

VOLUME ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN

THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL



**Students graduating from the Mutare
School of Preaching in Zimbabwe**



Bible Word Scramble

Rebecca Rushmore

Write the first letter of each word indicated in the passages below.
Then, unscramble the letters to find the theme of the verses.

Genesis 9:11 8th word _____

Genesis 15:18 25th word _____

Matthew 26:28 6th word _____

Galatians 3:17 22nd word _____

Hebrews 9:15 22nd word _____

Hebrews 9:16 11th word _____

Hebrews 9:17 7th word _____

Hebrews 9:21 13th word _____

Bible text: New King James (NKJV)

(See the back cover for answer.)

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

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I decided to stop calling the bathroom the “John” and renamed it the “Jim.” I feel so much better saying that I went to the Jim this morning.





THIS PRESENT EVIL AGE

Louis Rushmore

Galatians 1:3-4 reads, *“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from **this present evil age** [“world” KJV], according to the will of our God and Father”* (NKJV). To a greater

or a lesser degree, every age since sin entered into the world has been a *“present evil age.”* However, there have been several occasions throughout history where sinfulness resulted in a tipping point with God, whereupon He exacted widespread retribution upon sinners. A tipping point is “the critical point in a situation, process, or system beyond which a significant and often unstoppable effect or change takes place” (“Tipping Point”). No one can deflect God’s wrath when He determines to react against an *“evil age.”*

Some Significant Historical Tipping Points with God

A staggering percentage of 100% of humanity at the time – Adam and Eve – were banished from the Garden of Eden for their sin of disobedience (Genesis 3:23-24). Hundreds of years later, nearly 100% of humanity was killed in the universal flood of Noah’s day (Genesis 7:21-23). *“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...** The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence”* (Genesis 6:5, 11). God, therefore, *“condemned the world”* (Hebrews 11:7), sparing only *“eight souls”* (1 Peter 3:20). The sin of homosexuality (Genesis 19; Jude 7),

rampant in Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim (Deuteronomy 29:23), was “*very grave*” (Genesis 18:20) and reached a tipping point with God so that He destroyed those cities with “*brimstone and fire*” (Genesis 19:24-25).

Hundreds of years later, the Israelites traversed the Sinai peninsula and repeatedly reached a tipping point with God, whereupon He punished the nation again and again. Finally, God sentenced Israel to 40 years of wandering in that desolate place as a penalty until everyone – except Joshua and Caleb – 20 years and older who had departed Egypt died (Numbers 14:29-33). About two generations of families perished before God allowed a new generation to enter Canaan. Then, the whole period of the judges was a collection of tipping points with God because of sin, whereupon He permitted enemies of Israel to subdue it only to be freed later by a judge God raised up; a series of fifteen judges aptly denotes the rise and fall constantly over hundreds of years.

There was not a great improvement after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, but following the division of the Israelites into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, greater tipping points with God occurred. Almighty God allowed the Assyrian kingdom to overthrow Israel because of its sins, chief of which was idolatry (2 Kings 17:5-12, 23). Later, God permitted the Babylonians to overthrow Judah also because, like the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom also practiced idolatry (2 Kings 24-25; 1 Chronicles 9:1; Zephaniah 1:4). This initiated the 70 years of captivity for Judah that God’s prophets had forewarned would occur unless the nation repented and turned back to God (Jeremiah 25:1-12; 29:10). **God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6-7; 14:2) became as much a part of an evil age as the balance of ungodly humanity.**

The Present Evil Age

Some Christians muse from time to time that one reason that Almighty God may delay the destruction of planet Earth preceding Final Judgment (2 Peter 3:7) is because of the large number of New Testament Christians today; after all, the Lord agreed to Abraham’s bargaining not to destroy Sodom if there were ten righteous persons living in it (Genesis 18:32). Is it possible that the children of God constitute one reason that stalls the inevitable fiery end of the world and Final Judgment? Of course, the apostle

Peter penned that the **“longsuffering”** of God – extending time for sinners to repent (2 Peter 3:9) – explains why God has not already brought about the destruction of the created universe. Nevertheless, the world and time itself will end, as well as Final Judgment must happen – without warning and when we do not expect it (2 Peter 3:10). Consequently, the children of God need to always be ready (Matthew 24:36-44; 2 Peter 3:11).

No godly person would deny the obvious debauchery characteristic of the **“present evil age”** in which we live today. Sins are hardly **“secret”** today (Psalm 90:8), no matter how despicable they may be. Moreover, even the vilest sinners who are guilty of disgraceful deeds are not the least embarrassed. **“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down, says the Lord”** (Jeremiah 6:15).

Homosexuality’s *pride parades*, defenders of abortion from protesters to world leaders, gross immodesty, pornography, *shacking up* **“and the like”** (Galatians 5:19-21; cf., 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8) represent clearly noticeable specimens of **“this present evil age.”** Unfortunately, Christians and the Lord’s church are not immune to the prevalent immorality typical of the ungodly world all around us. Besides all this, lawbreakers abound in every degree, including the more violent offenses of robbery, assault, murder and wars. Hardly can we imagine that the wickedness and violence for which God deluged the world (Genesis 6-8) were any worse than the same in **“this present evil age.”** There are, though, more than eight souls – Noah and his family – today worshipping and serving Almighty God. There are more than ten souls worshipping and serving God than there were in Sodom.

Living in the World but Not of the World

The word **“age”** (NKJV) or **“world”** (KJV) in Galatians 1:4 is translated from the Greek *aion*, which means “...properly, an age... by implication, the world” (*Biblesoft’s*). “These words [Galatians 1:4] cannot mean created nature, or the earth and its productions, nor even wicked men. The former we shall need while we live, the latter we cannot avoid...” (*Adam Clarke’s*). Though the children of God have no choice but to live amidst wicked humanity, they are called upon by God through the

Gospel of Jesus Christ to distinguish themselves from impenitent sinners. Regrettably, however, many Christians do the same things as ungodly people and somehow suppose that God will ultimately overlook their willful sins. ***“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ...do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?”*** (Romans 2:1-3). Willfully practicing sin dispenses with the only redemption available – Jesus Christ. ***“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a [any other] sacrifice for sins”*** (Hebrews 10:26).

Christians **ought to be different** from unrighteous and worldly people, often including family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers and acquaintances. We are God’s ***“special”*** (NKJV) or ***“peculiar people”*** (KJV) (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). Jesus noted the contrast between the children of God and children of the world. ***“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”*** (John 15:19). ***“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world”*** (John 17:14-16). Imitating Jesus distinguishes Christians from the ungodly and worldly people surrounding us at every turn.

Our Lord used the Greek word *kosmos*, translated ***“world”*** in these passages. *Kosmos* is used in the same **ways** we used the word “world,” sometimes referring to the planet on which we live and at other times referring to humanity. Jesus referred to ungodly humanity in contrast to God’s ***“special”*** or ***“peculiar people.”*** However, Christians can only be and remain ***“special”*** and ***“peculiar”*** as long as they do not assimilate into the world. ***“...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).

Sadly, many Christians have developed a spiritually unhealthy relationship with the world, about which an inspired half-brother of Jesus

warned. ***“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity [hatred] with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”*** (James 4:4). The apostle John, likewise, cautioned Christians about worldliness. ***“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever”*** (1 John 2:15-17).

Conclusion

Christians once, before their conversion, many times were among the most committed and diligent sinners, but they were ***“washed,” “sanctified”*** and ***“justified.”***

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.
(1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Christians are not who they were formerly.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Indeed, we live in a ***“present evil age,”*** but faithful Christians live their lives noticeably differently from the world around them – not trying to be ***different*** but attempting to ***emulate*** the model Christian depicted in the New Testament. Christians don’t do some of the things the world does; neither

do they go some of the places that ungodly people frequent. True Christians don't talk like the world around them. The children of God have a completely **unique worldview** that has as its goal a **heavenly, forever home**. ***“Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you”*** (1 Peter 4:4 KJV). That unique worldview, though, indirectly condemns the world around us (Hebrews 11:7), to which the world pushes back. ***“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”*** (2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV). If the ungodly world hasn't pushed you around at all, it may not even know that you profess to be a Christian! **Is there enough evidence to convict you of being a Christian?**

Historically, the children of God often became as much a part of an evil age as the balance of ungodly humanity, and the same observation may be applicable to many Christians and churches of Christ in our time, too. Are you and I different from the world around us, or do we admire and approve of sinfulness (e.g., drinking and reveling, Galatians 5:21; fornication; adultery; immodesty; indecent language; pornography, Matthew 5:28; etc.). ***“Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them”*** (Romans 1:32).

The world around us is motivated and animated by Satan. ***“Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them”*** (2 Corinthians 4:4). **Who is motivating and animating you – Satan or Jesus?** ***“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 2:5).✚

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What Should We Do with Our Sins?

Jerry Bates

God is clear in His judgment on the righteousness of man. He tells us in unmistakable terms that all men are sinful. For example, Paul wrote in Romans 3:10-12, quoting from Psalm 14:1-3, *“There is none righteous, no not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one”* (NKJV). Even man himself largely agrees with that assessment. While few would express it in such terms, virtually no one would claim perfection. All agree that they have sinned in the past and at times continue to sin. It is a universal problem, and it is a personal problem. So, while we agree that all have sinned or have made mistakes, we are not agreed as to what we should do with our sins. There are several diverse ways that humans deal with their sins.

Many try to hide their sins. Many in the Bible tried to do that very thing. When Israel destroyed Jericho, the people were forbidden from taking anything from the city as it was all consecrated to the Lord. However, Achan took clothes, silver and gold and hid them in his tent. He was sure that no one would ever know. Apparently, he was right as far man was concerned, but God knew. **He could not hide his sin from God.** Similarly, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he first tried to hide his sin from the eyes of man; however eventually, God confronted him with his sin through the prophet, Nathan. Again, we see that sin could not be hidden from God.

Unfortunately, man has not learned this important truth and continues

attempts to hide his sin. The attitude of many seems to be that it is fine to do what you want if you do not get caught. People do things on vacation that they would never do at home. Isaiah spoke of this attitude in Isaiah 29:15, *“Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord, And their works are in the dark; They say, ‘Who sees us?’ and, ‘Who knows us?’”* However, nothing is ever hidden from God. *“For there is nothing covered, that will not be revealed, nor hidden, that will not be known”* (Luke 12:2).

When man is eventually caught in his sins, he commonly attempts to lie his way out of his guilt. When God confronted Cain concerning the location of his brother Abel, he lied and said, *“...I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”* (Genesis 4:9). Of course, both God and Cain knew exactly where Abel was. Cain had killed him! In Genesis 18, God spoke to Abraham and Sarah and told them that they would soon have a son, and Sarah laughed. Amazingly, Sarah tried to lie to God in verse fifteen, *“I did not laugh, for she was afraid...”* When caught with their crimes, criminals almost unanimously lie and deny their guilt; however, others are not any better. When caught with their moral sins, politicians and even preachers, such as TV evangelists, deny them and loudly proclaim their innocence – until it is glaringly known otherwise.

In contrast to hiding their sins, **some boast of their sins.** Isaiah declared in 3:9, *“The look on their countenance witnesses against them, And they declare their sin as Sodom; They do not hide it...”* Sometimes this is a defense mechanism because their sins are known, and they are trying to defend themselves. Sadly, sundry men are proud of their sins and boast about their exploits. To make things even worse, countless others applaud and envy them.

Some belittle their sins, as if it is such a small thing or so common that it is not worth considering. I have often heard a proverb, “To err is human” or “I’m only human.” Those short sayings emphasize the common plight of man that we do make numerous mistakes. Since all humans sin, then one should not be concerned with his or her sins because they are too small in number or size to be worth consideration.

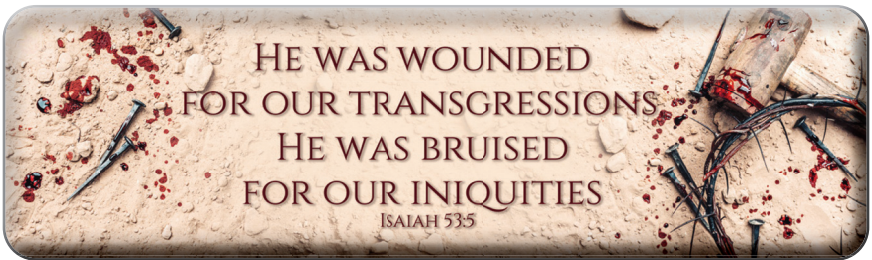
Some attempt to explain why they did wrong, thereby shifting the blame to someone else. While the sin is known and cannot be denied, it is the fault of someone else. Someone should have done more to prevent it.

Thus, the perpetrator becomes the victim of someone else's failure.

Some share their sins. We feel better about our sins when others are doing them as well. People often try to justify their actions by saying, "Everybody else is doing it." If so many people are doing it, surely it cannot be wrong. For example, many justify their lies by asking, "Who doesn't lie?" No one should expose the sins in the lives of others because we all sin, and we all have our own problems. Man's favorite verse now seems to be, "**Judge not, that you be not judged**" (Matthew 7:1).

Some simply forget about their sins and wait for time to cover them and for people to forget. For example, a person may commit a disgraceful act, and he runs away and continues his life in another place as if the sin were never committed. Years later, he may go back, and if he is confronted by someone, he'll say, "That was a long time ago." This often works as far as man is concerned, but time means nothing to God. **God does not forget!**

While the above methods are common ways of dealing with our sins, we must realize that none of them works. None of them deal with the real problem, which is, "**How can I get rid of my sins?**" In each case, the sin remains, and the guilt of sin remains. What can be done?



The answer can only be found in Christ. Other religions, to a significant extent, attempt to cover sins by doing good acts. They think that by doing enough good things, one can overcome his mistakes. However, that attitude forgets that good actions cannot take away sin. Sin must be punished, and "**the wages of sin is death**" (Romans 6:23). Paul declared in Ephesians 1:7, "**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.**" Jesus came and lived the perfect life, free from all sins. We cannot be "**redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from**

your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). In baptism, one is baptized into Christ’s death, one is united with Christ and one dies to sin (Romans 6:3-5). John declared in 1 John 1:7 that **“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”** Thus, all our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ, and the problem of sin is finally and completely solved.

However, we have another problem. What about the sins we commit after baptism? Becoming a Christian does not suddenly transform a person into this spiritual body that is no longer beset with the weaknesses of sinful flesh. John announced in 1 John 1:8, **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”** Notice the apostle John used the personal pronoun, **“we”**, thereby, apparently, including himself in that predicament of continuing to sin. We do not have to be baptized countless times in order to continue to receive forgiveness. John continued in 1:9, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** Other verses express a similar thought. **“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy”** (Proverbs 28:13). **“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed...”** (James 5:16). In these verses, one is told to confess his sins in order to receive forgiveness, which would also imply repentance.

To whom are we to confess our sins? Obviously, we are to confess our sins to God; however, James made it clear that we are to also confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another. How can I pray for you if I never know there is a problem? We are told to confess to each other, not to a priest, a preacher, a “senior prayer partner” or anyone else who sits in a superior position. We are to confess to each other. We confess a sin publicly when the sin is public. If the sin is completely private, we would only confess it to God. If the sin is known to only a few people, we confess the sin only to them. If the sin is public, as many sins are, we should confess it publicly.

This appears to be a major problem with Christians all over the world. I have been in many countries over the last several years and attended countless worship services. In almost every service, Christians have requested prayers for many things: sickness, a new job, money to take care of a financial problem, safe travel to a destination, prayers for God to care for a

family member who is away, education and such like. Rarely have I heard a confession of sin and a request for forgiveness. We are ignoring possibly the most important command of all. We all continue to sin; only by confession will our sins be forgiven (1 John 1:9; James 5:16); yet, Christians almost never confess sins publicly. Most likely, it is not done due to pride and fear of what others will think or do. Nevertheless, the command remains, and it is largely ignored. One person concluded that the result is a bunch of smiling, laughing, “nice” people who are dying on the inside and are too afraid to tell anyone. How can we continue to expect forgiveness from God and others while ignoring a basic command such as confession.



I encourage Christians to seriously think about the command to confess their sins. I encourage preachers to emphasize confessing sins more in their lessons. Undoubtedly, it takes courage to confess sins. Unfortunately, a few may not treat you the way God desires. However, that should not prevent us from obeying a simple command from God. **The result of such actions is something we all need – forgiveness!** †

Jerry Bates is a missionary, Gospel preacher and one of the editors of the quarterly magazine *The Voice of Truth International*. He resides in Winona, Mississippi, USA.



Paradoxes of Christianity: Simple, Yet Complex

Shane Fisher

A paradox is defined as “a statement that seems self-contradictory or absurd, yet in fact expresses a possible truth” (www.dictionary.com). In this article, we will come to understand that the Bible is a simple book, yet it is also deep with its nuggets of truth waiting to be discovered. Even if we had many lifetimes, due to our limitations, we would never be able to master its contents entirely. There is something always new to be discovered, even if we read the same passages over and over again.

