readying them for eternity.

These souls are merely “borrowed” and must be returned to the Lord in a better condition than when we found them. It has always been stressed to this writer that when we borrow something, we clean it or repair it before it is returned, by which we express our appreciation for its usage and establish trust in the owner toward us. Who knows, we may need his service again in the future.

Our children are merely loaned to us, and eventually they must be returned to God. Care needs to be exercised to prevent them from being “lost.” We are helping to establish a relationship with God through our teaching, mentoring and providing an example for them. We have been instructed to ***“train them up”*** (Proverbs 22:6). Paul expanded on this thought by qualifying this training when saying, ***“...in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”*** (Ephesians 6:4). A part of this training is to steer them from being ***“conformed to the world”*** (Romans 12:2). The real objective for every effort exhibited is to help them to ***“overcome the wicked one”*** (1 John 2:14). Paul cautioned young Timothy to prepare and discipline himself to make sure that his ***“...progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”*** (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

Those valuable souls, and they are valuable (Mark 8:37), need to be

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exposed to love, respect for authority, submission (whether to God, man, husband, wife, fellow Christian, etc.), joy, hope, discipline, faith and so much more. All of these attributes will be needed in Heaven, and just think how much sweeter they could make life here as well.

A principle we must keep in mind as we wield our “ax,” bearing all the accountability when using something borrowed, is to realize that the principle of sowing and reaping comes into play. We can only produce or receive according to seed or germinating influence that has been scattered. The Word of God is that seed, and its growth is enhanced when scattered by a discerning sower (Matthew 13:19-13). The quote has been uttered, “I cannot hear what you are saying, because what you are doing is deafening me!” Too, someone made an interesting statement to stress the importance of example: “Preach the word to the whole world, if absolutely necessary, use words!”

Just as God empowered Elisha to raise and restore the ax head to a “saved” and serviceable status, He can provide renewed life to the hearts of men and of women today who would otherwise be lost and worthless. Keep in mind that we will be answerable for that which has been entrusted to our care and for which we are responsible. If we teach and it is rejected, the burden will be on the hearer; if we fail to teach, a ***“soul will be required and his blood will be on our hands”*** (Ezekiel 3:16-18). We are “watchmen,” insuring that nothing borrowed will be lost! 

Did You Know?

Rebecca Rushmore

The surface of the Dead Sea, called the Salt Sea in Genesis 14:3, is the lowest point on Earth at about 1300 feet below sea level. Its deepest point is about 1300 feet deep. It is approximately 50 miles long and 10 miles wide, though these dimensions vary due to rainfall and other factors.



Precious Possessions

Charles Pugh III

The Bible is a book of great words. One of these words is the word that is translated with our English word as “precious.” Peter used this word several times in his two epistles. It is the Greek word “timios” and has reference to that which is “held as of great price, held in high honor, esteemed, especially dear” (Thayer 624). Peter used this word to refer to some of the precious, valuable, dear possessions of the Christian. Consider the following.

Precious Faith (1 Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 1:1). Peter said this faith is more precious than gold. This is not just any faith, but it is *“the faith.”* It is precious because of the **Person** in whom it is centered (1 Peter 1:8), the **pleasure** in which it lives (1 Peter 1:8) and the **prospect** in which it results (1 Peter 1:9). If you have this faith in God, Jesus and the Bible, then guard it, feed it, fight for it and die for it. How tragic when someone lets go of precious faith in the precious faith.

Precious Blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). This is a precious possession because of **what** it is—blood. Life is in the blood both physically and spiritually (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). It is precious because of **what kind** of blood it is—imperishable (not subject to decay). It is precious because of **whose** blood it is—the blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish or spot. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow!

Precious Promises (2 Peter 1:4). “Standing on the promises that cannot fail when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail; By the living Word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.”

Precious faith—precious blood—precious promises. Truly precious possessions! 

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TEXTUAL STUDIES

The Appearance of Evil

T. Pierce Brown

Since I was a small child, I have heard my mother and all sorts of other wonderful persons admonish, *“Abstain from the very appearance of evil.”* In a good number of those occasions, if it were a preacher who gave the admonition, he would usually add, “1 Thessalonians 5:22.” My memory even tells me that I have read many times from the Bible, “Shun the very appearance of evil,” but I find no version that reads that way, so I conclude that my memory is faulty. Now, I am reasonably well convinced by what little logic I have, and what I know of the Bible, that it is a good idea to shun things that **seem** to be evil. Those things that are of a doubtful nature should not normally be practiced. It may be that some impelling reason may be given for doing something of a questionable nature under some circumstances. For example, I do not think it appropriate to go into a tavern or a house of ill repute, normally, but would do so if I thought a soul could be brought out and saved by my going.