There is a well-known quote concerning the Gospel of John that goes something like this: “The gospel of John is shallow enough for a child to wade in, yet deep enough for an elephant to swim in.” The exact source is unknown, but this unidentified author conveyed the fact that a novice in the faith (1 Peter 2:2) can adequately understand the Gospel so easily when read through for the first time, yet it is a book for the mature Christian who can return to studying it repeatedly and glean reflectively from its profound truths. Let me compile a list of examples from the Gospel of John that show this paradox is true.

The prologue (John 1:1-18) was used by John as a launching pad to send forth his theological *rockets* that flew across and landed in several targeted areas of the account. These theological *rockets* are as follows.

The Word (John 1:1, 14)

The person known as Jesus of Nazareth is eternal. He is the second Person of the Godhead Who came down and became a man to experience the frailties, weaknesses, emotions and temptations that we as humans experience. Because of what we know from John's other letters (1 John; 2 John), there was a doctrine in its inception stage being taught falsely, asserting that Jesus only seemed human. John, being a reliable eyewitness and inspired by God, confirmed that Jesus was truly Divine **and** human. John stated that the Creator of the universe came and dwelt among those whom He created in His image (John 1:3, 14).

Jesus Is the Life (John 1:4)

Jesus is the source of the creation of life (John 1:4; 3:15, 36; 4:14, 36, 50, 53; 5:21, 24, 26, 29, 39; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 51, 53, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10-11, 15, 17, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 13:37-38; 14:6; 15:13; 17:2; 20:31). Without Him, nothing was made that was made. Unfortunately, soon after the beginning of creation, physical death was introduced as a consequence of man's disobedience to His Creator (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12-21). God had an eternal plan in His mind to redeem man from sin and physical death. Jesus was sent forth as the propitiation for mankind's sins (1 John 2:1-2) and the firstfruits to rise from the dead, to die physically no more (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). He is the One who said that He would rise from the dead (Acts 26:23). He offers the abundant life in this present, earthly life (John 10:10). He also offers the promise of eternal life to all those who trust, obey and remain faithful to Him (John 20:30-31; 1 John 5:13). When Jesus returns, He will raise all those who are in the graves from the dead, and some will go to everlasting life while some will go to everlasting damnation (John 5:28-29).

Jesus Is the True Temple of God (John 1:14)

The next theological *rocket* we will examine is the "temple" theme that launches out of John 1:14. "***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth***" (NKJV). This missile landed in such passages as John 1:50-51; 2:13-22; 4:1-42; 7:37-39; 14:23; 19:34-37.

(1) **John 1:14** Jesus, Who was known as the eternal Divine Word, before

the creation of the world, became embodied in human flesh. He added on the human nature (Philippians 2:5-11). The word “dwelt” is the same Greek word that is used for pitching the tabernacle. Essentially, God pitched His tent among us through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

(2) **John 1:50-51** Jesus referred back to the Old Testament episode of Jacob (Genesis 28:10-22). Jacob named the place “*Bethel*,” which means “house of God” after what he encountered there. Jesus, being both God and man, is the true fulfillment of Jacob’s dream in that He serves as the true intersection point between Heaven and Earth. He is the true presence of God Who came to dwell among humanity.

(3) **John 2:13-22** The Jews asked for a sign when questioning Jesus’ authority to cleanse the physical Temple in Jerusalem. The sign Jesus would give them in verse 19 was, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” John clarified for his readers what Jesus really meant in verse 21. “*But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*” Jesus was the true temple of God because He is the true glorious presence of Deity Himself Who was to be resurrected back to life on the third day.

(4) **John 4:1-42** Jesus requested a drink from a Samaritan woman beside Jacob’s well (John 4:6-7). He wanted to help this woman realize His true identity. When the conversation came to the point that revealed she was living immorally (John 4:16-18), she decided to switch the subject to religion because she perceived Jesus to be a prophet (John 4:19). Mount Gerizim was where the Samaritans worshipped, and Jerusalem was where the Jews worshipped. It is not certain whether she was trying to prove Jesus was wrong or she was inquiring about where God ought to be worshipped, since she did not ask it in a form of a question.

At that time, Jerusalem was the authorized place of worship under the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 12:5-11; 1 Kings 8:1-66). In the age of the New Covenant, it would not matter because it is not about the physical location of worship anymore (John 4:23-24). When a person trusts and obeys the Gospel, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit dwell in fellowship with the baptized believer through his or her intellectual, emotional and volitional faculties in which we allow God to rule and control our lives by imbibing His personality in our growth in His Word that is applied to our lives (2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 John 4:15,16).

(5) **John 7:37-39** When Jesus ascended into Heaven, He did send forth the power of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles (Acts 1:9-11; 2:1-4). The apostles were equipped directly to teach the message of inspiration that would serve them in teaching the life-giving Gospel message, which can change and transform lives added to the temple of God – the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22).

Other verses, such as John 14:23 and John 19:34-37 should be studied with the temple imagery in mind.

Conclusion

There are other theological themes you can study on your own time that show that these concepts are simple, yet they are also deep in meaning when studied in light of the Gospel of John and the whole Bible.

(a) **“light”** (John 1:4, 7; 3:19-21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46) and **“darkness”** (John 1:5; 3:19; 6:17; 8:12; 12:35, 46; 20:1).

(b) **“witness”** (John 1:7-8, 15, 32; 3:11, 28; 5:31, 36; 8:13-14, 18; 10:25; 12:17; 15:27; 18:23, 37) and (c) **“testimony”** (John 1:19; 3:32, 33; 5:34; 8:17; 19:35; 21:24)

(d) **“believe”** (John 1:7, 12, 50; 2:11, 22-23; 3:12, 15-16, 18, 36; 4:21, 39, 41, 43, 48, 50, 53; 5:24, 38, 44, 46; 6:29-30, 35, 40, 47, 64, 69; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:24, 30-31, 45; 9:18, 35, 38; 10:25, 37, 42; 11:15, 25, 27, 40, 42, 45, 48; 12:11, 36-37, 39, 42, 44, 46; 13:19; 14:1, 10-12, 29; 16:9, 27, 30-31; 17:8, 20, 35; 20:8, 25, 27, 29, 31)

(e) **“world”** (John 1:9-10, 29; 3:16-17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 7:4, 7; 8:12, 23, 26; 9:5, 32, 39; 10:36; 11:9, 27; 12:19, 25, 31, 46; 13:1; 14:17, 19, 22, 27, 30-31; 15:18; 16:8, 11, 20-21, 28, 33; 17:5-6, 9, 11-16, 18, 21, 23-25; 18:20, 36-37; 21:25)

(f) **“sign”** (2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30)

(g) **“truth or true”** (John 1:14, 17; 3:21; 4:23-24; 5:33; 8:32, 40, 44-46; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 17:17, 19; 18:37-38; 19:35; 1:9; 3:33; 4:23; 4:37; 5:31; 6:32; 7:18, 28; 8:13-14, 16-17, 26; 10:41; 15:1; 17:3; 19:35; 21:24)

(h) **“glory”** (1:14; 2:11; 7:18; 8:50; 9:24; 11:4; 11:40; 12:41; 17:5, 22, 24)✚

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1932—2008

What Are God's Laws Concerning Marriage?

J.C. Choate

What does the Bible say about marriage, divorce, remarriage and adultery [live-in relationships]? It is important that we study these matters since the world has become so liberal in its attitude toward marriage. Everywhere, the percentage of marriages that end in divorce is growing rapidly. This means that families are broken, for whatever reason, and, in many cases, there is a second marriage. The result is that children are tossed about, left without security and permanently damaged emotionally. As this continues in the years to come, can you imagine the kind of world in which we are going to find ourselves?

In recent years, many enemies have been unleashed on the home and family. Increasingly, live-in relationships – openly living together and having children without bothering to be lawfully married – have become the norm, especially among many young people. The unadmitted underlying reason is that the *union* probably will not be for a lifetime, and going separate ways will not entail the expense and ramifications of a divorce. So, just *live together, come-and-go and enjoy life.*” Marriage and family life are ridiculed as being old fashioned and out of date, and this *new way* is more sensible. Homosexuality is also held up as being an alternative lifestyle. In this age, there is no shame in engaging in whatever physical relationship one chooses. If *love* is involved, *nothing is wrong.*

Among the unmarried, as well as the married, abortion is openly practiced, with no shame, no feeling of guilt and with the acceptance of the world. A few years ago, to have an abortion was not only a disgrace, but it was illegal; now, **this form of murder is legal**. The result has been the taking of multiplied millions of innocent lives. It shows how far man's *culture* has gone, but **it is in the wrong direction**.

God has spoken on these matters, and it is time that we take note of what the Bible teaches, show respect for it and obey the Lord. To fail to do so ensures trouble for ourselves in this life and in the eternal life to come. The Bible says that whatever we sow, we shall also reap; if we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption (Galatians 6:7-8).

Remember that in the beginning, God created man, but it was not good for man to be alone, and so He proclaimed, “...*I will make him a helper comparable to him*” (Genesis 2:18 NKJV). We read on.

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. And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24).

You will note that the passage says it was not good for man to be alone, so then, it is clearly stated that God made a woman to be with the man. It is, of course, possible for man to go through life without a wife, or for a woman to go through life without a husband,

but they are not complete alone, that is, alone they cannot reproduce as God



intended. Thus, man and woman become complete or one flesh when they are united. They can have children without being married, but to have God's approval and to be able to live together lawfully with all of the privileges that go with a legal union, they must commit themselves to one another for life, obeying the law of God and the law of man. **This is called marriage.**

Please notice, too, that man should leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife that they might be one flesh. It is possible for a newly married couple to make their home with their parents for a number of reasons, but this is not advised because usually the parents will continue to look on the newlyweds as their *children*, telling them what to do or not to do, and so on. This might work out all right in the beginning, but the longer it goes on the more difficult it becomes, especially on the wife. Therefore it is better for a newly married couple to leave their parents and go out on their own to have their own place, to work and to provide for their own needs. Remember, the Lord created man and woman, and He knows what is best for them. Paul, in talking about the church in its relationship with Christ – the church as the bride, and Christ as the bridegroom – quotes from the Genesis record when he says, ***“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”*** (Ephesians 5:31).

When we turn to Matthew 19, we find the Pharisees, a religious sect of that day, coming to Jesus to tempt Him by asking Him, ***“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”*** (Matthew 19:3). Reading on, Jesus responded by saying,

...“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” (Matthew 19:4-6).

Please notice that Jesus went all the way back to the beginning of God's dealing with man and of man's relationship with woman. In doing that, He was saying that what was true in the beginning was still true. He also made it clear that when man and woman come together in marriage, God recognizes them to be “one flesh,” and therefore whatever God has

joined together then let not man put asunder, separate and destroy.

The Pharisees, then, came back and wanted to know, “...*Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?*” (Matthew 19:7). With this question, they thought they had trapped Jesus in a contradiction. Jesus was saying that whatever God had joined together, no man should put asunder, but **Moses had allowed a writing of divorcement**. Then Jesus explained, “...*Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so*” (Matthew 19:8). He was saying that Moses – and God – had tolerated this for that time, but that from the beginning it was not God’s will for man and woman to divorce. Then Christ backed up His answer by saying, “*And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery*” (Matthew 19:9). Now let us make some observations from this statement:

- 1. It has always been God’s will, from the beginning to the present day, that there should be but one man and one woman in marriage, and the marriage should be for a lifetime.** Marriage is a serious thing and should not be entered into lightly. It should be a permanent bond.
- 2. There is only one thing that can break a marriage, as long as both the husband and wife are still living, and that is unfaithfulness or fornication on the part of the husband or the wife.** When one or the other is immoral with some other man or woman, then the marriage contract is broken. Even then, the guilty party may ask for forgiveness, and the innocent party may forgive his or her companion. In that case, the marriage can be saved. However, if circumstances are such that the guilty party refuses to make things right, then the innocent party may put the guilty party away through divorce.
- 3. Only the innocent party is free to marry again, provided the innocent party marries someone who has not been married before, or marries an innocent party of a similar situation. However, the guilty party cannot marry again.** If the guilty party marries, he or she commits adultery, and the one who marries the guilty party commits adultery. Adultery is a term that defines an unlawful or unscriptural

tural marriage relationship. It might seem harsh to say that the guilty party cannot marry again, but that is the penalty for sin.

Also, once one commits adultery, the only way that individual can be forgiven is to repent, to leave that adulterous union. Yet, someone may ask, “What if children are involved?” It should be pointed out that **having children does not justify an adulterous relationship**. It is true that sometimes innocent people must suffer the consequences for the sins of others, but God will not forgive sin until it is repented of in obedience to His law.

Paul taught that a man and a woman are bound together in lawful marriage until one or the other dies. Then he wrote, *“But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress,*



though she has married another man” (Romans 7:2-3). Paul later spoke of a widow, saying, *“A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 7:39). Although the wife is free to marry again, once her husband dies, the same would be true of the husband, if the wife died.

So, what is the conclusion in all of this? The conclusion is that God has a law concerning marriage, and man and woman must abide by that law. To ignore it is to sin against God and oneself. It is only when we respect God’s will in marriage, and comply with it, that we can have a good marriage and a good family life. †

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We Have Only Three Days

Byron Nichols

You may not realize this, but it is a fact that **we all have only three days** about which to be concerned in this lifetime. Those who make the most of these three days will be happy, successful and richly rewarded. These days are **yesterday, today and tomorrow.**

Learning from **YESTERDAY**

In Genesis 30:27, Laban spoke to his son-in-law Jacob about having *“learned by experience”* (NKJV). We read in Job 32:7 that *“...days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom”* (KJV). The Lord desires and expects us to learn from our experiences of **yesterday** or the past.

By using yesterday as an educational experience, we will succeed in doing what the Lord wants of us, and that is to become more and more like Christ each day (2 Corinthians 4:16). This will only happen, though, if we learn from yesterday. If we fail to learn from our experience – our yesterday – we cannot be given the grace that is necessary for salvation. *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* (Romans 6:1-2 NKJV).

We must do better; we must grow. Yesterday is to be our teacher. Someone playfully groaned, “Yesterday was such a bad day that even my twin sister forgot my birthday!” The truth is that we **can** and **must** learn from even our bad yesterdays. Only the unwise fail to learn from the yesterdays of their lives.

Living **TODAY** to the Fullest

There is a saying about today that is unfortunately true for many people.

It goes like this: “Today is the tomorrow we worried about yesterday.” Today I have today. Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow may never be, but I have today. So, the question becomes, “What will I do with it?” Psalm 118:24 offers inspired advice on the question, saying, ***“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.”***

It is foolish and unprofitable to try to live either in the past or in the future. We can benefit from the past, and we need to plan for the future, but today is what we have. It has been said that “Yesterday is a cancelled check. Tomorrow is a promissory note. Today is ready cash. Use it wisely.”



There needs to be within each one of us, not a frenzy or turmoil, but a sense of urgency to live today and every day as an offering of gratitude to the Lord for what He did for us by dying for us, and also with the realization that we will one day stand before Him in the Judgment.

We would do well to heed the words of David in Psalm 90:12, where it reads, ***“So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*** A wise fellow by the name of Benjamin Franklin asked, “Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that’s the stuff life is made of.” Living today to the fullest can help us be ready for tomorrow.

Leaning on God for TOMORROW

There have been a good many folks who have offered their words of wisdom regarding tomorrow, some of it good and some not so good. Mark Twain facetiously advised, “Never put off till tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow.” Let me share some much better advice in regard to tomorrow. In Proverbs 27:1, the wise man Solomon cautioned, *“Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.”* Jesus added these words of wisdom when He said, *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”* (Matthew 6:34). The Lord teaches us to lean on Him, to trust Him and to put His ways and His kingdom first in our lives (Matthew 6:25-34).

Tomorrow is definitely the most important day we have never had. By leaning on God for tomorrow, we can have peace today, and we can have rest tonight. I came across some advice that I believe is appropriate regarding our days.

Take time to work – it is the price of success.

Take time to think – it is the source of power.

Take time to play – it the secret of youth.

Take time to read – it is the foundation of knowledge.

Take time to laugh – it is the music of the soul.

Take time to be courteous – it is the work of a gentleman.

Take time to pray – it is the Christian’s vital breath.

If we will live today in keeping with knowledge and wisdom acquired from experiences (both good and bad) from yesterday, we can look toward tomorrow with faith and confidence. †

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**Yesterday Is History
Tomorrow Is a Mystery
& Today Is a Gift!
That's Why We Call It - THE PRESENT**

WHO CAN BE SAVED?

THOSE WHO OBEY THE TRUTH

ROMANS 2:8, "BUT TO THOSE WHO ARE SELF-SEEKING AND DO NOT OBEY THE TRUTH, BUT OBEY UNRIGHTEOUSNESS—INDIGNATION AND WRATH TRIBULATION AND ANGUISH, ON EVERY SOUL OF MAN WHO DOES EVIL, OF THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO OF THE GREEK."

HEBREWS 5:9, "AND HAVING BEEN PERFECTED, HE BECAME THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL SALVATION TO ALL WHO OBEY HIM."

[HEAR (JOHN 6:45), BELIEVE (JOHN 8:24), REPENT (LUKE 13:3-5), CONFESS THE LORD (ACTS 8:37), BE BAPTIZED (1 PETER 3:21)]

THOSE WHO ARE ADDED TO THE LORD'S CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS BODY

ACTS 2:41,47, "THEN THOSE WHO GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD WERE BAPTIZED; AND THAT DAY ABOUT THREE THOUSAND SOULS WERE ADDED TO THEM. 47) PRAISING GOD AND HAVING FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD ADDED TO THE CHURCH DAILY

THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED." **EPHESIANS 5:23**, "FOR THE HUSBAND IS HEAD OF THE WIFE, AS ALSO CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH; AND HE IS THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY."

THOSE WHO ARE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

HEBREWS 3:12-13, "BEWARE, BRETHREN, LEST THERE BE IN ANY OF YOU AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF IN DEPARTING FROM THE LIVING GOD; 13) BUT EXHORT ONE ANOTHER DAILY, WHILE IT IS CALLED 'TODAY,' LEST ANY OF YOU BE HARDENED THROUGH THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN."

ROMANS 2:6-7 "WHO [GOD] 'WILL RENDER TO EACH ONE ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS': 7) ETERNAL LIFE TO

THOSE WHO BY PATIENT CONTINUANCE IN DOING GOOD SEEK FOR GLORY, HONOR, AND IMMORTALITY..."

**ARE YOU DOING YOUR PART TO
KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT
IN THE BOND OF PEACE?
EPHESIANS 4:1-6**

All I Need to Know about Life I Learned from Jesus

Rebecca Rushmore

- I know I'm special because Jesus loves me (John 3:16).
- Jesus is happy when I obey my parents and play well with others (Ephesians 6:1).
- When I am kind to others, I am following Jesus' example (Matthew 7:12).
- I must be an example to others as Jesus is my example (1 Corinthians 11:1).
- My sins caused Jesus to die (Romans 5:6-8).
- Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice, so I should be willing to sacrifice for others (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).
- Jesus spent his life teaching others the way of salvation. I must be willing to do the same (Mark 16:15-16).

Children begin learning at birth. They immediately begin accumulating information. This data comes from all five senses. As the child grows, the acquired facts are related to each other in a way that becomes meaningful. For example, a baby hears the sounds of words everyday. Soon, the words come to have meaning. The child will respond to his name being called. Eventually, the baby begins to say the words himself to get a response (asking for a drink). The words that are used around the child become part of his vocabulary.

Many parents do not feel the need to bring their children to Bible class. Some believe that newborns and very young children will get nothing out of the class. This, however, is not true. All children, even newborn babies, can greatly benefit from attending Bible class. Consider, for a moment, the lines above.

I know I'm special because Jesus loves me. One song most every

GOD

child can sing is “Jesus Loves Me.” In the beginning, young children may not understand the full meaning of the words. As they grow, the words will begin to have a strong meaning for them. Everyone needs to feel special – loved. This is a good beginning. Knowing that Jesus loves me can be some very powerful words through the tough growing years to come. If the child is taught this concept early, it will remain with him even through the difficult times.

Jesus is happy when I obey my parents and play well with others.

Toddlers can learn the difference between happy and sad. They know when they do something that does not make Mommy or Daddy happy. Young children learn to play nicely with others. When children can relate these concepts to what they know– real people – it makes sense to apply this knowledge to Jesus. Let children know



that they can please Jesus. Name things that make parents happy and tell them these things also make Jesus happy. Use these ideas to begin teaching obedience to God at an early age. Consider the examples set by Hannah (1 Samuel 1) and Timothy’s mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5).


When I am kind to others, I am following Jesus’ example. I must be an example to others as Jesus is my example. As children grow, they can comprehend increasingly difficult topics. Show from the Scriptures how Jesus treated others. Let students know that Jesus is our example and we should follow Him. List ways that students can be kind to others. The age of the child will determine the type of things he can do.

GOD

My sins caused Jesus to die. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice, so I should be willing to sacrifice for others. Discuss sin in terms the children can understand. (Sin is breaking the rules.) Talk about sacrifice in general and the sacrifice Jesus made. (Sacrifice is giving up something you want or need so someone else can have something they want or need. Jesus gave up Heaven so man could have eternal life and forgiveness from sins.) Children need to know that there are things they must do to please God and some of these things may not be pleasant. They should also be taught responsibility and consequences for their actions.

Jesus spent his life teaching others the way of salvation. I must be willing to do the same. As children grow, their understanding of their responsibility to God grows as well. Bible students should be taught God's plan for their life. Help them to keep in mind that Jesus is the best example we have. He spent His whole life preparing the world for His kingdom. This should be important enough to us that we do the same.

The different statements discussed here are but a few of the basic concepts that can be easily taught to children. An infant cannot be expected to immediately understand the meat of God's Word. Children must start with the basics. If they are not taught at a young age about Christ, when they are older they will have no foundation on which to build for the meat (Hebrews 5:12-14). Start teaching children from birth about the love Jesus has for them. As they grow, include simple ideas on how to please God. Gradually increase their knowledge of God's will for man. When the children are older, begin teaching them about the awesome sacrifice Christ made and our necessary response to that sacrifice.

Children are never too young to learn about Christ. In fact, the sooner they are taught, the better their foundation will be. God instructed the Israelites on how to teach their children in preparing for the coming of the Savior (Deuteronomy 6:4-7). Can it be any less important to instruct them about the Savior now that He has died for us? 

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GOD

I Saw the Light and Was Glad

Aaron Cozort



...Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance [patience, KJV], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. (Hebrews 10:35-36 NKJV)


This morning, I was driving east as the sunlight was beginning to shine over the ridge. The spectacle was beautiful. The sun was at the perfect angle to send rays of light across the sky in streams while still being below the horizon in other areas. Our Father's creation is magnificent. Habakkuk prophesied about God as if His presence were the sun itself.

God came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, And there His power was hidden. (Habakkuk 3:3-4)


When we see the sun rays on a calm, cool morning, we know Who exists and Who reigns supreme over the day and the night.


GOD

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. (Psalm 19:1-6)

As a child of God serving Him faithfully, take comfort each new day as God continues to send sunshine and rain on the just and on the unjust. ***“That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”*** (Matthew 5:45). 

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5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

Kingdom Coming

Paula Bates

1. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste _____ till they see the _____ of God. Luke 9:27
2. But _____ said to him, “No one having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of _____.” Luke 9:62
3. But he [Jesus] said to them, “ I must _____ the kingdom of God to the other _____ also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” Luke 4:43
4. But _____ the kingdom of God, and _____ these things shall be _____ to you. “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good _____ to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:31-32
5. “The law and the _____ were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and _____ is pressing into it.” Luke 16:16
6. But when they believed Phillip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of _____, both men and women were baptized. Acts 8:12



4. Seek, all, added, pleasure
5. Prophets, everyone
6. Jesus Christ,

Answers:
1. Death, kingdom
2. Jesus, God
3. Preach, cities

THE WORD OF GOD

This obscure family of ours was early in the Reformation, and continued Protestants through the reign of Queen Mary, when they were sometimes in danger of trouble on account of their zeal against popery. They had got an English Bible, and to conceal and secure it, it was fastened open with tape under and within the cover of a joint-stool. When my great-grandfather read it to his family,

he turned up the joint-stool upon his knees, turning over the leaves then under the tapes. One of the children stood at the door to give notice if he saw the apparitor coming, who was an officer of the spiritual court. In that case the stool was turned down again upon its feet, when the Bible remained concealed under it as before.

This story is given by the hand of Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography.

We live in a time that is unparalleled insofar as access to information and learning. Scholars and philosophers alike would have treasured our libraries and bookstores. The Internet has moved thousands of instructors into our living rooms and dens to be at our beck and call. The instructions of Aristotle are at our fingertips; we may *listen* to Cicero's masterful orations,



The Bible under the Stool

Ed Melott

THE WORD OF GOD

be entertained by the works of Shakespeare or follow Don Quixote on one of his journeys. We have no fear that someone will confiscate and burn our books or seize our Bibles.

Yet, our society is guilty of the crime of neglect and laziness. It is felonious in the way we have abandoned the reading and study of the great thinkers and writers of antiquity. How much more is it a travesty for our Bibles to be left unread? Truly, Israel was **“destroyed for lack of knowledge”** (Hosea 4:6 NKJV), not because God’s Word was inaccessible, but rather because it was **“rejected”** (Hosea 4:6). Spiritual Israel has learned from her ancestors and is today nearly biblically illiterate. No more is the Lord’s church comprised of *Bible toting, Bible quoting people*.

We have forgotten the truth described by Henry Van Dyke. He wrote of the influence of the Holy Volume and recommended to us its contents. He wrote:

It comes into the palace to tell the monarch that he is the servant of the Most High, and into the cottage to assure the peasant that he is the son of God. Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and wise men ponder them as parables of life. It has a word of peace for the time of peril, a word of comfort for the day of calamity, a word of light for the hour of darkness. (Lappin 31)

No longer must we hide our Bibles, as did Ben Franklin’s ancestors, or conceal our faith in the Almighty! Let us resolve to read the Bible, study its contents intently, believe its words and practice its principles. A day should not pass in which we have failed to read our Bibles. Lay this article aside; pick up the Oracles of God and allow the Divine Author room in your minds and a place in your hearts. You will soon agree with the Psalmist when he wrote of God’s Words, **“More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb”** (Psalm 19:10 ESV). †

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Ed Melott preaches for the Lubeck Church of Christ, Parkersburg, West Virginia, USA.

THE WORD OF GOD

Good News from a Far Country

Ernest S. Underwood

It is always good and pleasant to hear good news, and especially so if it comes from one who is far away. Solomon described it in Proverbs 25:25. *“As cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a far country”* (NKJV). As I have been privileged to travel into



different parts of the world, I have always tried to call home. It is always good to hear from loved ones and to know that all is well. I remember receiving the news that my wife and I had another grandson, this while we were living in Singapore. What wonderful news! The soldier in the field is cheered by mail from home, especially if it contains news that is good.

The greatest news that has ever come to man came from a “far country” – Heaven. That good news is the Bible – God’s Holy Word! In it one learns of the provisions God has made to save fallen man. It tells of man’s redemption through God’s only begotten Son. It tells of God’s willingness to forgive the vilest sinner if that sinner will simply accept the terms of the Good News – the Gospel – for that is what the word “Gospel” means. This news tells man of the promise of an eternal home with God, a place so beautiful that the human mind can scarcely comprehend it.

Have you heard the Good News? Have you obeyed its terms? Are you spreading that news to sinful man? Hear it, heed it, and then, tell it to others! ✝

Ernest S. Underwood is a preacher as well as a missionary to India. He resides in Eliljaj Georgia, USA.

THE WORD OF GOD

Divine Dining - No Fast Food

Marilyn LaSrape

The Bible overflows with the commanding message of seeking after and searching for God. Knowledge of divinity is eternally imperative. When Moses asked God the question about His name, He said, **“I AM WHO I AM”** (Exodus 3:14 NKJV). From that timeless declaration of God’s divine identity, He has continued to declare that He **is** the LORD, the Great I AM.

Since we are the highest of His creation, God wants us to know who He is. He wants us to know why we are here, where we are going, how we will get there and when this will happen. The short answer is that **we are here to prepare ourselves to spend eternity with God and teach others to want to do the same.** God has provided the answers to all these questions in His Word, the Bible, and these answers take time to study and to learn. When we become God’s spiritual children, we will spend the remainder of our lives in His divine dining room with His Word. Are we willing to invest ourselves in the study of the Bible to learn Who God is and to understand His expectations of us as His children? Do we realize that time invested is crucial to our relationship with God while the fast food mentality is useless? If so, we will conclude that **time spent with God is always time well spent.**

In her book, *Impossible*, Casandra Martin writes:

The Bible is a catalog of the Possible. From the opening words to the closing Amen, the pages are filled with descriptions, details, promises, prophecies, and blueprints for the Possibles that God wants to work in our lives. Immersing ourselves in His Word will help us stand against the Impossible that press against our heart. (182)

David said in Psalm 37:3-5, **“Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.”** There will be no trust and no commitment to someone we do not know. It

THE WORD OF GOD

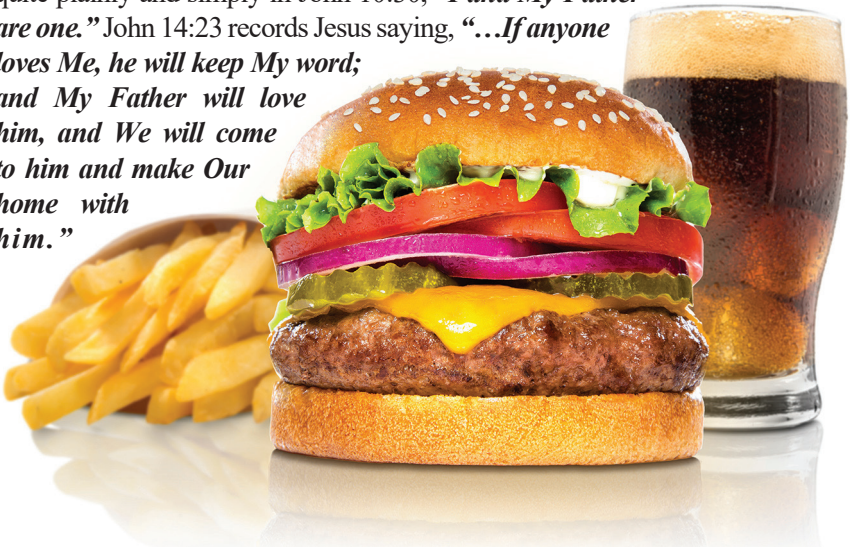
takes time to get to know the Supreme Being. God has revealed everything we need to know about Him and how He deals with us.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 declares:

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.”

Proverbs 9:10 states, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* Gaining biblical wisdom and knowledge is found nowhere else but in the **Bible!** We must first have a fervent desire to gain this biblical wisdom and knowledge. We must understand the purpose of this mental transformation in our thinking, talking and acting, as we get to know God. The purpose is for us to embrace the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Getting to know God inherently means getting to know His Son. Jesus said quite plainly and simply in John 10:30, *“I and My Father are one.”* John 14:23 records Jesus saying, *“...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”*



THE WORD OF GOD

To know Jesus is to know the One who gave His life for all people. One writer said the Bible has a three-fold message. From Genesis-Malachi the message is “Jesus is Coming!” From Matthew to Acts 1:8, the message is “Jesus is Here!” From Acts 1:9 to Revelation, the message is “Jesus is Coming Again!”

Before Jesus went to the cross, He prayed for Himself, His apostles and all of us. John 17:1-5 records:

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

As Jesus gave John instructions to the seven churches of Asia, our Lord extended the invitation above all invitations to the lukewarm church at Laodicea. In Revelation 3:19-20 Jesus said, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”*

Dining with Divinity takes time. There is no place for the fast-food approach in building a lifelong relationship between the Father and His children. **Through God’s strength and power, we will withstand the raging storms of life’s traumas, tests, temptations, tribulations and tragedies. The goal is to continue to overcome them all – time and time again until Heaven is finally our home!** †

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Marilyn LaStrape is a Christian writer and author who resides in Hewitt, Texas, USA.



Bible Find

Martha Rushmore

Across

- 1 Samson tied 300 tails of what animal together? 15:4
- 3 Samson posed a riddle to how many men? 14:11-12
- 5 Who had rule over Judah? 15:11
- 6 What vow was made for Samson before he was born? 13:5
- 9 What did Samson call his wife? 14:18
- 12 Samson killed 1000 men with the jawbone of what animal? 15:15
- 14 What did Samson want in Timnah from the Philistine nation? 14:2
- 15 Where did Samson go and kill 30 men for their garments? 14:19
- 16 Samson found a swarm of bees and what else in the carcass of the lion? 14:8

Down

- 1 Samson's wife was given to his companion by her _____. 15:2
- 2 Who was given Samson's wife? 14:20
- 4 Samson set fire on shocks, standing grain olive groves and what else? 15:5
- 7 Samson's wife was given to another, supposing that Samson _____ her. 15:2
- 8 Who was Samson's father? 13:2-3
- 10 The men told Samson's wife to



- do what to Samson, so they would have the answer to the riddle? 14:15
- 11 What was on the torch Samson put to the 300 foxtails? 15:4
- 13 What animal did Samson kill and tear apart with his hands? 14:6

See inside back cover for the solution.


EVIDENCES

The Sun, the Moon and the Bible's Inspiration

Terry Wheeler

“The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Acts 2:20 NKJV). *“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the full moon became like blood...”* (Revelation 6:12 ESV). The holy Bible has long been called an ancient book of superstitions, myths and fables. The unbeliever refuses to give the Bible credence or credibility as something that should be taken seriously. Then, one comes to these very interesting verses. Mostly rejected as figurative at best, these prophetic utterances have been around for thousands of years. In fact, in Acts 2, Peter quoted Joel 2:31, which uses the same terms.

We all know when there is a **solar eclipse**. At that time, the sun goes dark to us because the moon passes between the sun and the earth. However, during a **lunar eclipse**, the earth obscures the light of the sun for the moon, turning the moon red due to refracted light passing by the earth. In other words, **when the sun goes dark for the moon** because of the earth, **the moon turns red!** Incidentally, it must be full to do so.