Almost every one of the persons whom I have heard quote or misquote 1 Thessalonians 5:22 did it with this thought in mind: “You should not only abstain from whatever **is** wrong, you should abstain from whatever **seems** or **appears** to be wrong.” This Scripture was then used to prove that contention. The trouble is, that is **not** what that Scripture says. The difficulty is partly brought about by the fact that in English the word “appear” has at least two meanings. If we should say, “The man **had an angry appearance**,” we would normally mean that it seemed to us that he was angry. It would be equivalent to, “He appeared angry.” If we should say, “The man **made an angry appearance**,” we would mean that he **was angry**, and he came on the scene that way—not just that he seemed to be so. It would be equivalent to, “He appeared, angry.” Note the comma. I find no example in the Bible of the word used in 1 Thessalonians 5:22, translated *“appearance,”* meaning, “seemed to be.”

Since I know that the Bible teaches in Romans 14:14, *“To him that*

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esteemeth anything unclean, to him it is unclean,” and in verse 23, *“He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith,”* I have no hesitancy in teaching that from Eve on down it would have been better not to even face toward sin, *“pitch the tent toward Sodom,”* *“walk in the counsel of the ungodly,”* *“stand in the way of sinners”* or *“sit in the seat of the scoffer.”* Yet, I do feel most strongly that we who preach the Gospel are especially obligated to make as sure as we can that we neither misquote God’s Word nor misuse what we properly quote to uphold a truth. **A point that cannot be upheld without an improper exegesis of a passage of Scripture is not worth upholding.**

The Greek text in 1 Thessalonians 5:22 reads, *“apo pantos eidous ponerou apechesthe.”* This may be translated, *“From every form of wickedness abstain.”* “Edious” is the genitive singular of “eidous,” which is in the KJV translated *“appearance”* once, *“fashion”* once (Luke 9:29), *“shape”* twice (Luke 3:22; John 5:37) and *“sight”* once (2 Corinthians 5:7). In **no** case have I found it used in the sense of something that merely **seems** to be. Both the ASV and the RSV translate, *“Abstain from every form of evil.”* Williams translates, *“Continue to abstain from every sort of evil.”* Phillips says, *“Steer clear of evil in any form.”* The Amplified Bible says, *“Abstain from evil—shrink from and keep aloof from it—in whatever form or whatever kind it may be.”* The Berkeley Version says, *“Keep away from evil in every form.”* Beck says, *“Keep away from every kind of evil.”* Only in the New Testament in the Translation of Monsignor Ronald Knox have I found it translated like this, *“rejecting all that has a look of evil about it.”*

If anyone knows of any reason why we need to misquote or misapply this or any other Scripture to prove a point, no matter how good the point, I should be happy to hear from him. 

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

[Editor’s Note: The variety of Bible translations from which citations of Scripture were noted in the above article, for the purpose of comparison to make a point, does not constitute a general endorsement of all of those Bible versions. ~ Louis Rushmore]



Scavenger Hunt

through Ezra

Rebecca Rushmore

(Answers inside back cover)

1. In what year of the reign of Cyrus did he send the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple?
2. Which king of Babylon took Judah into captivity?
3. How large was the congregation that returned to Jerusalem?
4. How many servants and singers also returned?
5. What did the men who had seen the first temple do when the foundation was laid for the new temple?
6. What did Darius decree should happen to anyone who changed his edict regarding the building of the temple?
7. In what year of the reign of Darius was the temple completed?
8. What was Ezra's occupation?
9. By the decree of which king did Ezra go to Jerusalem?
10. What was commanded of the men who had taken strange (foreign) women as wives?

The Thief on the Cross

Steve Higginbotham

The day Jesus died was a day in which the creation crucified the Creator. Yet, by the irony of divine wisdom, God used this gruesome means of taking life to give life! Not only did Jesus hang on the center cross, but so did the hope of all humanity. This moment in time, and the transaction that took place on that day, was without question the defining moment of history.

Yet, if that be the case, why is the record of Jesus' death cluttered with peripheral information about the death of an irrelevant thief who also died that day? Surely, there's a bigger story here in the death of Jesus than to waste ink on the deserved death of a thief.

Well, may I suggest that the death of the thief is not an irrelevant, peripheral event, **but he is** an important part of the bigger story? You see, the cross of Jesus proclaims the depth of God's love in that He was willing to give His only Son (John 3:16). However, alongside that proclamation is the proclamation from the cross upon which the thief died. This cross proclaimed the scope of God's love.

The message from the thief's cross speaks to all of us who struggle with guilt for wasting so much of our lives in sin. It speaks to those who have waited much too long to surrender to Jesus. It speaks to all of us who have nothing left to offer God but an apology. The thief's cross announces that God is a God of grace!

I hope we can find peace in that truth. Without the cross of Jesus there would be no hope. In addition, without the thief's cross, maybe we would doubt if the redemption that Jesus secured could reach a sinner like me!

When the thief on the cross had nothing left to offer God but an apology, Jesus promised him Paradise! Thank God for the redemption procured on the cross of Christ, and also for the hope that it illustrates by the thief's cross. ✝

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BIBLE CHARACTERS

Forgotten Men of the Bible: Joseph

Rebecca Rushmore

There are many Bible characters about whom we know much. Such people are the subject of frequent studies and may even have whole books or chapters of books devoted to them, and the lessons we can learn from them. There are other people mentioned in the Bible about whom we know very little. These people may only be mentioned in passing or are found in only one or two places in the Bible. Often times these people are overlooked, yet they appear in our Bibles for a reason.

John 20:30-31 tells us that Jesus did many things that were not recorded in the Bible. The things that were recorded are to strengthen our faith. Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that everything in the Bible is from God and is for our learning. With this in mind, there can be no doubt that these little known, “forgotten” men and women of the Bible can teach us valuable lessons today.

When most people think of the Joseph of the Bible, they probably think of the Joseph in the Old Testament. However, there are two other men in the Bible named Joseph. The first is the foster father of our Lord. The second provided a tomb for our Lord.

The Father of Jesus

First, consider Joseph, the foster father of Jesus. This man is only mentioned a handful of times in the Bible. In Matthew 1:16-24, we can read about the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. This passage tells us that Joseph was espoused to Mary. This was a time of engagement before the actual marriage took place. The bride-to-be remained with her parents, but in the eyes of the law, the couple was married (Deuteronomy 22:23-24); a divorce decree was required to break the engagement.

It is during this time that Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, not knowing the true father of her baby, assumed she has been

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unfaithful. He cared enough for Mary to not want to see her made a public example. Unfaithfulness of a betrothed woman was subject to stoning (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Joseph instead wished to divorce her privately as allowed by law (Deuteronomy 24:1). God appeared to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to follow through with his marriage to Mary.

Matthew 2:13-15 and 2:19-23 recount our second and third references to Joseph. In both of these instances, God again appeared to Joseph in a dream. Through the first dream Joseph was told to flee with his family to Egypt, and in the second dream he was told that it was safe to return. Our next reference of importance is found in Luke 2:4-7. Here we find Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem to be taxed at the decree of Augustus Caesar. It was while in Bethlehem that Jesus was born. Verse 16 of the same chapter mentions Joseph's presence when the shepherds come to visit the Savior. Luke 2:22-39 describes Joseph and Mary making the required presentations of the child and sacrifices at the Temple (Leviticus 12:1-8). Again we read of Joseph in Luke 2:41-51 making his annual trip to Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus was twelve. Joseph is only mentioned by name three other times in the New Testament (Luke 3:23; John 1:45, 6:42). Each of these times is a reference to Jesus being the *“son of Joseph.”*

Overall, not much is written about a man who played such an important role in God's plan for our salvation through Christ. Consider for a moment the lessons we can learn from this “forgotten” Joseph. Many people today remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. Emphasis is placed on how righteous she must have been to be chosen by God to be the mother of our Lord. Rarely, though, do we realize the same should be said of Joseph. Just as it was an honor for Mary to be the mother, think also of the honor given to Joseph.

Here was a man chosen by God to be the earthly father of Christ. As the father, Joseph taught Jesus what it meant to be faithful to God. We see from the Bible records that Joseph taught faithfulness by example. Joseph ensured that his son was circumcised on the eighth day and that his wife made the proper sacrifices after his birth as required by the Law. In doing this, Joseph was being the spiritual leader of his home. He again demonstrated his

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faithfulness by his yearly trips to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. We, like Joseph, need to be faithful to God's commands. Husbands need to make sure they, like Joseph, are the spiritual leaders in their homes.