How were the Bible's penmen, so long ago, able to know this, because the how and the why the full lunar eclipse occurs can only be seen from outer space (Sauers)? The only reasonable answer is that God told them. We have only recently begun to figure it out! Certainly, God's Word is truth (John 17:17)! 

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Terry Wheeler preaches for the Village Church of Christ in Lady Lake, Florida, USA.

EVIDENCES

The Leafcutter Bee

Dave Everson

When God created the creatures of the field during the week of creation, He made a whole host of amazing creatures that included the insects. Among the multitudes of insects God created are some creatures that almost defy imagination. Among those is a member of the bee family – the leafcutter bee – that is largely unknown by most people. Let’s take a look at the some of the amazing features of this creature.

As a fairly un-remarkable bee, it is many times overlooked as just a fly. They are about $\frac{2}{3}$ the size of a common honeybee and not as colorful. The leafcutter bee has an abdomen that is covered with many bristles – called scopa, which are used to carry



pollen. This makes spreading pollen easier from one flower to another, which makes the leafcutter bee one of a gardener’s best pollinators. In fact, the US Agricultural Research Service says that in the alfalfa fields and in greenhouses, one leafcutter bee can do the job of at least twenty honeybees! So, it is a very important insect for farmers’ crops.

The leafcutter bee is a solitary bee, unlike most bees with which we are familiar, like the honeybee. Living a solo lifestyle causes all responsibilities that are normally shared by members of a hive to be done by the female. Even more unusual is the fact that males of the species live for just a few weeks and have only one function – reproduction. The female leafcutter bee serves as the drone, worker and queen, which makes her remarkably busy indeed. Because

EVIDENCES

of everything she has to do, she does not live far from where the pollen is located, and most of the time, she has a range of only about 300 feet. This also keeps her so busy that she is not interested in aggression, which would distract her from other important tasks. Therefore, they rarely sting.

The work ethic of the leafcutter bee female is only part of the amazing features of this creation. The name of this bee comes from its unusual method of nest building. The female will make several nest chambers in holes in wood, hollow tubes and other small round openings, including the ends of water hoses. This nest chamber is lined with pieces of leaves, that as its name implies, are cut from plants in the area. These are arranged inside of the hollow nest area as a structure that resembles a rolled cigar. The egg chamber nest is wrapped up in the leaves into which she deposits pollen and a single egg. Then, she separates one nest chamber from another with another cut leaf. The larva will use the pollen as a food source as it grows and then exit as the food runs out about when it matures.

The ability of this industrious female leafcutter bee to collect food, pollinate so many flowers in the process due to the bristles of the scopa, search out suitable hollow locations, build multiple nests by cutting hundreds of leaf pieces, stocking the nest chambers with food and lay eggs is incredible. These amazing abilities given by the Creator are all passed on in the DNA blueprint as the young bees never see their mother, and consequently, they have no one from whom they can learn. So, let's always praise the Creator as we observe His handiwork around us (Romans 1:20; Psalm 33:6-9). ✝

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.



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Does It Matter?

Paul Marty



Does it matter to us that Jesus left Heaven and came here to live as one of us? Does it matter to us that He lived a perfect, sinless life here? Does it matter to us that Jesus sacrificed Himself for us on the cross so that we could have freedom from the slavery to sin?

“Yes” to all of the above; they matter. The real question, then, is **“How much does it matter?”** Does it matter enough to put Jesus Christ first in our lives (Matthew 6:33), to study His Word (2 Timothy 2:15), to pray always (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to take the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), to give on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) and to walk in the light (1 John 1:7)?

Does it matter enough to be faithful to death (Revelation 2:10)? Let’s challenge ourselves to think, to talk and to live in a way that shows full appreciation for the freedom (salvation) we have in Christ. 

Paul Marty resides in Bellaire, Ohio, USA.

SALVATION

Why Some Are Not Saved

Edward Anderson

It grieves God that myriads of people are lost. He paid the ultimate price for our sins, through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, so that all might be saved (John 3:16; Romans 5:8-9; 2 Peter 3:9). What are some reasons, then, why multitudes remain in their sins and will be eternally lost (Mathew 7:13-14)?

Some have allowed the devil to snatch the Word out of their hearts (Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:12). He cunningly deceives them with his “thou shall not’s” as he did with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:4-5). He is called *“the great dragon,” “that old serpent”* and *“the Devil and Satan who deceives the whole world”* for good reason (Revelation 12:9).

Some, not loving truth, even to the point of despising it, have been deceived. Paul graphically described such a process along with its results (2 Thessalonians 2:3-15). They exchange the truth for the “pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:12).

Some simply love sin (John 3:19). Our current culture reflects the words of the Lord, for we surely live in a time wherein people are thrilled by the “darkness” of sin rather than the “light” of truth! A large segment of the populace revels in unrighteousness.

Some follow man’s religion instead of following Jesus (Matthew 10:37-38). It may be the religion of one’s parents, as seen in the above text. It may be the religion of a favorite theologian or philosopher. Whoever it may be, there is no substitute for **the Christ**. In Him alone is salvation found and are all spiritual blessings enjoyed (Acts 4:12; Ephesians 1:3).

Some mistakenly trust in their personal morality to save them (Romans 1:16; Ephesians 5:23). The centurion Cornelius was of impeccable character and morality, and yet, it was necessary for him to hear, believe

SALVATION

and obey the Gospel to be saved (Acts 10:1-4, 22, 33, 43, 47; 11:14).



Some diligently seek the praises of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43). Many crave the praise of their peers. It has long been and continues to be the goal of a large segment of humanity. Trading God’s approval for the praise of man is not a smart decision (2 Timothy 2:15; Matthew 16:24-26).

Some just neglect salvation (Hebrews 2:3). Though of vital importance, religion is allowed to slide to the *back burner* – *if not completely off the stove!* Lots of folks talk about their “bucket list,” but when it comes to spiritual things, their buckets have no bottom! Sadly, this phenomenon is not just true of “worldlings,” but it is also true of many *church members*. The writer of Hebrews was, after all, writing to Christians!

Let us ever be on guard and never neglect the “great salvation” only realized and received in Christ! †

Edward Anderson preaches for the Carthage church of Christ in Carthage, Tennessee, USA.

SALVATION

The Valley of Decision

Nat Evans

We read in Joel 3:14, *“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision”* (NKJV). Man is a creature of choice, and throughout life, he will be faced with many decisions. Some of these, of course, will be more critical than others and will carry greater consequences. Each person must realize that he is responsible for his own life and for making his own personal decisions. This is especially true with regard to those that have a direct bearing upon one’s soul and where he will be in eternity when his life on earth has ended. *“Then the dust [body] will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it”* (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Also read Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.

Will I Make the Decision to Serve God or Satan?

As accountable beings, we have the capability of making this choice. Notice what Joshua said in Joshua 24:14-15. *“Now therefore fear Jehovah, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt; and serve ye Jehovah. And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.”* Please notice that the decision was in their hands. **God does not force anyone to serve Him**, but He will richly reward those who do. Those who choose to do otherwise will be punished. They bring ruin upon their own heads, which could have been avoided. *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9), *“who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4).

So, you see, God’s ideal will is that all men might be saved, but He knows that man’s freedom of choice is involved and cannot be violated.

SALVATION

Therefore, God provided a way for men to be reconciled to Him, by inviting men to come to Him upon His terms. Man can be saved if he is willing to comply with God's terms. Those who stubbornly refuse will be lost.

Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). *“Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation”* (Hebrews 5:8-9). Read Acts 2:37-47 and 1 Peter 1:22.

Will I Obey the Gospel of Christ or Wait Till It Is Too Late?

Peter asked the important question in 1 Peter 4:17. *“What shall be the end of all those that obey not the gospel of God?”* The apostle Paul answered that in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. *“And to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”* With one's soul in the balance, and Heaven and Hell at issue, why would one wait another day? **What is more important than your soul? †**

Nat Evan preaches for the churches of Christ in the USA.

Verse Search



2 CORINTHIANS 5: 1-11

Jerry Bates

1. What did Paul say that we have from God once this body is destroyed? (5:1)
2. What did Paul say we should be earnestly desiring? (5:2)
3. Paul said that _____ would be swallowed up by _____. (5:4)
4. What did God give us as a guarantee? (5:5)
5. Paul said that when we are at home in the body, we are _____ from the Lord. (5:6)
6. “For we walk by _____, not by _____. (5:7)
7. What was Paul’s desire regarding this life? (5:8)
8. What was Paul’s aim in this life? (5:9)
9. One day, where will all men appear? (5:10)
10. On that day, what will each one receive? (5:10)
11. While most people think about the love of God, what part of God’s nature did Paul emphasize in this section? (5:11)
12. Due to that part of God’s nature, what did Paul attempt to do to all men? (5:11)
13. To whom did Paul say he was well known? (5:11)

(See the back cover for answers)

VERSE SEARCH

1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. **3** if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. **4** For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. **5** Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. **7** For we walk by faith, not by sight. **8** We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **10** 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. **11** Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.


NOTE: Paul gave Christians comfort and assurance of the coming resurrection. While we suffer in this life and will one day die, we have the assurance that we will have another body, an incorruptible body that is eternal. Paul looked forward to that life, and we should likewise anticipate that time with gladness rather than sadness. Knowing what is in store for Christians gives us hope and comfort in this life. Death is not a great tragedy as we often term it; rather, it is a glorious beginning of a new existence that is much better than this life. This hope gives us motivation to live a life in service to God, knowing that one day we will be with the Lord.

We can be confident of this promise because God has given us His Holy Spirit as a guarantee. We thus serve God by faith. This means that since Christ is not physically present with us, and no one has ever seen God or Heaven, we live by faith. To walk by sight means to live according to our own wisdom or what we can foresee. Paul encouraged Christians to live according to God's Word and His promises. Thereby, He also assures us that we will not be disappointed in what God has prepared for His children.

Paul also warned about a side of God about which men do not often think. Most people always consider God to be a God of love, which is true. However, Paul pointed out that we should also be conscious of the terror of the Lord, because one day all will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and we will be judged according to what we have done in this body. Paul emphasized this same idea in Romans 14:12, which reads, ***“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*** This should not take away our joy but motivate us to live more closely to God.

How Do You Measure Up?

***“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*”**

A silhouette of a person in a prayerful pose, with hands clasped and head bowed, set against a dramatic sunset or sunrise sky with clouds. The person is on the left side of the frame, looking towards the right.

Acts 20:18-24

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

Brian R. Kenyon

God’s “kingdom” is an often-misunderstood concept. “Church of Christ” always means kingdom of God,” but “kingdom of God” does not always mean “church of Christ” (Matthew 5:18-20). **Context must always determine meaning.** Also, the terms “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are interchangeable terms (Matthew 19:23-24). Truly understanding the nature of God’s kingdom will both strengthen the Christian and help to evangelize the lost. This is why God’s kingdom was a staple subject of preaching in the book of Acts (1:3; 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

Meaning of “Kingdom”

“Kingdom” is from a Greek word *basileia*, which means “kingship, royal power, royal rule” (Daniel 4:31, 36). Secondly, it refers to “the territory ruled over by a king.” Therefore, it first means “reign and not realm” (Revelation 11:15). Consider the parables in this light (Matthew 13:11, 24-32). Consider the priority object to be sought in this light (Matthew 6:33). Consider also some difficult “kingdom” passages in this light (Matthew 5:19; 8:11-12; 11:12; Luke 17:20-21). Since the rule of God does not operate in a void, “kingdom” does imply people living under that rule, and hence, the derivative meaning of realm.

“Kingdom” and the Old Testament

Since kingdom primarily means “royal rule,” it is evident that **God has always had a kingdom, although there have been different manifestations of it** (Exodus 15:18). At least some aspect of God’s “kingdom” was a present reality in the faith of the Old Testament. The psalmist declared, *“The Lord has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over*

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all” (Psalm 103:19 NKJV). Also, *“They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, And talk of Your power, To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, And the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations”* (Psalm 145:11-13). That God intended to be the King over His people is clear when Samuel reminded his generation, *“And when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the Lord your God was your king”* (1 Samuel 12:12; 8:7). Even the people of Israel were referred to as the Lord’s kingdom (2 Chronicles 13:8).

Although there was a sense in which God has always had a kingdom (because He has always reigned), there was also in the Old Testament the expectation of a future manifestation of God’s royal rule. This would be a future manifestation of God’s sovereignty when He would exercise kingship in a fuller way (Isaiah 24:23; 33:22; Zephaniah 3:15; Zechariah 14:16-17). This future manifestation was symbolically revealed by the prophets (Joel 2:28, *“afterward”* [Acts 2:16]; Amos 9:11, *“that day”* [Acts 15:16]; Isaiah 2:2, *“the last days,”* Daniel 2:44, *“days of these kings”*). Such prophecies made clear that this final manifestation of God’s kingdom would be established in the last age of human history when the Messiah would reign (*“last days,”* Hebrews 1:1-2).

“Kingdom” and the Church of Christ

The church of Christ is the final manifestation of God’s kingdom this side of eternity. John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord by, among other things, preaching, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”* (Matthew 3:2). Jesus also preached, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). *“At hand”* in most contexts refers to something very near. Jesus affirmed in two verses the nearness of this final manifestation of God’s kingdom. First, in Matthew 16:28, right after promising to build His church, Jesus declared, *“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in*

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His kingdom.” Some of those who heard Jesus, including Peter (Matthew 16:19), would be alive when this “*kingdom*” would come. Then, in Mark 9:1, Jesus said, “*Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.*” Mark also affirmed that some of those who heard Jesus would be alive when this final manifestation of the “*kingdom*” would come, but he also added a detail that the “*kingdom*” would come with “*power.*”

Two passages particularly shed light on this power. According to Luke, Jesus said before ascending, “*Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high*” (Luke 24:49). Jesus also told the apostles before ascending, “*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). Remembering that the kingdom was to come with power, and that the power was to come from the Holy Spirit, a study of Acts 2:1-47 reveals that this final manifestation of God’s “*kingdom*” was established with the establishment of the church (Matthew 16:18-19).

“Kingdom” Is Present Reality


From Acts 2 to the end of the New Testament, God’s kingdom, the church of Christ, is spoken of as a historic fact. Paul told the Colossians that God “*has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (Colossians 1:13). “*Delivered*” and “*conveyed*” [*translated*] KJV deal with past action. Thus, the “*kingdom*” was a present reality when Colossians was written (A.D. 60-61). Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to “*walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory*” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). “*Calls*” indicates the Thessalonians were in the “*kingdom*” when the instruction was given (A.D. 51). Thus, the kingdom had to be in existence at that time! The writer of Hebrews declared, “*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (Hebrews 12:28). In order to receive something, it must be in

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existence! Hebrews was written around A.D. 68 or 69. Thus, the “*kingdom*” was in existence. Finally, from Patmos, John declared, “*I [am]... your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*” (Revelation 1:9). Just as sure as John was on the island of Patmos, he was in the “*kingdom.*” These verses show the “*kingdom*” was already in existence then, which means it is certainly here today!



Conclusion

There will be a future manifestation of God’s kingdom, synonymous with Heaven, where all the faithful souls of all ages will dwell eternally with God, commencing on Judgment Day (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18; 2 Peter 1:11). The only way to be a part of God’s kingdom is to submit to His reign through the Gospel of Christ! The same way a person becomes a member of the church, he or she becomes part of God’s kingdom (Acts 2:38, 40-41, 47). All Christians are part of the culmination of God’s plan for His kingdom on this side of eternity. Are we faithful members of His church? Are we faithful subjects of His kingdom? 

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The Church Must Uphold the Truth!

Gary C. Hampton

Many seem to believe truth is either non-existent, unattainable or everchanging. God's people, however, must help the world see the unchanging truth that will set them free (John 8:32).

Paul told Timothy the church is the *“pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Timothy 3:15). In other words, the church is the column and the prop that holds up the truth. Jesus' prayer shows **the Truth** is important because it is the means of man's sanctification. No wonder Jesus gave His followers the assignment of taking the good news to every creature (Mark 16:15-16)!

The church is to teach the truth. Peter and John said they were compelled to preach (Acts 4:20). Later, all the apostles were arrested because of the impact of their preaching. After an angel set them free, they were found in the Temple teaching. They were recaptured, threatened and beaten but did not stop preaching daily (Acts 5:25, 42). Those scattered by the persecution following the death of Stephen preached wherever they went (Acts 8:4). Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of his teaching in their city – day and night (Acts 20:20).

The church must send teachers with **the Truth**. Christ's mission for Paul was carrying Jesus' name to *“Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel”* (Acts 9:15). Barnabas was sent to Antioch to encourage young Christians. He found Paul to help him, and they taught for a year (Acts 11:22-26). That same church prayed and fasted before Paul and Barnabas went on their missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3).

Each faithful Christian must deliver the God-saving message of **Truth** (2 Timothy 2:2). Our Savior wants us to be a light, showing the way to the Father (Matthew 5:14-16). Paul instructed Timothy, *“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 4:16).

The church is the home of the saved. It must uphold the truth so others can learn the life-giving message. †

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Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

(1 Peter 3:3-5; 1 Timothy 2:9; Matthew 5:28; Romans 12:2)

“Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves...” (1 Peter 3:3-5).

“...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” (1 Timothy 2:9).

“...whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

“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).

With the lowering of all standards of honesty, integrity and modesty in the world, we know that the downhill spiral of morals for the general populace is likely to continue. There are reports that nudity is accepted in some public situations in Europe, as well as on TV. Since those countries seem to be the model we are following, we can accurately project what we will see on American streets in the near future.

However, what the world is doing is not nearly as alarming to me as the transformation that is taking place in the Lord's church. Sometimes, I am afraid to look up to see incoming attendees for worship because of what some of the women are wearing: short, tight skirts; spaghetti strap dresses; see-through fabrics; low-cut tops that reveal cleavage.

Some among us could walk out of the church building and blend harmoniously with the women of the world! Shame! Shame! Are there no sermons or Bible class studies anymore on modest apparel for Christian women? Are there no elders, sincerely looking after the flock? Do the husbands/fathers of these women have no eyes? Does no one remember the connection between exposure of the physical body and the resulting lust in the hearts of the beholders?

Dear Christian sisters, please remember that the first death was God's taking the life of animals to make modest clothing for Adam and Eve after they realized their nakedness. He cares what we wear!

Why Do We Worship?

Rodney Nulph

Man is a worshipful being! No doubt the desire to worship something greater than ourselves was placed within us by an Intelligent Designer. Although the desire to worship is innate, humanity cannot determine proper actions with which to pay homage to our Creator without a Divine Standard. Thus, **God's Word dictates to man what is acceptable in the realm of worship.** Jesus emphasized that worship must be *"in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24). However, sometimes people attempt to worship according to their standards rather than to God's Standard (Leviticus 10:1-3). Not only are the **actions** (Truth) of worship necessary, but the **attitude** (spirit) must be right as well. When the actions and the attitude are right, worship accomplishes great things!

Worship exalts God! Surely the greatest accomplishment of worship is that it exalts and extols God Almighty! God is more than worthy of any praise and adoration we can give to Him. *"For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols, But the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and gladness are in His place"* (1 Chronicles 16:25-27 NKJV). When Isaiah saw the throne room of God, he heard the seraphim declaring, *"...Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"* (Isaiah 6:3). John, the revelator, saw and heard a very similar chorus that included the four and twenty elders saying, *"You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created"* (Revelation 4:11). **True worship exalts God!**

Worship elevates my spirit! Another unique aspect of worshipping our God is that when we offer true worship to Him, we elevate and uplift our own spirits. Joy was the direct result for the Psalmist when he entered to worship. *"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'"* (Psalm 122:1). Paul and Silas understood

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the elevating nature of worship, and while they were in prison, they “... *were praying and singing hymns to God...*” (Acts 16:25b). Think for a moment personally; have you ever found yourself distraught and down, but when you worshipped God, your innermost being changed for the better? **Worship elevates my spirit!**

Worship edifies others! In fact, many of the problems the Corinthian church faced were directly linked to failing to worship properly. The Corinthians were not partaking the Lord’s Supper properly, and the result was “...*many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep*” (1 Corinthians 11:30). The Corinthians were misusing the miraculous, spiritual gifts, and the result was a lack of edification (1 Corinthians 14:26). Clearly, when worship is not given properly, anything but edification is the result. However, the opposite is true as well. When we offer true worship to our God, others are uplifted, built up and edified! **Worship edifies others!**

While mankind is certainly commanded to worship (Hebrews 10:23-25), worship for the sincere child of God is much more than a command. **Worship, to the sincere Christian, is a privilege and an honor – an opportunity like no other! True worship gives me the opportunity to exalt God, elevate my spirit and edify others.** “*Oh, magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together*” (Psalm 34:3). †

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God's Grace, Love and Mercy – For which We Should Be Thankful!

Raymond Elliott

Grace, love and mercy are inherent in the very nature of our Heavenly Father, God Almighty! Two Scriptures have these attributes mentioned regarding our God. They are Ephesians 2:4-8 and Titus 3:4-7. Please read the first passage in Ephesians 2 and observe what is written about mercy, love and grace: ***“rich in mercy,” “great love,” “exceeding riches of His grace”*** and ***“For by grace you have been saved”*** (NKJV). Now read the passage in Titus 3 and observe what Paul wrote about love, mercy and grace: ***“Love of God our Savior, but according to His mercy He saved us”*** and ***“justified by His grace.”***

God's grace is greater than our sins. ***“...He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone”*** (Hebrews 2:9). ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”*** (Ephesians 1:7). Our iniquities demanded God's justice, but instead, He extended His unmerited favor to us so we could be redeemed by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, His beloved Son!

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). ***“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”*** (Romans 5:6). In our finite minds, we will never be able to comprehend the ***“width and length and depth and height”*** of the love of God and Christ (Ephesians 3:17-18).

It is ***“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior”*** (Titus 3:5-6).

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy

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toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:11-14).

Oh, how great is the kindness and compassion of our Heavenly Father!

There is an old story that tells of two angels who were dispatched from Heaven, each with a basket – one to bring back the prayers of petitions, the other, prayers of thanksgivings. Both returned in great distress and trouble. The collector of petitions had his basket full and a sack as well, but the angel of thanksgiving had only three. It is right and good that we should make intercession for others (Romans 10:1), petitions to God (Matthew 6:11; Colossians 1:9) and supplications (Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:1-2). **What is often lacking in our prayers, both private and public, is the giving of thanks to God! Should we not praise God from whom all blessings flow?** In Revelation 7:11-12, we read that the angels, elders and the four living creatures worshiped God, saying, “...*Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.*”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, when we pray let us praise God and give thanks to Him for His infinite grace, steadfast love and tender mercy! Our hearts should overflow with gratitude for these blessings, without which we could not be saved! Furthermore, it would be good if our songs and our prayers in our assemblies were filled with praise and adoration to God for such blessings from our Heavenly Father! Let us all think on these things.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (Psalm 103:1-4).



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He Did Not Restrain Them

Johnny O. Trail

The Bible contains many valuable lessons for its readers. In addition to providing a pathway that leads to eternal life, it contains information about successfully raising children. Sometimes the most powerful examples are negative ones, and the book of 1 Samuel contains a lesson regarding Eli and his unwillingness to chasten his wicked sons.

Eli was the one who instructed Samuel to be a servant of the Tabernacle and receive instructions from God. While God's Word *generally* portrays Eli in a positive manner, it treats Eli's sons differently. First Samuel 3:12-13 says, *"In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them"* (NKJV).

Eli was culpable in the behaviors of his children because as the text says, *"He did not restrain them."* That is, he never rebuked them for their lewd behavior. Every parent would do well to take note of how Eli failed in raising his sons.

Eli was unwilling to correct his sons because he honored them more than he did God. First Samuel 2:29 says, *"Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?"* This is a powerful lesson to anyone who places human relationships above fellowship with Jehovah. The Shema (ancient, daily Jewish prayer taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-5) called upon Israelites to love God above all else and then to instruct their children from His precepts.

In a modern context, it has often been said that **one cannot be a friend to his child and be a parent, too.** Sometimes parents must discipline children in a manner uncharacteristic of a *friend*. Really, a parent who seeks to discipline and teach about the consequences of evil is the best

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friend a child can have. Too often, parents are critical of adults who seek to correct the behaviors of their children. Instead of parents taking appropriate measures to correct their children, they blame the adults who try to instruct or to direct their children toward responsible adulthood.

Eli lost his two sons due to his unwillingness to “restrain them.”

First Samuel 2:34 reads, “*Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them.*” Similarly, many parents lose their children *spiritually* at or near adulthood because of their unwillingness to restrain them. Though physical death may also occur in some circumstances, spiritual atrophy and eternal loss are more serious.

Eli’s unwillingness to “restrain” his sons led to a national catastrophe for the nation of Israel. Several men died in battle against the Philistines, and the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the enemy. First Samuel 4:10-11 records, “*So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. Also, the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.*”

Consequently, any time children are not disciplined by parents, the entire society suffers. Under the Old Testament Law, a rebellious and disobedient child was to be taken before the elders of the city and stoned for his sinful behavior. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 says:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.

This was done in such a public setting because **disruptive, rebellious**

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children can endanger an entire nation. Good Christian parents teach their children to be godly people who contribute in a positive manner to the church and to the world in which they live. Conversely, children who never learn discipline create problems in schools and in the nation in which they live. We are reaping the fruits of children who were not raised by parents who cared for them properly – physically or spiritually.

Eli perished, too, when he heard about the death of his sons. First Samuel 4:17-18 notes:

So the messenger answered and said, “Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also, your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured.” Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

This sad account of a father underscores the sadness parents feel when a child strays from the straight and narrow. However, in the case of Eli, he contributed to their demise by his lack of action as a parent.

As children of God, our role as parents is to lead our children, with whom we are blessed, to establish and to maintain fellowship with Him. This is our greatest responsibility as parents, and we need to prayerfully seek God’s blessings and directions in this endeavor. **May we never be guilty of apathy when it comes to raising our children!** †

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Did You Know?

The apostle Peter was married. In Matthew 8:14, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. First Corinthians 9:5 indicates Peter’s wife traveled with him. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:1 that he was an elder in the church, and elders are required to be married (1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:6).

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Losing Our Children

Ed Benesh

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7-8 NKJV)

While studying recently for a series of lessons I am presenting at our congregation, I ran across some research that was done among teenagers who left the church after they reached college age and moved off to make their way in the world, independent of their parents' influence. The study gave a lot of facts and figures, but one figure just floored me. Based on this study, over 60% of all the kids who were part of some church or youth group in their teens would end up leaving those pursuits behind by the time they reached college. The same study said that only about 35% would return to some religious mooring during the remainder of their lives, and fewer would return to the church of their fathers.

As the researchers began to dissect the results, what they found, as far as reasons for why there was so large a trend of departure from faith, was that the fundamental disconnect between **what parents believe and how they act was a significant factor in children deciding to leave**. In other words, the rate of failure to retain and to actually live out the Christian life on an ongoing basis depended a great deal on whether or not mom and dad actually modeled the teachings they called their children to adopt.

As one of the research analysts said, "One of the biggest reasons children leave the church is because they see mom and dad treat religion as if it were nothing more than a hobby." Of course, this is not just a failing on the parent end of the spectrum. Children look up to older members, who ought to be wise, for their example of what a Christian really looks like beyond the inspired page: deacons, elders and many others. When the example fails,

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then the spiritual baby is thrown out with the hypocritical bathwater, and children slowly make their way to the world and away from faith.

So, what type of example are you? When the kids at your church or in your home observe your behavior, does it make them want to be stronger like you? Does it



challenge them to grow? Does it create in them a fire for godliness? Or, do they run from the church, thinking, “What a bunch of hypocrites”? Whether you believe it, like it or not, you have a part in this 60% departure rate or the 35% retention rate. Which is it? Now, let us not make excuses. I fully understand that each and every one of us is responsible for our own deeds, but to pretend that there is no accountability for how we treat others would be like trying to say that our neighbor in the command to love one’s neighbor as yourself is no one other than self.

Consider with all soberness what kind of example you set for those who are desperately seeking an example to follow. Where are you leading them?✝

[Editor’s Note: As a husband and as a father, besides the potential influence on others outside my immediate family, I have pondered and still mull over again from time to time to what eternity I have led my wife and my children. When my wife Bonnie died, I was struck with the heart-pounding question to myself, “Did I help her on her journey to Heaven or to Hell?” She thanked me just before she died for leading her to become a Christian, but beyond that, did I help her prepare to meet God in the Judgment (Amos 4:12)? As I see the ups and downs in my children’s lives, I question whether their mother and I sufficiently mirrored in our lives the Christ we profess to adore, so that our children might wholly embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord and demonstrate a vibrant, faithful Christianity in their lives. Aside from the personal spiritual successes of my children, I know that as their father, I should have been a better Christian example. The point is, that until we as Christians *“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matthew 6:33), even the Lord’s church will continue to suffer staggering losses of its young people from *“the like precious faith”* (2 Peter 1:1). Until we stop treating the church of Christ and Christianity like our version of a social club, we will continue to lose our young people. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

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ATTITUDES

Betty Burton Choate

Attitudes – If we could fully master this one part of our makeup, how much greater would be our control over our days and years. What a truth to embed firmly in our hearts and of which to remind ourselves, over and over, as we deal with the various situations of life!

Even Christians value things variously because of different attitudes! Look at these contrasting responses to situations and the resulting effects:

- **The regular song leader of the congregation was away, so a substitute had to be found.**

George, grumpily said, “Don’t bother me, Mary; I’ve got to lead the singing this morning. Why couldn’t they have asked somebody else?”

Bob, with a smile, invited, “Come on, Ann. Help me choose the songs for worship. They want me to fill in while Tom’s away!”

- **A teacher was needed for one of the childrens’ classes.**

Barbara: “Oh, no you don’t! I’m not going to teach a wild bunch of kids.”

Jane: “I love to teach children that age. They’re old enough to be able to read and to write, so there are many methods open for teaching them. That age is also so ready to learn!”

- **The preacher was to be away for two weeks on vacation.**

John: “I don’t know why they always want to put all the extra work off on me. Why can’t some of the other men feel some responsibility to do something?”

Charles: “Sure, I’ll stand in for Jim. It’s a good opportunity for me to add a little to my development. If I take advantage of oppor-

DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

tunities to speak now, God will surely open other doors of service for me further along the way.”



- **A new list was being made for the care of the communion trays and the building:**

Mary: “Well, when they make such a mess of that building, they need not think I’m going to break my back helping to clean it up, and someone else can do the trays. I don’t know how to make the bread, and, anyway, I don’t see why we have to do that.”

Ann: “If no one else wants to clean the building this month, we will. Even though humans are the ones who sometimes carelessly dirty it, it is the building set aside for God’s worship, so in a very special way, it’s God’s house. I like the thought that we can clean it for Him, and I love filling the trays. Without human hands to clean them and make the preparations, that memorial of Jesus’ death couldn’t continue. I have my own private time of worship and giving myself to God when I’m taking care of the trays, especially in making the bread. It makes me feel so good to take the best flour and oil and to work with care to make the bread to the best of my ability, fresh and lovingly prepared for congregational worship.”

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- **A person taking the Bible correspondence course requested a home Bible study.**

James: “Well, I hope they don’t think I have time to go. All of my extra time is taken up with practice and games with the church ball team. The elders ought to be the ones doing the studying. Besides, I don’t know this Walker fellow, anyway. He’s probably not really interested, and the trips over there would be a waste of time.”

Sam: “I’m so glad they gave me this person to visit. How wonderful it is to find somebody who actually wants to study! I’ll call now to introduce myself and to see just when we can arrange the first lesson. Even besides the possibility of the Walkers learning the truth, studying with them will be so good for Joan and me in our own spiritual growth.”

- **Volunteers were asked to visit the various Christians reported as being sick.**

Tom: “No, don’t ask me. I don’t know what to say. Besides, sickness depresses me.”

Scott: “I’ll go. Maybe I can be of some help. Visiting sick people reminds me strongly of how thankful I need to be that my health is good and that it is me doing the visiting instead of having to lie in bed, suffering and wondering if anybody cares enough to come.”

- **Weariness with Life and Challenges.**

Beth was heard to remark, “I’m just so tired of everything – the schedule that has to be kept, the challenges and the bills to be paid. I seem never to catch up or never to have any extra time or money; everything is just a struggle.”

Anita smiled, and said, “Sometimes I think, ‘I’m so tired that I wish I could just quit. Then, I look at families in which someone is critically ill, where the husband is out of work, families that have lost


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a son or a daughter tragically or families with children who have left God and are living such worldly lives. That's when I know how happy I ought to be. I don't have any real problems or great tragedy in my life. I create my own atmosphere of trouble by worrying and complaining about little things. How small I feel then and am ashamed. I pray for God to help me realize the countless blessings I have, before I maybe lose them because of my attitude."

Do you see the absolutely opposite outlook and resulting effect the same situation produced in the lives described? No, it isn't actually opportunity, tragedy, good times or the loss of them that shapes our lives. It is *our own attitude* in direct response to each event that comes our way. We, ourselves, determine whether it will be a blessing or a curse, whether we will grow or be withered because of it.

Moses said, "*Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...*" (Deuteronomy 11:26-27). The commandments were the same for all the people; the difference, causing the blessing in one life and the curse in another, was the reaction to the commandments.

Paul wrote, "*...We are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life...*" (2 Corinthians 2:16).

God's message for the Christian has remained the same through the years. The difference is solely in the hearers of the message. Let us, each of us, be careful how we hear and how we respond. Our attitudes will send us to Heaven or to Hell. We cannot be too vigilant in our guard over our attitudes. 



Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, the Founding Editor of *The Voice of Truth International*.

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The Narrow Way

Wayne Barrier

Jesus contrasted the only two ways we can travel through life by describing one as a narrow way and the other as a broad way. He stated in Matthew 7:13-14, ***“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”*** (NKJV).