Also, like Joseph, we should be readily obedient to God's commands. Three times God appeared to Joseph in a dream with a job for him. Each time, Joseph immediately accepted the command and obeyed. Joseph is also said to be a *"just"* man (Matthew 1:19). He was righteous and dealt fairly with everyone. It is this characteristic that moved him to desire a private and merciful punishment for Mary. He did not wish to bring about a punishment of death when her character was such that it was possible her child was the result not of her unfaithfulness but rape (Deuteronomy 22:25-27). As Christians, we also should be known for our righteousness and fair dealings with others. Like Joseph, we should be willing to forgive and be merciful to others.

Joseph of Arimathaea



While not much is recorded about the foster father of Jesus, even less is known about the third Joseph of the Bible—the man who provided a tomb for our Lord. After the death of Jesus on the cross, one man sought the body for burial. This man, Joseph from the city of Arimathaea, is mentioned in

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only four places in the Bible (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-42). Each of these passages is the account of the burial of our Lord. Joseph was a wealthy man. The tomb in which he buried our Lord was his, and it was new (John 19:41; Matthew 27:60). The body of our Lord was wrapped with new, fine linen that was bought for that purpose by Joseph (Mark 15:46). Joseph sacrificed his money, time and property for the Lord. He did this before he really knew for sure that Jesus was God's Son and would rise from the dead. We should be willing to do the same, especially knowing that Christ is Lord and Savior.

Joseph was also a member of the Sanhedrin. This was a governing body of the Jews. It was this council that sought to put Christ to death and tried Him for claiming to be the Messiah. Luke 23:51 records that although Joseph was a part of the Sanhedrin, he did not agree with the decision to murder Christ. In fact, he was one *“who also himself waited for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 23:51). Joseph believed the Old Testament promises of a coming Savior and Messiah. He let it be known he did not agree with the council concerning Jesus. Even though John 19:38 tells us that Joseph was a disciple of Jesus in secret because he feared the rest of the Jews, when no one else was around to take care of our Lord's body, Joseph stepped forward to do the job, no matter what it might cost him. We also must never forget to stand up for what is right.

Both of these **forgotten** Josephs of the Bible can teach us about our lives for Christ. The foster father of Jesus and the provider of Christ's tomb are described as *“just”* men (Matthew 1:19; Luke 23:50). They sacrificed of themselves. The foster father sacrificed his reputation by marrying a woman considered unfaithful by many of her day. He also gave of his time and attention to a child that was not his. Joseph of Arimathea sacrificed his time, money, property and potentially his position and life by caring for the body of Jesus. As Christians, we would do well to follow in the example of these **forgotten** men of the Bible. †

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What About Paul and the Sabbath Day?

Russell G. Bell

Question: Didn't the apostle Paul and his associates observe the Sabbath many times? As these are recorded in the New Testament, shouldn't we observe the Sabbath, also?

Answer: There are several passages in the New Testament that tell of the apostle Paul and his preaching partners going to Sabbath meetings (see Acts 27:1-4). The question is, "Why were they going to the meetings?"

A little background is necessary here. The apostle Paul had been a devout Jew and persecutor of the church of Christ until he saw Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. From this time forward, he went about preaching Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The Book of Acts in chapters 13-28 records the work of Paul preaching Christ throughout the world.

Notice first of all that Paul was looking for people who were interested in the true God; so naturally, he went into the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath where people gathered to worship God.

There was another reason. It was the custom in those days that if a stranger, who was a Jew, appeared in synagogue worship, after the reading of the Law and the prophets (Old Testament), the ruler of the synagogue would ask the strangers if they had any word of exhortation. Of course, Paul always did have something to say. He would always preach about Jesus Christ and His will, the New Testament.

If you will study the context of the 13th chapter of Acts and the following chapters, you will find that Paul and his company were persecuted and driven from town after town because of the jealousy of these Jews. Why? Because Paul taught them that the old law (Old Testament) was finished and now they should follow the New Testament of Jesus Christ. This included the change in the day of worship. This is obvious from Acts

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20:6-7, which reads, *“But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.”*

Notice, Paul and company tarried at Troas seven days, and no mention is made of anything happening on the Sabbath. Yet, on Sunday, the first day of the week, the Christians gathered to observe the Lord’s Supper and hear a sermon from Paul—typical of our worship services on the first day of the week today.