We are encouraged to avoid destruction and to travel the more difficult path. Consider James 1:2-4. ***“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*** Also, Peter stated in 1 Peter 4:12-13, ***“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”***

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The narrow way involves several things discerned by Jesus in the remainder of Matthew 7. First, those in the narrow way must recognize false teachings and reject them. In doing this and by following the truth, one will bear good fruit (Matthew 7:15-20). Jesus also included a stern warning in Matthew 7:21-23 concerning obedience to the will of the Father. *“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!’”*

Rather than build a life on a foundation of false teaching, Jesus taught to build a good life on a foundation of truth in order to withstand the attacks of evil as we go through life (Matthew 7:24-27). This is emphasized in detail in Ephesians 6:10-17 by Paul as he described the whole armor of God needed to stand against the devil.

The narrow way also is the way that provides us with (1) the constant presence of Jesus (Matthew 28:20), (2) the provision of God for all things to work together for good (Romans 8:28), (3) the gift of wisdom (James 1:5), (4) the blessing of all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), (5) the promise of an answer to every prayer (Matthew 7:7-12), (6) the freedom from anxiety (Philippians 4:6), (7) rest (Matthew 11:28) and (8) eternal life in Heaven (Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:8).

The narrow way is the only way to Heaven. Furthermore, the narrow way is the only way to be blessed by the Lord in our comparatively short life on earth (contrasted with an eternity to come).✝

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PRAYING TO THE GODS


Jay Crook

A young friend recently wrote her thoughts of the Uvalde massacre. Her lengthy post contained one inadvertent letter (“s”) that caught my attention and made me think. She mentioned a teacher who has “prayed to the gods” for protection. That may be the true problem. We have people praying to the gods instead of praying to **The God!**

What we are seeing now is a reenactment of the book of Judges. Over and over again in Judges, the people of Israel turned from God to the gods. They were in a land of Philistines with their pagan gods, and repeatably the Jews were influenced by society. Then, when things got really bad, they returned to God. You may think that the relation with foreign nations was their downfall, but it was really their relation (or lack) with God that led to their downfall.

We have seen a minority of people cause God to be expelled from our schools and culture. God is love and justice, and when He is driven out, it is not surprising to see that cavity filled with hatred and injustice. Where there is no love and justice, it is easy to raise evil, depraved people who care nothing for others. The weapons vary: guns, autos, poison, etc.

So, from where does such a morally depraved person come? Guns are today’s Philistines. It is easy to blame them (as the Jews did in Judges), but the true cause of this cancer in our nation is the absence of God in our society. We put many Band-Aids on problems, but they won’t make them go away. We have to go to the source of all problems: the absence of God within our society

Teach God to your children and grandchildren. Teach His love, mercy, grace and justice. Teach godly morals. Read God’s Word to them when they are young, as well as while they grow. In the book of Romans, Paul wrote to a church that was divided, much like our nation today. In chapter 14, he concluded with this solution for division, *“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another... Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God...”* (Romans 14:19, 22 NKJV). 

Jay Crook is a former elder of the Western Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas, now living in Searcy, Arkansas, USA.

THE CUPBEARER

T. Pierce Brown

In Nehemiah 1, we find that Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king. We also are, in a sense, cupbearers to the King – Jesus. When James and John wanted to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus, He asked them, “...*Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?*” (Matthew 20:22 NKJV). When they replied that they were, our Lord replied, “*You will indeed drink My cup*” (Matthew 20:23). They drank of the cup in the sense that they endured the bitter affliction and suffering that came as a result of following Him. To the extent that we suffer for the cause of Christ (2 Timothy 3:12), we also drink of that cup. Most of us may not do more than sniff the contents of it. The same basic thought is in the expression in Luke 14:27, which reads, “*And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*” It may be that some of us, instead of taking it up, merely drag it along behind, but we are supposed to be cupbearers and cross bearers. With that in mind, a study of Nehemiah 1 became more personal to me.

First, I was impressed with Nehemiah’s sympathetic inquiry in Nehemiah 1:2. He did not allow his prominence, promotion, position, prestige or power to turn his heart in selfishness to his own interests and become indifferent to the interests and welfare of his brethren. That may happen to cupbearers today. We may become more interested in building gymnasiums or cathedrals for our own selfish purposes than we are in the walls that have been broken down, the gates that have been burned and the streets that have been deserted in the spiritual house of God.

Six months later, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. How had this happened? It was not that a prophet like Elijah had come and stirred the people. Nor had a warrior like Gideon or David overthrown the enemy. It was simply a picture of one man who was so concerned that he wept, prayed, fasted and worked. **There is no way to overemphasize the power that God can exercise through one man who cares that much and is willing to be personally involved.**

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Nehemiah did not merely go back home and give a little more money or get others to do so. He did not merely find fault with those who were slack in their duty. He did not simply appoint a committee that could find a dozen reasons for not doing what God wanted done. He did not call a business meeting to see whether the budget would allow it.

His first response was that he sat down, wept, mourned with prayer and fasted (v. 4). Probably one of the greatest reasons for our failure to do so many things that God wants done is that we do not really care that much. We do considerable preaching and fasting but not much prayer and fasting. We see Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and Paul who ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears (Acts 20:31). How many do you know, including the preachers you may think are so great, who really care enough about lost souls and the sad condition of the church to cry about it?

The value and nature of that kind of prayer should commend itself to us. Here was unquestionable earnestness. Here was no stilted, formal, mechanical muttering of phrases without real meaning or thumping on a pulpit. Here was the outcome of a soul stirred to its depths, who knew what he wanted and knew that God was the only source of those specific things. Many times, our prayers are so general as to be almost meaningless. Often, I have prayed or heard prayers like this, “God, forgive us of our many sins and shortcomings and bless us as thou knowest we stand in need.” Since there is no particular sin of which we confess, there is no correction we intend to make. While there is no particular blessing we desire, the statement of James may apply. “Ye have not because ye ask not” (James 4:2).

What do you think would happen if your child asked you for things as he hears Christians ask God for things? You ask him what he really wants. He says, “Bless me.” What would you do?

The second thing we notice about Nehemiah’s words are his reverent and humble attitude. He did not overlook the severity and justice of God as he considered His goodness and mercy. Most persons in denominations and many connected with the church of the Lord do not seem to believe in the justice of God. They only want to think of His grace and mercy. Nehemiah recognized both. Paul put it in Romans 11:22, ***“Therefore consider the goodness and***

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severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."

There was importunity or constancy in prayer. Note Nehemiah 1:6, which reads, ***"Please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night..."*** Why do you think God wants us to keep asking, as He taught in Luke 11:8, Luke 18:2 and various other places? One probable reason is that only in that attitude of earnest caring will we be fit to receive the answer.

Notice again, the confession he made. ***"...Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses"*** (Nehemiah 1:6-7). The confession was individual and personal. It was not, "Some of us may have sinned." It was particular and specific, not general and vague. There may be some value in our saying, "Forgive us of our many sins, whether of omission or commission," but the value of naming them and dealing with each individual one is greater than merely making a vague reference to sins. The reason is simple. **We will not do anything specific about correcting a sin if we are unwilling to specify that sin.**

The modest and diffident language of Nehemiah 1:11 is striking. ***"O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer."*** Although most of us who preach may have emphasized that good intentions are not satisfactory substitutes for obedient actions, we need to be aware that desire may be more basic and decisive than actions.

The reason is that actions may be counterfeited but desire cannot. We may be forced to act. We cannot be forced to will. Actions may simply be outward responses or ritualistic performances. Desires are not. Desire will be one of the things God will consider in His Final Judgment. This is why so much emphasis is put on such things as ***"worship in spirit"*** (John 4:24) and 'obey from the heart' (Romans 6:17) for if the desire is not right, no

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action is acceptable.

Many of our prayers may be without value because we do not desire to completely yield to God's will and live for the glory of His name. James says, ***"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures"*** (James 4:3). The desire is wrong in such a case.

In any case, all the grief, the desire, the fasting and the confession are of little value until and unless it leads us to try to do what God requires. We still have brethren who argue about whether God demands perfect obedience or saves by His grace in spite of the fact that we fail to obey perfectly. Part of the problem is a semantic one. None of us can deny that we have not obeyed perfectly, or we would not even need to be saved. So, from that standpoint, if God demanded perfect obedience in order for us to be saved, then none of us could be saved.

Yet, speaking of perfect obedience in a different way, we must realize that God demands perfect obedience. This may illustrate what I mean. God says, ***"Unless you repent you will all likewise perish"*** (Luke 13:3). Suppose one should say, "I have not completely repented, for no one can be perfect, but God will accept partial and imperfect repentance." This is not so! God says, ***"...Be baptized... for the remission of sins..."*** (Acts 2:38). I may reply, "I did not really understand that baptism is immersion, but no one is perfect, and so my sprinkling will suffice." Those kinds of responses are wrong. Although a person may not understand all of the reasons why God commanded repentance, baptism or many other things about them, when a person has done what God has said, that is perfect obedience. That does not mean he has had perfect obedience up to that time, for in that case he would not be guilty of sin. It does not mean that he will have perfect obedience after that time or he will be lost, for in that case, none could be saved, as we all sin and fall short of the glory of God even after we have been born into God's family (Romans 3:10, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10).

It does mean, however, that when God says to do something, we have no right to say, "God knows that man cannot be perfect, so I will not be concerned about doing exactly what God says do, the way he says do it, as well as when and where he says do it. His grace will take care of all that."

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When we have sinned and repent, that is perfect at that point, for that is what God said do. If we are alien sinners and believe that Christ is the Son of God, if we repent and are baptized for the remission of sins, that is perfect at that point. If we are children of God who have sinned, and we repent, confess our sins and pray to God for His forgiveness, that is perfect obedience at that point. God demands that kind of perfect obedience. †

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[Editor's Note: Obedience and perfection are not precisely identical. **Obedience** is the **sincere and honest effort** to do what God says to do, in the way God says to do it and, if applicable, when and where God says to do it. **Perfection**, though, would be **sinlessness**, in which case, one would not need a Redeemer – Jesus Christ – to forgive him. Further, even if a soul formerly needed forgiveness prior to his conversion, he still could not correctly claim sinlessness after becoming a child of God. I have heard a brother adamantly claim that he (and other faithful Christians) does not commit any sins. However, you and I rather must accept the inspired text, which says, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him [Jesus] a liar, and His word is not in us”* (1 John 1:8, 10). Those verses were written to Christians. We may not be aware of specific sins of which we may be guilty, *“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). Faithful Christians repent and pray for the sins of which they are aware (Acts 8:22) and have the confidence that Jesus Christ cleanses Christians from the sins of which they are not aware. Obedience is not perfection, and fortunately for humankind, Jesus Christ is *“...author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (Hebrews 5:9). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

Robison's Rubies

When Isaiah prophesied of Jesus, he called Him, among other names, the *“Prince of Peace”* (Isaiah 9:6). When Jesus was born, the heavenly host said, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men”* (Luke 2) Paul taught that Jesus Himself is our peace, bringing peace between Jew and Gentile – formerly separated people (Ephesians 2). Still, Jesus knew there would be division concerning Him. Families and societies would be divided because not everybody would believe in Him. Yet, He never wanted war in His name. He never wanted His people to be mean or violent but to be people of love. He came to bring peace within man and between men. He offers the peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Do you know the peace?

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What Samuel Can Teach Us

Mark T. Tonkery



As one reads about the life of Samuel in 1 Samuel, there are many life lessons one can apply to his or her own life. Here are four lessons from Samuel that every Christian can use to become a better Christian.

First, we can learn the power of prayer. In 1 Samuel 1, we see Hannah could not have children, and so, she prayed fervently for a son. God answered that prayer by providing Hannah with Samuel. Samuel continued the discipline of prayer. We read about him praying for Israel in 1 Samuel 12:23, where he stated, *“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you in the good and the right way”* (NKJV).

May we have the confidence and faith as Hannah and Samuel did when they talked to God in prayer. James 1:6 reminds us, *“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”* May we pray with confidence and faith.

Second, we can learn how to be faithful to the Lord. Samuel grew up knowing the Lord, and the Lord used Samuel to do His will (1 Samuel

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3:19). Samuel never fell away from the Lord; He remained steadfast in his faith and devotion. What an example for us, especially when we understand that people of faith in Samuel's day were rare! Today, it may seem that followers of God are in the minority, and there are very few of us **keeping the faith**. Maybe this is how it always has been, but we must keep in mind that, just like Samuel, we can be faithful to the Lord despite the majority of people not following Him.


Third, we can learn obedience. As Samuel grew to know the Lord, he learned to be obedient. First Samuel 3:19 tells us, ***“So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.”*** Samuel never failed to do the will of the Lord.

In this world, it is hard to sometimes do the right thing, to even obey God. However, Samuel reminds us we can obey God, even when it seems difficult. In fact, we must keep in mind that it is always right to obey God (1 Samuel 15:22).

Fourth, we can learn how **not** to raise our children. If there is one flaw in the life of Samuel, it is that he failed to guide his children in the ways of the Lord (1 Samuel 8:3). It seems he followed in the footsteps of Eli in the way he raised his sons, who were worthless and evil (1 Samuel 2:12). It is very easy, especially for spiritual leaders, who spend their time helping teach and lead others to the Lord, to neglect their own families.

Parents have the responsibility to teach their children the ways of the Lord and to set a godly example before them (Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:7). If we do not teach our children the ways of the Lord, then who will? May we lead our families in all the ways of the Lord and not neglect their spiritual wellbeing.

Prayer, faithfulness to the Lord, obedience and raising godly children are four lessons we can learn by studying the life of Samuel.

Hebrews 11:32 depicts Samuel as a person of faith; for what will you be known? God needs people like Samuel today, people who are willing to give their loyalty and devotion to Him all the days of their lives. Will you give loyalty and devotion to the Lord all the days of your life? 

Mark T. Tonkery is a Gospel preacher for the Norval Park church of Christ in Zanesville, Ohio, USA.


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NAOMI

Thomas Baxley

The account of Ruth is a great one. It demonstrates God's providence, His care and concern for all nations (not just Israel). Further, it teaches the value of hard work and many other great lessons, both theological and practical.

Most lessons based out of Ruth focus on her, and rightly so. She is the main character and heroine of the biblical record. For this lesson I want to briefly contemplate what kind of woman and mother Naomi was. As the book of Ruth begins, she and her husband had journeyed to Moab because of a famine in Canaan. Their two sons selected wives from among the Moabites.

Later, all three of the men died. Subsequently, Naomi encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their families. What I find very interesting is that **both** expressed a desire to stay with Naomi (Ruth 1:10). There are many details we don't have, but what we know is that Naomi was the kind of person and the kind of mother people wanted to have and to be around. It is because of this that we have the book of Ruth. 

Thomas Baxley preaches for the Highway Nine Church of Christ in Piedmont, Alabama, USA.



BIBLE CHARACTERS

Moses: A Husband of Blood

Kevin L. Moore

A brief and obscure episode in Moses' life is recounted in Exodus 4:24-26. After forty years in the land of Midian, the Lord sent Moses back to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of bondage, initially taking his wife Zipporah and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus 2:11-4:20; 18:2-6; Acts 7:22-36).

And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!" So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!" – because of the circumcision. (Exodus 4:24-26 NKJV)

Commentary

Zipporah was a Midianite of the lineage of Abraham through his second wife Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4; Exodus 2:15-21). Presumably, the Midianites were also amenable to the covenant of circumcision that God had instituted with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:1-14). Zipporah's father was the "*priest of Midian*" (Exodus 2:16; 3:1; 18:1) who acknowledged and served the Lord (Exodus 18:10-12, 19-23). However, at some point, the Midianites drifted away from the monotheistic faith of their ancestry and served other gods (Numbers 25:2). They became enemies of the people of Israel, luring them into sexual perversion and idolatry (Numbers 22:1-6; 25:1-18; 31:1-18; Judges 6:1-10, 14).

The fact that Moses was in danger of being struck down by the Lord suggests he had been negligent in observing the whole counsel of God. The words and actions of Zipporah reflect her contempt for a divine ordinance, regarding it as abhorrent rather than a solemn act of obedience. Seeing that only one of their two boys was circumcised on this occasion, the other son had likely been circumcised already, provoking the ire of Zipporah and thus influencing Moses to then appease his wife rather than the Lord.

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As the recognized leader of God’s people, it was imperative for Moses to be an example of obedience and faithfulness, even in what might seem to be the smallest matters. Moses would go on to write, *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children...”* (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). Moses’ life was spared when the law of God was obeyed, enabling him to continue his mission and be the instrument through whom the Lord would accomplish incredible things.

Lessons to Learn

Apostasy is a gradual process. It starts with what may appear to be the **little things**, digressing from and thereby straining God’s will and favor until complete estrangement results (Revelation 2:4-5). Whether spiritual degradation occurs within one’s lifetime or over generations, **apostasy is a great tragedy with everlasting consequences for all who go astray** (2 Peter 2:18-22).

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Concerning the divine will, we must avoid trivializing, compromising or disregarding what might be perceived as merely **minor elements**. While certain aspects of biblical teaching are **weightier** than others, “...*These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone*” (Matthew 23:23).

It is vital that we exercise diligence in knowing, observing and defending the whole counsel of God. “*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much*” (Luke 16:10).

It is dangerous to think we know better than God. Whether or not we understand, like or agree with what the Bible says, **we must trust that God’s revealed thoughts and ways are infinitely higher than ours** (Isaiah 55:8-9). “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2).