Let us close with 1 Corinthians 9:20, which notes: *“and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law,[a] that I might win those who are under the law.”* †

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Contemporary, Informal Praise Service?

Ernest S. Underwood

If you were to have an audience with the Queen of England or some world leader, would you wear a ball cap, jeans and flip-flops? Some might say, “Yes,” but most would show more dignity than to do so. Not long ago, I was driving by a church building where there was a sign that read, “Contemporary, Informal, Praise Services.” Here were a people who were announcing their lack of respect and reverence to God. Nowhere in the Holy Scriptures does one find anyone being “informal” in his worship to his Sovereign, Creator and Ruler of the universe—The Almighty God! There was always a formal dignity and respect.

The hymn writers of old recognized this. Read the words of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” written by Martin Luther and be favorably impressed with the respect and reverence the lyrics express to God.

Friends, God is not our buddy! He is our Creator, Our Sustainer and our Savior! Habakkuk said, “The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.” Those in the Revelation were singing, *“Holy, Holy, Holy.”* There was no “informal” praise there. How do you worship? †

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What is True Worship?

Ken Tyler

Jesus said in John 4:23-24, “*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” In this passage, Jesus gave two characteristics of true worship:

1. *In spirit (sincerely from the heart)*

2. *In truth (according to God’s instructions, John 17:17).*

I want to emphasize that Jesus said our worship must be “*in spirit and in truth.*” Then and only then will we be true worshippers. According to the teaching of the New Testament, true worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, consists of partaking of the Lord’s supper (Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; Acts 2:42), preaching (Acts 20:7), praying (Acts 2:42); giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) and singing (1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19). Please notice that no piano, organ or any other kind of mechanical instrument was used in the worship of the first century church.

The New Testament also speaks of vain worship (Matthew 15:9), ignorant worship (Acts 17:22-23) and will worship (Colossians 2:20-23). We do not want our worship to fit into any of these categories.

We must practice true worship. This is the only kind of worship that is pleasing to God. 

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Sermon Starters

Mark N. Posey

Sermon: All things New!

Text: 2 Peter 3:10-13

1. There is the **New Creature** (2 Corinthians 5:17).
2. There is **Newness of Life** (Romans 6:4).
3. There is the **New Testament** (Matthew 26:28).
4. There is the **New Command** (John 13:34).
5. There is the **New Man** (Ephesians 4:24).

Conclusion: When one is “born again” (John 3:3), it is a New Birth!

Sermon: Come Rest with Us!

Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:7, *“rest with us.”*

1. God Rested on the 7th Day (Genesis 2:2).
2. Jews Rested on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10).
3. Israel Rested in Canaan (Joshua 1:13).
4. Sinners Rest when they come to Jesus (Matthew 11:28-30).
5. Saved Rest in Heaven (Hebrews 4:9-11; cf., Revelation 14:13).

Conclusion: For one to experience rest in eternity, he must enter rest here on earth (Matthew 11:28).

Sermon: Heaven will surely be worth it all!

Text: Philippians 1:23; 2 Peter 3:13, *“new heavens and new earth”*

1. In Heaven there will be a New Rest (Hebrews 4:9).
2. In Heaven there will be a New Relationship (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
3. In Heaven there will be a New Reward (Matthew 5:12).

Conclusion: Will Heaven be your New Home?

Sermon: Our God, He is **ALIVE!**

Text: Psalm 91:1-2

Introduction: Trust in the Lord with all your might!

1. God is ELYON (91:1): *“The Most High.”*

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2. God is SHADDAI (91:1): *“Almighty.”*
3. God is YAHWEH (91:2): *“The LORD.”*
4. God is ELOHIM (91:2): *“My God.”*

Conclusion: Trust God (v. 2): *“My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!”*

Sermon: Major Change in a Maniac!

Text: Mark 5:14-20

1. Jesus changed him; Jesus purged him of tormenting demons.
2. Jesus clothed him; he was no longer naked but clothed.
3. Jesus calmed him; his mind was now clear.
4. Jesus charged him; Jesus sent him to his friends and neighbors.
5. Jesus commissioned him; Jesus gave him a message to share.

Sermon: Christians Always Abounding!

Text: 2 Peter 1:8

1. Abound in Faith (2 Corinthians 8:7).
2. Abound in Hope (Romans 15:13).
3. Abound in Love (Philippians 1:9).
4. Abound in Good Works (2 Corinthians 9:8).
5. Abound in the Lord’s Work (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Sermon: God is ABLE!

Text: Ephesians 3:20

1. God’s RICHES are unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8).
2. God’s JOY is unspeakable (1 Peter 1:8).
3. God’s PEACE is past understanding (Philippians 4:7).
4. God’s LOVE is past knowledge (Ephesians 3:19).
5. God’s WAYS are past finding out (Romans 11:33).

Sermon: Three Levels of Giving!

Text: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

1. I have to—LAW.
2. I need to—OBLIGATION.
3. I want to—LOVE.

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Conclusion: Giving out of love is giving from the heart.

Sermon: The Incarnation of Christ!

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:9, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

1. Lord—Identifies His Deity.
2. Jesus—Identifies His Humanity.
3. Christ—Identifies His Divine Mission.

Conclusion: Thank God for Christ (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Sermon: What Philip Preached!

Text: Acts 8:12, *“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.”*

1. CHURCH: Philip preached *“the kingdom of God”* (cf., Acts 2:47).
2. AUTHORITY: Philip preached *“the name of Jesus Christ”* (cf., Philippians 2:9-11).
3. SALVATION: Philip preached *“baptism”* (cf., Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Conclusion: Acts 8:13, *“Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.”*

Sermon: Christ in Four-D: We See Jesus!

Text: Hebrews 2:9

1. We see Christ as the Son of God (John 1:49; 20:31).
2. We see Christ as the Son of Man (Luke 9:22; 19:10).
3. We see Christ as the Sacrifice for Sin (Heb. 9:22; 10:12).
4. We see Christ as the Savior of Sinners (1 Timothy 1:15; Romans 5:8).✝

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Did You Know?

Archaeology confirms the biblical account of the walls of Jericho falling outward (Joshua 6:1-21).



THE SUMMER IS (ALMOST) ENDED

Patrick Morrison

Long ago, during the days of Jeremiah, God’s people in Judah had grown rebellious and disobedient. In spite of warnings and pleadings, Judah continued down the path of unfaithfulness and would have to suffer the consequences. Jehovah used Babylon as an instrument of divine judgment to cause His people to see their need for repentance. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the City of Jerusalem for over two years. It was during this siege that the people of Judah lamented, ***“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved”*** (Jeremiah 8:20). They were unwilling to accept responsibility for their wickedness, and they were looking for God to deliver them at any moment in spite of their unwillingness to humble their hearts and repent.

Summer had come and gone, and they were still besieged by the enemy. Another summer had likewise come and gone, and still they were in the same condition. They assumed that God had abandoned them, but what they failed to realize was that they had long ago abandoned Him, and so were now facing the results of their infidelity. Judah would go on to ask, ***“Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?”*** (Jeremiah 8:22). There was a balm for their affliction, and there was a Great Physician who could apply the cure, but they had not turned to Him that they might be healed! Therefore, the summer passed, and they were still not saved.

There are many today who ignore the pleadings and warnings of Scripture that encourage them to repent and to return to God. Then, when trouble befalls, they wonder where Jehovah is and why He is not delivering them from their self-inflicted tribulations. Our society is fixated on passing the blame and dodging responsibility. We must remember that we will have to reap the consequences of what we sow (Galatians 6:7). So many

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want to take advantage of the longsuffering of God, not knowing that His longsuffering will one day be exhausted. God's longsuffering should lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4), but for many it is just a license to continue in sin. Like Judah of old, there are those who want to put the burden of responsibility upon God. There is deliverance from the enslavement of sin through the blood of Jesus (Romans 6:16-18), but so many choose not to turn to the Great Physician to find the cure that they need and for which they long. The masses of humanity wallow in their sins, but when the piper comes calling, they want someone else to pay the price. Jesus offers to pay the price for our sins (1 Peter 1:18-19), but man must respond in the obedience of faith in order to obtain salvation (Ephesians 2:8).

God had not forgotten about His people. Though they had rebelled and disobeyed, and though they would have to suffer the consequences of their sins, God still loved them and wanted to heal them. The temporal punishment could not be averted, but the eternal punishment that continued rebellion and disobedience would bring could be averted if they would turn back to Him. When we are faced with the temporal consequences of sin, such is not a reflection that God has abandoned us or does not love us. Those who turn their hearts to Him will be delivered from the eternal consequences of sin. God longs to deliver all from the sting of sin (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), but we must take advantage of the opportunities we have to draw near to Him. Night is quickly coming (John 9:4). The summer is coming to an end. Are you saved? 