Our circle of influence matters. “*Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’*” (1 Corinthians 15:33). This is especially true with respect to whom we choose to marry. **Spousal influence can draw us closer to God or lead us farther away** (Genesis 26:34-35; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 17:17; 1 Kings 11:1-3).

Conclusion

Let us be committed to trusting and obeying the Lord in all things, no matter how trivial and insignificant they may seem from a worldly perspective. †

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Are the Righteous Scarcely Saved?

Colin McKee

Some people read 1 Peter 4:18 and become anxious about their eternal salvation. That verse reads, *“Now **‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’**”* (NKJV). Various readers coming across the verse think that since Peter said the righteous are scarcely saved that their salvation is in constant jeopardy. They imagine one can only make it to heaven by **‘the skin of their teeth’** (Job19:20). Is that true? What did Peter mean by ‘the righteous are scarcely saved’?



We must understand that Peter was writing to Christians in the context of persecution and imminent danger from oppressors. They were

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“grieved by various trials” (1:6), facing the possibility of *“suffering for righteousness’ sake”* (3:14), experiencing ‘fiery trials’ (4:12), ‘suffering as Christians’ (4:16), and ‘suffering according to the will of God’ (4:19). Peter wrote to encourage them in the face of those then present dangers and to assure them of the victory they could expect even though it might include physical loss. Let us analyze the words in the passage.

The word *“scarcely”* appears as *“with difficulty”* in other passages. *“When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus...”* (Acts 27:7); *“...and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him”* (Luke 9:39).

The word translated *“saved”* does not always mean eternal salvation – salvation of the soul in Heaven. Our eternal salvation is sure as we walk in the light. Jesus saves *“to the uttermost”* (Hebrews 7:25). We are *“... kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Peter 1:5). We will have an ‘abundant entrance into eternal salvation’ (2 Peter 1:10-11). Apparently, though, Peter was not talking about eternal salvation in 1 Peter 4:18. Instead, he was talking about **physical salvation from persecution**. The word *“saved”* or *“salvation”* occurs numerous times in both the Old and New testaments to refer to physical salvation from danger or death.

But do not fear, O My servant Jacob, And do not be dismayed, O Israel! For behold, I will save you from afar, And your offspring from the land of their captivity; Jacob shall return, have rest and be at ease; No one shall make him afraid. (Jeremiah 46:27)

For the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you. (Deuteronomy 20:4)

For I will not trust in my bow, Nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies, And have put to shame those who hated us. (Psalm 44:6-7)

But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30)

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Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. (John 12:27)

Who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. (1 Peter 3:20)

Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. ...Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 27:20, 31).

The word translated “**judgment**” in 1 Peter 4:17 does not refer to the final day of judgment at Christ’s return but to the judgment of physical suffering or punishment. The judgment that Peter described was to “**begin**” at that time. The final judgment has not occurred because Christ has not returned for that event. Therefore, it must have been some other judgment. God often came in judgment to punish ungodly nations and individuals. Judgment, at times, refers to the judgment exercised by a justice system. It also may refer to clarifying the difference between good and bad.

The Lord will enter into judgment With the elders of His people And His princes: “For you have eaten up the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses.” (Isaiah 3:14)

“Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab In the latter days,” says the Lord. Thus far is the judgment of Moab. (Jeremiah 48:47)

Therefore behold, the days are coming That I will bring judgment on the carved images of Babylon; Her whole land shall be ashamed, And all her slain shall fall in her midst. (Jeremiah 51:47)


“And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien – Because they do not fear Me,” Says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:5)

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While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." (Matthew 27:19)

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat. (Acts 18:12)

It seems that the conclusion to be reached is that the judgment to which Peter referred was the 'testing of their faith by fire' (1 Peter 1:7) and not to the final Day of Judgment. He taught that Christians would be tested in the fire of suffering, which would purify them as gold is purified by fire. Further, it would begin with them since they were the target of persecutors. Christians were tested in the fire (a kind of judgment) and were preserved for the eternal salvation that they anticipated. The ungodly and sinners have no hope of enduring God's testing or judgment, because they have lived in rebellion to Him. Jesus said that He came into the world **"for judgment"** to separate the good from the bad (John 9:39). That is what happened in the **"tested by fire"** judgment that Peter described.

"The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9). "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!" (2 Timothy 4:18). 

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BIBLE QUESTIONS

Garage Sales

Louis Rushmore

Some non-members and possibly some members of the churches of Christ wonder, “Why don’t churches of Christ have garage sales?” The reason for which typically the churches of Christ do not have garage and yard sales is the same reason for which they do not use instrumental music in Christian worship or convene for weekly worship on Saturday night instead of on Sunday.

The churches of Christ look exclusively to the Bible – God’s Word – to discern what is **authorized by God**. The *principle* found in Psalm 139:17

is valid today, too. *“How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!”* (NKJV). However, since we live in the New Testament era, we turn specifically to the New Testament to learn and to practice what is authorized by God today (Hebrews 8:13). Providentially, God preserved divinely inspired New Testament epistles that He wanted us to have. Only by scouring or searching the New Testament (John 5:39) can we know what God has authorized. **How the Lord’s church finances itself, whether to use instrumental music in worship or when to assemble weekly for worship are all authority issues – or understanding what is authorized.**

The first day of the week is authorized for the weekly assembly of the



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church for Christian worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Only a specific kind of music – singing – is authorized for Christian worship (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Weekly, freewill giving is authorized by God for the needful expenses for which the church is responsible (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Galatians 6:6). One possible *addition* that Scripture authorized was also a freewill offering occasioned by an immediate and widespread need (Acts 4:32-37). Congregations may also be faced with selling non-monetary gifts (e.g., an estate sale of a deceased donor) or disposing of church property associated with changing locations of a local church’s place of meeting. Yet, the Lord’s church has no biblical authorization for *actively* attempting to generate funds through yard or garage sales, car washes, bake sales, tourist attractions, investments, real estate transactions, etc. †

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Kenney's Pennies

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-2, 14 NKJV). We rightfully teach about the great sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for the sins of mankind. Possibly we need to think more about the great sacrifice He made by taking on flesh, leaving Heaven, and dwelling with man? *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:5-8).



PROVERBS 17:22



A patient told a doctor, “I’ve been going to a faith healer, but I wasn’t getting any better.” The doctor smiled and said, “And what dumb advice did this phony give you?” “He told me to come see you,” replied the new patient.



My wife asked me to help one of our neighbors, a young mother whose sailor husband was at sea. Her car had to have a freeze plug replaced, a job that took two days. Then I discovered that the battery was dead, and the starter was shot, and so I fixed those too.

Days later, I proudly handed the woman her keys saying, “Now your car is good for many more miles.”

“Thanks,” she said. “All I care is that it runs long enough to make it to the dealer. I’m trading it in tomorrow.”



A young woman who was worried about her habit of biting her fingernails down to the quick was advised by a friend to take up yoga. She did, and soon her fingernails were growing normally.

Her friend asked her if yoga had totally cured her nervousness.

“No,” she replied, “but now I can reach my toe-nails so I bite them instead.”



Notice: Our company requires no further physical fitness program. Everyone gets enough exercise: jumping to conclusions, beating around the bush, running down the boss, going around in circles, dragging their feet, dodging responsibility, passing the buck, climbing the ladder, wading through paper work, pulling strings, throwing their weight around, stretching the truth, bending the rules and pushing their luck!



I had been teaching my seventh-graders about World War II, and a test question was, “What was the largest amphibious assault of all time?” Expecting to see “the D-Day invasion” as the answer, I

PROVERBS 17:22

found instead on one paper, “Moses and the plague of frogs.”



A site foreman had ten very lazy men working for him, and so one day, he decided to trick them into doing some work for a change. “I’ve got a really easy job today for the laziest one among you,” he announced. “Will the laziest man please put his hand up.” Nine hands went up.

“Why didn’t you put your hand up?” he asked the tenth man.

“Too much trouble,” came the reply.



Billy Bob’s parents were thrilled and excited when he joined the Army; he was going to serve his country. After Billy Bob had completed basic training, he invited his parents to come to the base and spend the day there. He said that special programs had been set up for all the parents so that they could see the results of the training. His parents showed up, eager to see what Billy Bob had learned.

After all the parents had visited with their sons, their Drill Sergeant announced that the group would do an exhibition of marching to show

off the skills their sons had learned.

The troops lined up in formation and marched by the group of parents. As they went by, Billy Bob’s mother said to his father, “I’m so proud of Billy Bob. Look at him, He’s out there marching, and do you notice, he’s the only one in step?”



Church Bulletin Bloopers

Volunteers are needed to spit up food at the food bank.

There will not be any Women Worth Watching this week.

Child care provided with reservations.

Mark your calendars not to attend the church retreat.

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink.

The visiting monster today is Bro. Jack Bains.

We are always happy to have you sue our facility.

Jean will be leading a weight-management series Wednesday nights. She’s used the program herself and has been growing like crazy!

Hymn: I am Thin, O Lord.





Rebecca Rushmore

(answers inside back cover)

1. What was John's purpose?
2. Why did John baptize near Salim?
3. At the pool of Bethesda, how many years did the man have an infirmity before Jesus healed him?
4. What is another name for the Sea of Galilee?
5. What did Jesus say would make free those who believe in Him?
6. What accusation did the Jews make against Jesus when they wanted to stone Him?
7. Which disciple stated he would lay down his life for Jesus?
8. What was the name of the man who lost an ear in the garden at Jesus' arrest?
9. Who did the chief priests claim to be their king?
10. Why did John write about the miracles of Jesus?

***Bible Doctrines
All Christians Can
Believe, Teach and
Practice with the Same
Mind and the Same Judgment***

David Myers

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

*Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be **like-minded toward one another**, according to Christ Jesus, that you may **with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. (Romans 15:5-6)*

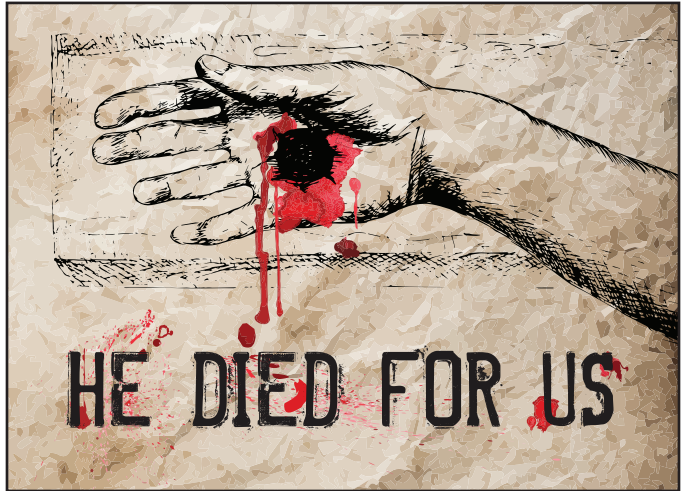
Read the passages cited below, study them in their context and see if any have been misused in any way. Follow the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11 as “...*they... searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*”

1. Christ established His church, purchasing it with His blood (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27).
2. The church is the spiritual body of Christ, and there is but one body. Therefore, there is only one true church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4).
3. Each local church is autonomous, overseen or shepherded by a plurality of spiritually mature men known in Scripture as elders, pastors or bishops (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:2; Titus 1:5).
4. Elders must meet the qualifications set forth in Scripture for these functions

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

(1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).

5. It is a sin to deliberately forsake the assembly of God's people for worship and spiritual edification




(Hebrews 10:24-25).

6. We must worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24; Matthew 15:7-9).
7. We are to sing and to make melody in our hearts to the Lord in our worship, and there is no authority to use instrumental music in the worship of the church (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15).
8. The Lord's Supper is to be observed on the first day of the week, and every week has a first day (Acts 20:7).
9. We are to give on the first day of the week to the Lord as we have been prospered (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
10. The world – with its secular, humanistic, postmodern and *everything is relative* or *anything goes* attitude – is damning to the souls of people (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4; Colossians 2:8).
11. We are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).
12. We are to present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord (Romans 12:1-2).

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13. We are to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11-14).
14. The practice of homosexuality is sinful (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
15. Transgenderism is sinful (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4-5; Deuteronomy 22:5).
16. Living together in a sexual relationship outside of marriage is sinful (Hebrews 13:4).
17. Christ will come again (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18; 2 Peter 3:10-13).
18. All mankind will stand before God in a day of Final Judgment (Matthew 25:31-33; Hebrews 9:27; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
19. The redeemed will live with the Lord in Heaven through all eternity (Matthew 25:46; 2 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
20. The wicked and disobedient will spend eternity in Hell (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 21:8; Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 2:5-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 21:18).
21. A child of God can fall away from the Lord, become unfaithful and be eternally lost (Proverbs 16:18; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 3:12; 2 Peter 2:12-22).

These doctrinal points neither represent all of Bible doctrine nor do they comprise a creed apart from the Bible. Rather, these numbered points illustrate fundamental biblical doctrine over which there can be no misunderstanding and on which Bible believers can believe, teach and practice with the same mind and the same judgment. 

David Myers preaches for the Church of Christ in Wildwood, Florida, USA. He is also a missionary to Guyana, South America.

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Unity

David W. Hester

In September 2010, Christopher Hitchens – then the world’s most prominent atheist – came to Birmingham, Alabama to debate the existence of God. Prior to the debate, he was interviewed by local media. Asked why he was an atheist, he gave an interesting reason. Hitchens noted the many divisions in the religious world, and (correctly) said that they all cannot be right. However, he then said that would mean that only one could be right, if there is a God and the Bible is His Word – a conclusion Hitchens rejected out of hand (likely because of him equating that with the Roman Catholic Church, which he hated). Thus, he rejected all religion and became an atheist.

Jesus prayed for unity in John 17:20-21. ***“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me”*** (NKJV). The current state of affairs in Christendom spawns atheism and agnosticism. While we strongly disagree with the now deceased Hitchens on the existence of God, can he be faulted for seeing through the disunity that exists in religion? Religious unity is not a pipedream – something that is good to philosophize about but impossible in practice. If it weren’t feasible, the Savior would not have made it a focus of His prayer in John 17. Creeds, catechisms, confessions of faith (whether written or unwritten) – are the impediments to true unity.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, the apostle Paul set forth the platform for unity.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

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Much focus has (rightly) been given to verses 4-6, which describe the **action** of unity; yet, not as much has been said about verses 1-3, which describe the **attitude** of unity. There cannot be true unity without proper attitude! Paul begged Ephesian Christians to *“walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”* The Christian life is a walk with God, as well as with others. “Lowliness” indicates the spirit of humility that must be present in every child of God. *“Gentleness”* describes the disposition that we must display to all people but especially fellow Christians. *“Longsuffering”* sets forth how far the child of God is to go in disagreements with fellow Christians. Likewise, *“bearing with one another in love”* further buttresses this thought. We must be willing to go far beyond the norm or what is expected. Are we facilitators of unity or of division? *“Endeavoring [making every effort] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* is a very critical phrase. Unity is not something that we bring about; it is the work of the Spirit, when the Spirit’s words (from the New Testament) are carried out. We must make every effort, in

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love, to maintain that unity! Again, are we willing to make that effort?

In all too many cases, congregational disputes are commonplace. In the vast majority of those disputes, the root cause is brethren not following the inspired instruction of Paul in Ephesians 4:1-3. If those traits described by the apostle were followed, unity in love will result. The exhortation by Paul in Romans 14 concerning matters of no consequence is vital along these lines. ***“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another”*** (Rom. 14:19). When we put our own egos aside, our wants and wishes will take a backseat to the maintenance of unity. Without the attitude described in Ephesians 4:1-3, formality and cold ritualism result. The spirit of popery thrives in such a fetid swamp. That being said, unity cannot be achieved by attitude alone. Thus, the apostle continued his description of how it can be practiced.

“There is one body.” In verses 4-6, Paul mentioned seven items – each of which is preceded by the number ***“one.”*** The pertinent question to ask is, “does one mean one?” That is to say, does “one” mean that there are many differing viewpoints, ideas, denominations or doctrines, all under “one umbrella?” Or, does “one” mean ***only*** one? To those in “Christendom,” the question of the ***“one body”*** is beyond dispute. They would assert that all of the denominations are part of the one body – the mysterious, universal body of Christ. Yes, they would acknowledge, there are many different doctrines and practices; yet, they would have us believe, we are all going to the same place – just traveling down different roads. Yet, when this reasoning is applied to the other items in Paul’s list, it falls apart. The apostle declared that there is ***“one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all...”***

Suppose, for a moment, that your preacher were to mount the pulpit and declare the following:


I have done much careful study of the world’s religions. There are many differing views on so many subjects. I have arrived at the conclusion that there are many Spirits. The Holy Spirit is important, but so are the spirits of the Navaho nation and the spirits

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

of the Sioux nation. These are equally viable. Or, consider all of the Lords that people follow. Muhammad; Buddha; Vishnu and Christ. Certainly, we can agree that they are equal. Further, in our pluralistic society, to declare that one faith is superior to all others is unthinkable. The faiths of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are parallel. God? Why, all of the gods of all major religions are equal to one another.