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Kenney's Pennies

“[Jesus] who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”
(Hebrews 1:3 NKJV)

The word “brightness” has the idea of radiating rays, like from the sun. Just as there are no rays without the sun or no sun without rays, neither is there no Son without the Father nor Father without the Son. Both are eternal and divine!

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The Faith of the Remnant

Rebecca Rushmore

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is well-known for its discussion of faith. The first verse of this great chapter reads, ***“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*** The word “faith” describes our conviction in the truth of God’s Word. This faith is produced in us when we hear God’s Word (Romans 10:17). Many faithful servants of God are presented in Hebrews 11 as examples for the Christian.

Consider for a moment another example of faith found in the Book of Ezra. The Babylonians conquered Judah as divine punishment for their rejection of God. Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity would last for seventy years (25:12; 29:10) before a remnant would return to the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). As the Book of Ezra opens, King Cyrus sends over 40,000 Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and take up residence in the land. God’s people had been away from home for seventy years. Many of those relocating to Jerusalem had never been there before. They had never seen the grand temple built by Solomon. Yet, this new generation moved to Jerusalem to build a temple where they could worship God ***“as it is written in the Book of Moses”*** (Ezra 6:18). When the foundation for the new temple was laid, there were two different reactions. The aged men, ones who had seen the original Temple, wept. The younger people shouted for joy (3:12).

Both groups of people showed great faith in the promises of God. First, the aged men showed their faith. When Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, he did not choose who would go. Instead, the king allowed volunteers to return (Ezra 1:3). The aged generation was aware God allowed their captivity and exile. This group understood, through the messages of the prophets and remembrance of the words of Moses, that their homecoming was based on their return to obedience to God. If they doubted God would allow a remnant to return to Jerusalem, why volunteer to go? They evidently had faith that God would do as He said. Their faith,

HISTORY

conviction in the truthfulness of God, led them home to Jerusalem.

Second, the new generation showed their faith. This group also knew of the messages of the prophets and the words of Moses. It's probable they heard of the grandeur of Solomon's Temple and of life in the Promised Land from the older generation (Deuteronomy 6:1-7). With this knowledge, this group also volunteered to return to Jerusalem to rebuild a temple to God. Though they had never seen the magnificent Temple, nor worshipped God with sacrifices ***“as it is written in the Law of Moses”*** (Ezra 3:2), this younger generation also had faith that God would do as He said. Their faith, conviction in the truthfulness of God, led them to a new home in Jerusalem.

As Christians, we also look for a home in the **“New Jerusalem”** (Revelation 21:2). We hope for—expect—the eternity in Heaven that God has promised to his faithful children (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 2:10), even though we have never seen Heaven ourselves. When we read the description of Heaven (John 14:1-6; Revelation 21) and the promises of God concerning Heaven, our faith assures us that Heaven is a real place prepared for God's faithful followers. Do you have the faith shown by the 40,000 of Ezra's day? If not, study God's Word so that you may develop great faith and be assured, by your obedience to the Gospel, of a home in the New Jerusalem one day. 

Rebecca Rushmore is a Staff Writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and *Gospel Gazette Online*. Rebecca is also a schoolteacher and resides in Collierville, Tennessee, USA.

Robison's Rubies

The apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and worked his way up through the Roman court system, defending Christianity and never being found guilty of any crime, as recorded in the Book of Acts. Nevertheless, he was often falsely accused. One Roman governor cried out, ***“Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!”*** Paul calmly responded, ***“I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason”*** (Acts 26:24-25).

Christianity, indeed, is a religion of truth and reason. It is **not** a religion of blind faith. The evidence for it is there, though many willfully suppress it. People will always accuse Christians of being crazy, but the response must be to ever try to kindly reason with our accusers.

Andy Robison is the minister for the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ and the Director of the West Virginia School of Preaching in Moundsville, West Virginia, USA.

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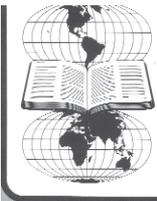
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ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

Verse Search (Page 38)

1. Puffs up, edifies.
2. Nothing.
3. One.
4. Are, live.
5. Weak.
6. Defiled.
7. No.
8. Stumbling block.
9. Eat those meats.
10. Perish.
11. Sins against the brother and against Christ.
12. Eat meat.

Bible Find (page 50)



Scavenger Hunt (page 93)

Answers:

1. the first year (1:1)
2. Nebuchadnezzar (2:1)
3. 42,360 (2:64)
4. 7,337 servants, 200 singers (2:65)
5. wept (3:12)
6. timber from his house should be used to hang him, his house would become a dunghill (6:11)
7. sixth year (6:15)
8. scribe (7:6)
9. Artaxerxes (7:1-6)
10. 10. put them away (10:3, 10-11)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Guyana, South America

Guyana is a parliamentary republic. The May 2015 national vote in Guyana resulted in the first change of ruling party, with the election of David Granger, since the country gained its independence from Great Britain in 1966. The US \$1 (USD) equals approximately \$206.6 Guyanese dollars (GYD).

Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America, though additional languages spoken there include languages of India, Guyanese Creole, Amerindian dialects and Chinese. Though English is spoken by all, especially remote, isolated villages commonly resort to tribal languages in the absence of English-speakers.

Guyana has a tropical, hot, humid environment as it sits near and above the equator. It has two rainy seasons, May through August and November through January. Most of the country is forested (77.4%).

Guyana is adjacent to Suriname, Brazil, Venezuela and the Atlantic Ocean. The nation's population of 735,909 (July 2016) is comprised of East Indians (39.8%)—descendants of indentured servants from India to British colonists, Africans (29.3%), mixed races (19.9%), Amerindians (10.5%)—the indigenous population—and other ethnicities (.05%). A greater number of Guyanese live abroad (55%), chiefly in Canada, the USA, Great Britain and Caribbean nations, often in pursuit of economic improvement. One third of the population is considered to be living below “the poverty line,” and unemployment is rampant. Over 80% of well-educated and economically advantaged citizens have emigrated from Guyana. Though rich in natural resources, the distribution of wealth does not benefit the general populace.

The country is rich in bauxite, gold, diamonds, hardwood timber, sugarcane, shrimp and fish. Subsequently, it exports sugar, gold, bauxite, alumina, rice, shrimp, molasses, rum and timber—chiefly to the USA (33%), Canada (17.9%), UK (6.7%), Ukraine (4.3%) and Jamaica (4%). It imports manufactured products, machinery, oil and food—chiefly from the USA (24.7%), Trinidad and Tobago (24.3%), China (10.8%) and Suriname (9.5%). Guyanese love America and everything American.

Only 11 of the 106 airports within Guyana are paved. Most of the paved roads (367 miles) are within an hour's drive of the Atlantic coastal area, and the balance of the roads (4,952 miles) are unpaved—many of which are nearly impassible logging roads. Consequently, navigable waterways are a primary means of transportation—many able to accommodate ocean freighters far upstream. Guyana has seaports as well as river ports. Three of the largest rivers are the Berbice, the Demerara and the Essequibo—the last being 20-miles wide at its mouth where it meets the Atlantic Ocean, and there are hundreds of islands in it, many of which that are habitable. Guyana is a land of many waters.

Guyana is a religious country, known for many varying offerings: Pentecostal (22.8%), Adventist (5.4%), Anglican (5.2%), Methodist (1.4%), Hindu (24.8%), Catholic (7.1%), Muslim (6.8%), Jehovah's Witnesses (1.3%), Rastafarian (.5%), miscellaneous additional Christian claims (20.8%), other religions (.9%) and non-religious (3.1%). The number of congregations of the churches of Christ fluctuate with closures as well as with the establishment of new churches; there are over 100 churches of our Lord in Guyana.

The souls of Guyana are valuable (Matthew 16:26). Christians have an obligation to reach out to the lost everywhere with the Gospel—including in Guyana (Mark 16:15-16). Guyanese are religious overall despite widespread sin (Acts 17:22-23)—not uncommon anywhere, including in the USA. Guyanese will study the Scriptures (Acts 17:11), and many are hungry and thirsty for God's Word (Matthew 5:6). Guyana is a worthy land in which the Lord's people from abroad ought to continue sowing the seed among non-Christians and watering the growth of that Word of God within honest hearts—leading to a bumper crop of spiritual harvest (1 Corinthians 3:6; John 4:35). Given the encouragement and the tools, Guyanese Christians will arise to the occasion to participate in the evangelization of their own country.

Cover photograph by Louis Rushmore. Cover design by Betty Burton Choate.