I think you know what would happen if such were said next Sunday from the pulpit. The preacher would be called on the carpet and summarily fired. I daresay that in the vast majority of conservative evangelical denominations, such a declaration would touch off a war. Yet, those who would (rightly) oppose such have no issue affirming that there are many bodies that make up the one body, and some of them would go so far as to say that there are many baptisms that make up the one baptism. “Consistency, thou art a rare jewel indeed.”

When Paul said “*one*” in Ephesians 4, he **meant** one! There is one God and no other. There is one Lord and no other. There is one faith and no other. There is one Spirit and no other. There is one body (the church, Ephesians 1:22-23) and one baptism (immersion for salvation, Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-4) and no other!

Why won’t all people accept this platform for unity? There are many possible reasons, and yet, human nature has not changed. Power, prestige and popularity are all factors. Devotion to family and friends are strong distractions from doing the right thing. Yet, our Savior’s prayer in John 17 must be kept at the forefront. To achieve unity – true and lasting unity – all people must determine to follow the instructions in Sacred Writ. Only then will we realize what Jesus desired. 

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Noting Your Bible




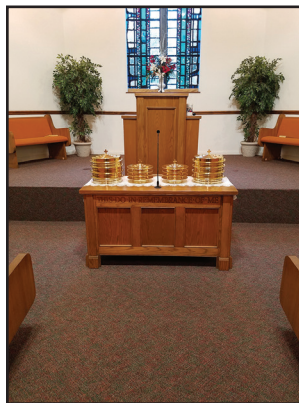
The Lord's Supper

The New Testament records commands, provides examples and gives us the reason for Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper. Let's note those verses in our Bibles so that when we are studying with someone who asks us why the church does this, we can show them from Scripture. This study will also help us as we eat the bread and drink the cup with our brothers and sisters, remembering our Lord each Sunday in worship.

1. Note this subject in your Bible for quick reference and write next to it, "**1 Corinthians 11:17-33.**" This will be the main text of this study.
2. Turn to the 11th chapter of 1 Corinthians. It is best to read the whole letter that Paul sent to the church in Corinth in order to see the context and subjects Paul addressed. Let's highlight some things in verses 17-33. Paul did "not praise" them as he began to address this subject in 11:17 as opposed to 11:2. Verses 17-22 make it clear that Corinth had problems that affected their fellowship during the Lord's Supper. Reference "**1 Corinthians 1:10-13**" next to these verses.
3. Continuing in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul reminded and reaffirmed to them that he taught them what Christ had taught him. The apostle repeated the very words of our Lord when He instituted the Supper. The bread represents Christ's body, and the cup represents His blood. Next to these verses write, "**(See Matthew 26:26-28).**"
4. Turn to Matthew 26:26-29 and reference here the parallel passages: **Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20.** At these, you may want to note that we can know it is unleavened bread they were eating due to the fact that Christ and His disciples were observing the Passover during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (See Matthew 26:17; Exodus 23:15.). "The cup" is described as "fruit of the vine" by our Lord (26:29).

Ancient Palestine’s common drink with meals was grape juice.

5. Go back to 1 Corinthians 11. Underline “**do this in remembrance of Me**” in verses 24-25. Christ gave the reason for His followers to partake of this meal, and Paul expounded upon that in verse 26, “**proclaiming the Lord’s death till He comes.**”
6. Look at 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. Paul there addressed more specifically the Christian’s individual responsibility – **examine self**. Christians – people covered by the blood of Christ – in His body – the one, true, church are to have relationships with one another that reflect Godly followers of Christ. We see this in the Lord’s teachings: **Matthew 5:21-24** (Much of the Sermon on the Mount deals with human relations.) and **Luke 17:1-4**.
7. Underline the consequences of eating this meal in an unworthy manner in 1 Corinthians 11:27, 29. We must all judge/examine ourselves whether we are right with our brothers and sisters, because if we are not, we are not right with God. Meditate on this passage and make any notes. Here, reference “**1 Corinthians 10:14-17.**”
8. Turn to the 10th chapter of 1 Corinthians. Read the whole chapter and note the context. In verses 16-17, Paul referred to the cup of blessing and the bread that we break, calling it the **communion of the body and blood of Christ**. Underline verse 21 and again reflect upon this text.
9. Now, go back to 1 Corinthians 11 and write, “**for examples, see Acts 2:42, 20:7.**”
10. Turn to Acts 2:42 noting the early church’s habits in verse 42. “Break bread” is a common phrase used to say that a meal was eaten. We must determine from the context if it was a common meal or the Lord’s Supper referenced. Note here among this list of religious activities, the article “the” is used as opposed to verse 46 where it seems to indicate common meals.
11. Turn to Acts 20:7 and underline this verse: “**Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...**” This is the purpose for which they came together. Is it ours? 



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The Sign of Jonah


Cecil May, Jr.

“The Jews demand signs” (1 Corinthians 1:22 ESV). Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, He worked *“mighty works and wonders and signs,”* which *“attested to”* (guaranteed) the truth of who He claimed to be (Acts 2:22). Throughout the Gospel records, He healed the sick, cast out demons and raised the dead. Yet, frequently, He was asked by His doubters and enemies, *“Show us a sign!”*

The signs and wonders He was doing were eminently suitable for a divine King of a spiritual kingdom, the kind of kingdom He came to establish (John 18:26). They showed Him to have power over sickness, demons and death.

Jesus’ enemies were not satisfied. They wanted a material kingdom to defeat Rome, freeing them from Roman domination and establishing a kingdom in which they would rule over the nations, the Gentiles. So, they wanted some kind of sign of military power, maybe like Satan suggested: *“Go up on the temple tower and jump off; the people will be amazed when angels bear you up and keep you from harm”* (paraphrase of Matthew 4:5-6).

Jesus usually answered the request for a sign cryptically, *“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah”* (Matthew 16:4). In Matthew 12:40, He added, *“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* The *“sign of the prophet Jonah”* was Jesus’ resurrection!

It turned out just like Abraham told the rich man in torment. *“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And the rich man said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ Abraham said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead’”* (Luke 16:29-31). 

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

TEXTUAL STUDIES

The Four Greek Words for Love

David Conley

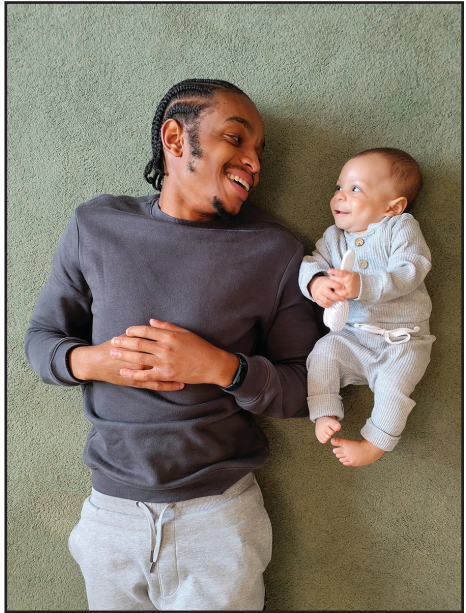
Eros – This is the love that husband and wife feel for one another during their intimate times. We get our English word “erotic” from this Greek word.

Storge – This is the love that exists naturally between family members: mother, father, brother, sister, etc. This is the strong magnetism that bonds people through blood relationships.

Phileo – This is the love that exists between friends, people who enjoy each other’s company. These are those who delight to be in the presence of one another.

Agape – This is the love that we **choose** to have toward another person. This kind of love is kind, gracious, respectful, not willing to see harm come to those loved, etc. even when we don’t have a friendly feeling associated with them. This type of love is defined in 1 Corinthians 13.

The first three are based on emotions or natural feelings that one person has toward another. The last one, *agape*, is a command that God expects us to keep. We make a choice whether or not we will keep it! Do you **agape** me? †



David Conley is the pulpit minister of the Liberty Church of Christ in Dennis, Mississippi, USA.

FROM THE HEART OF

Brief History of Mutare School of Preaching

Godwin Marandure



Mutare School of Preaching (MSOP) was established in 1958 as Nhowe Bible School (NBS) by Roy V. and Jixie Palmer, former missionaries to Germany. Roy Palmer, who was also the mission superintendent, arrived in 1957 at Nhowe Mission (NM) in the then Southern Rhodesia, under the supervision of the eldership of Central Church of Christ of Nashville, Tennessee. The Palmers were joined in 1958 by Loy S. and Donna Mitchell. Loy Mitchell became the pioneer teacher in NBS.

The school offered a three-year preaching certificate, an acceptable qualification for ministry. It accepted both married and single students. For the first ten years, the majority were foreigners from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Zambia and Malawi), since these were the days of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Students were accommodated on campus, with the school providing tuition and board. The rigorous academic curriculum was tailored to the USA baccalaureate degree program, includ-

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ing Koine Greek. All the teachers were Western missionaries with at least a bachelor's degree, who were required to obtain Southern Rhodesia visas since they were also required to teach primary school. Under their teachers' supervision, students planted congregations in farms and villages around the mission. At times, missionaries took preacher students to Marandellas, Macheke and even Salisbury – the capital city.



After three years, most students went into full-time preaching with financial support from Churches of Christ in the United States. These became the catalyst in growing the Churches of Christ throughout the country – particularly in the Mashona-speaking areas. However, the school attracted students from Matabeleland areas who also planted churches in their respective villages and towns. In 1966, the school started a practical session – bush program, when students, under the supervision of a teacher, camped for ten weeks in a village or township, either planting a new congregation or strengthening one. During the program's existence, the bush programme (later called the field programme) established hundreds of congregations throughout the country.

In 1964, the Hillcrest Church of Christ of Abilene, Texas took over the supervision of NM from the Central Church of Christ, with J. C. McCurdy, one of the elders, becoming the linchpin between the USA congregations and the work in Rhodesia (Southern Rhodesia became Rhodesia after the Federation collapsed in 1963). In 1969, the school relocated from NM to Dangamvura, Umtali following Mitchell, who worked in Umtali. It changed its name to Umtali School of Preaching (now Mutare School of Preaching), with Mitchell as principal. John Hanson was the boarding master, with Jim Petty, Dick Boyd and Clayton Waller as teachers. Xavier Goredema was the only indigenous teacher, but Stanley Bamu was the

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first black teacher in the school's history when it was still at NM.

Jim Petty became the principal in 1975 when Mitchell resigned because his supporting congregation wanted him to concentrate on full-time missionary work, including preaching for the 6th and Jubilee congregation – an all-white church during the notorious Ian



Douglas Smith's regime, a pocket edition of apartheid. Unfortunately, in 1976 the Zimbabwe war of liberation intensified, forcing all the Western missionaries to hand all works over to the indigenous people in 1977. Goredema became the principal, with Ishmael Matangira as boarding master. The other teachers were Noah Gonzo, Velaphi Mlangeni, Timothy Matangira (no relationship to Ishmael Matangira), and later Solomon Magomore as the boarding master. Although all the teachers did not have college or university education like their counterparts, they produced some of the greatest self-supporting preachers in Zimbabwe.

Goredema left the school in 1987 for full-time preaching. He was replaced by Edmund Gwazaza, who worked under the supervision of Loy Mitchell, who had arrived in Zimbabwe the previous year. Mitchell became the first Mutare Bible School board chair until 1995. From 1990, the school had a very high enrollment with nearly all the graduates being absorbed into full-time preaching. Mitchell raised almost all the financial support through the Africa Mission Fund (AMF). At its peak, AMF supported close to 150 preachers. It closed its doors in 2013, a year before Mitchell transitioned to glory, with many preachers losing their financial support, although Mitchell gave them start-up money for capital projects.

Gwazaza retired in 2002, and he was replaced by Paul Chimhungwe and his team. The team managed to register the school with the Ministry of Higher Education to offer a certificate in preaching. With the immense

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support of the Hillcrest Church of Christ, the team purchased the first vehicle for the school and refurbished all classrooms, with the library receiving close to five hundred academic books. The school drilled a borehole and constructed a water reservoir. The old student's association purchased a bus. It also started raising cattle to feed students.

Chimhungwe was replaced by Lawrence Sedze, who worked from 2009 to 2011 when Nhamo Marunga took over in 2012.


Mutare School of Preaching has been instrumental in planting and strengthening churches in Zimbabwe. Its graduates, roughly about 400, have managed to establish nearly two-thirds of the 400 (A Cappella) Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe. The school has also developed several elders and deacons for the Lord's church in Zimbabwe. The school has a great future as it receives financial and moral support from foreign and national congregations. The school is now registered with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and offers a full-time residential preacher training program, a leadership training and enhancement (Diploma course), a members' training and enhancement for Bible class teachers, and a church workers and ministry (Certificate courses)



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programs. Students also receive vocational training in various fields that enables them to be self-sustained preachers of the Gospel.

The school continues to train successful preachers and evangelists. After two years of being shut down due to Covid (2020-2021), they had a graduation ceremony in 2022. The school now has a large garden with drip irrigation to help supply food for teachers and students. This also trains the students to grow their own food after graduation. Due to shortcomings in funding, the school now charges the students fees in order to attend. Because of the difficult economic situation in the country, many potential students find it challenging, if not impossible, to pay these fees; thus, this limits current enrollment, which is about 20 students at the present time.

The Hillcrest Church of Christ continues to invest itself in the Mutare School of Preaching (<https://hillcrestonline.com/ministries/missions/mutare/>) and can be contacted at Hillcrest Church of Christ, 650 E. Ambler Avenue, Abilene, TX 79601, by phone at (325) 691-4200 or via email at office@hillcrestonline.com. 

Godwin Marandure is a past graduate of the Mutare School of Preaching. He currently preaches for the Manyame Park Church of Christ outside of Harare and is a well-known evangelist throughout the country. He is very instrumental in distributing The Voice of Truth International and other World Evangelism books throughout Zimbabwe. He can be reached at godwinkuda@gmail.com.



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ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

Verse Search (page 50)

1. A house not made with hands
2. To be clothed with our habitation
3. Mortality, life
4. Holy Spirit
5. Absent
6. Faith, sight
7. To be present with the Lord
8. To be well pleasing to God
9. Before the judgment seat of Christ
10. What we have done in this life, good or bad
11. Terror
12. Persuade men
13. God and the Corinthians

Bible Word

Scramble (inside front cover)
covenant

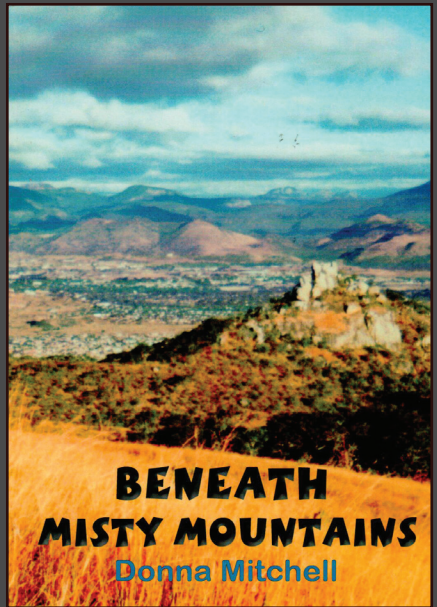
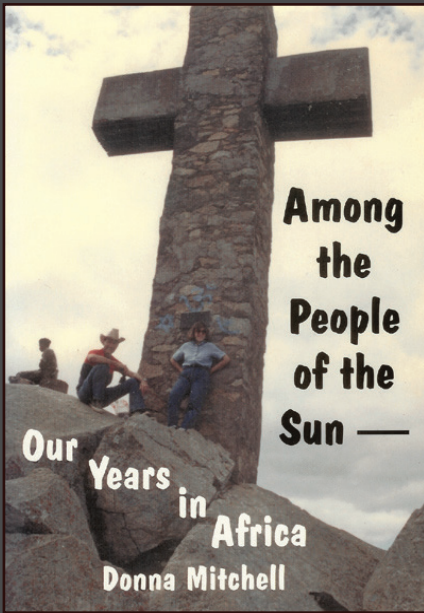
Bible Find (page 41)



Scavenger Hunt (page 94)

1. to bear witness (of Chris) (1:6-8)
2. "there was much water there" (3:23)
3. 38 (5:5)
4. Sea of Tiberias (6:1)
5. the truth (8:32)
6. blasphemy (10:31-33)
7. Peter (13:37)
8. Malchus (18:10)
9. Caesar (19:15)
10. "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:30-31)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:



Loy and Donna Mitchell were missionaries in Zimbabwe for 28 years. In 1958 they left the airport in Kansas City, MO and made their way to what was then Southern Rhodesia where they commenced their work at Nhowe Mission among the Shona speaking people. In 1965 they moved to Umtali (now Mutare), and began their signature work in a city that did not have a New Testament church. From humble beginnings, where less than ten would meet in their living room, the church in Mutare now

has multiple congregations numbering in the thousands. The Gospel has radiated out from this city to farms and villages, resulting in thousands of congregations throughout the country. (Stan Mitchell)

These books, and books of sermon material written by brother Loy and his son, Stan, are available at World Evangelism Publications, P.O. Box 72, Winona, MS 38967; phone 662-283-1192. Ask also for our catalog, listing about 250 books and 112 tracts.