

# V THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

What is...



It can't be good, but  
what does it mean?

See page 96

# The Sign Said Stop

Author Unknown

The sign said, “STOP.” I didn’t. So, I said to the judge...

- “I feel that everyone has the right to choose his own interpretation of this word.”
- “My father never stopped. If I were to stop, I would be condemning him.”
- “My family has always refused to stop. If it was good enough for them, it is good enough for me.”
- “I have gone so long without stopping, I just don’t think I can start at this time.”
- “My preacher says I don’t have to stop.”
- “What about those who have never seen the sign?”
- “My parents made me stop when I was young, and so I just don’t do it now.”
- “I believe that only going is important. Stopping is optional.”
- “How do you know the word really means today what it did when it was written?”
- “I’ll stop after I get my life straightened out.”
- “I’ll stop when my spouse decides to stop. It will mean more if we do it together.”
- “It’s not anybody’s business what I do.”
- “I feel that as long as we are all sincere that you, the judge, will accept us no matter what we do.”

The scripture said, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). I didn’t, and so, I said to **the Judge**... Think about it!





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

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*The Voice of Truth International* is a quarterly printed magazine. About 60,000 copies per edition in several languages are distributed on six continents. Every issue is a veritable mini library, sporting numerous sections and something for everyone. We intend thereby to glorify God and to edify Christians and non-Christians alike. You can be a partner in this by ordering copies for your congregation, for yourself, as gifts for others or simply participating with us through your donations to enable us to ship more to distant destinations across the planet. In addition, **VOTI** is seed material for one's personal edification, Bible class and sermon preparation, and bulletin articles.

# Epicenter(s)

**Louis Rushmore**



The word “epicenter” pertains to the center point above an earthquake. However, “epicenter” is used often figuratively as, “the focal point of a usually harmful or unpleasant phenomenon or event; the center” (yourdictionary.com). As I listened to the news this morning, the broadcaster referred to San Francisco as the epicenter in the United States for instances of monkeypox, and he cited New York City and Miami as epicenters for this disease in other parts of the country. Furthermore, in each of those epicenters, monkeypox first and primarily infects homosexual communities. Thousands of years ago, Sodom was an epicenter for homosexuality, for which cause God destroyed it and neighboring cities (Genesis 19:1-29). God could not find even 10 righteous souls in Sodom (Genesis 18:24-33).

Genesis 19:4-5 identifies the specific sin by which the city of Sodom defiled itself, and the NIV uses plain, unmistakable words. ***“Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. They called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.’”*** Prior to the Law of Moses or Judaism and under Patriarchy, God condemned homosexuality or sodomy. The word “sodomy” comes from the city of Sodom, which God destroyed because homosexuality was commonplace there. That decisive, punitive action by God against Sodom as the epicenter for homosexuality should cause residents of San Francisco, New York City and Miami to pause and carefully reflect respecting being epicenters for homosexuality today.

Likewise, under Judaism, God also condemned homosexuality.

Leviticus 18:22 reads, ***“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination”*** (NKJV). The word ***“abomination”*** here means “extreme disgust and hatred” (*Webster’s*) and “something disgusting (morally)... an abhorrence” (*Biblesoft’s*). God hates some sins – such as homosexuality – more than others (Proverbs 6:16) and calls them abominations. The seriousness of homosexuality is apparent from Leviticus 20:13, which says, ***“If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.”*** God mandated capital punishment under Patriarchy and Judaism for homosexuality.



God also condemns homosexuality in the New Testament under the Gospel Age – Christianity. ***“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”*** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). In another list of sins, the inspired apostle Paul included, ***“...the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality...”*** (1 Timothy 1:10 ESV).

God views homosexuality as a perversion and made the destruction of Sodom and the surrounding cities “*an example*” against homosexuality. “*He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly*” (2 Peter 2:6 NIV; cf., Luke 17:29). “*...Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire*” (Jude 7).

Remember that through homosexuals another disease was introduced into the United States – HIV/AIDS. Now, homosexuals have lately brought into the country the disease of monkeypox. Not only did the apostle Paul condemn homosexuality when writing to Christians at Rome, he also indicated that there is a physical penalty for practicing homosexuality.

*Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves... For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.* (Romans 1:24, 26-27 NKJV)

HIV/AIDS, monkeypox and who knows what else appears to correspond to “*receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.*” Unfortunately, diseases brought about by homosexual behavior also results in collateral damage when non-homosexuals become infected with HIV/AIDS and monkeypox (i.e., through blood transfusions, bisexual contact with heterosexuals, exposure to saliva or blood).

How ironic! Homosexuals celebrate so-called “pride month” in June each year. Shall we celebrate HIV/AIDS? Shall we celebrate monkeypox? Should we have pride in HIV/AIDS and monkeypox? Lawmakers, leaders of industry and the media champion homosexuality – something that God views as an abomination and condemns. Romans 1:32 declares that punishment will be forthcoming not only for homosexuals but also for those who approve of it!


Contrary to popular assertions, the Bible amply condemns



homosexuality (Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Luke 17:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7; Romans 1:26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). According to the meaning of the original language of the word, the **“perverted persons”** of Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46 and 2 Kings 23:7 refers to homosexuals.

There is a remedy for all sins, including the sin of homosexuality. Some of the Christians at Corinth had been homosexuals, and they were forgiven upon their repentance and obedience to the Gospel. Paul wrote:

***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 NKJV)

Jesus Christ summarized in Mark 16:16 one’s initial obedience to the Gospel to become a Christian. It reads, **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”** Forgiveness for sins after becoming a Christian involves penitence and prayer (Acts 8:22). To not obey the Gospel and suffer eternal condemnation is too horrible to contemplate (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 1 Peter 4:17). 

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# Finishing What You Start

**Jerry Bates**

We have all started projects only to quit them before we finish. Undoubtedly, we have also seen others do the same thing. It is common for people to start something and yet never finish. It is easy to start something; it is often hard to finish.

The same is true regarding our service to God. It is common for people to start serving God. Unfortunately, it is also quite common for many of those same people to quit, and the consequences of such a decision are eternal. We sometimes wonder how or why people would do that. When we understand that the consequences are eternal, why would anyone give up a reward in Heaven knowing that the only other alternative is damnation in Hell? Unquestionably, there are probably many reasons for such a decision.

We can read about numerous biblical characters who likewise quit following God. One such individual was Asa. He was the grandson of Rehoboam, the third king of Judah. He ruled for 41 years, and his life is summarized in 2 Chronicles 14:2. ***“Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.”*** We look at that statement, and we wonder what was wrong. Indeed, he did countless things right, and he served God properly for many years. We read in verse three that he tore down the altars to the idol gods. He was so devoted to doing God’s will that he demoted his own grandmother from her position of queen mother because she refused to give up her idol to Asherah (1 Kings 15:9-13). Furthermore, 1

Kings 15:14 declares that ***“Asa’s heart was loyal to the Lord all his days.”***

Due to his faithful service, God blessed him and his kingdom. Second Chronicles 14:7 proclaims that God gave him rest from his enemies, and thus, he was able to build and prosper. Even when he was confronted with foreign enemies, Asa depended upon God for deliverance. In verse nine, we read that Zerah, the king of Ethiopia, came against him with an army of one million men and 300 chariots, more than double the size of Asa’s army. Asa did not despair; rather, he cried out to God in prayer. He affirmed his belief and trust in God that He was more than able to deliver him and confessed his inability to save himself. The result was that God struck the Ethiopians, and they were soundly defeated.

For 35 years, Asa depended upon God, and 2 Chronicles 15:9 pronounces that there was no war until the 35<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. For many years life was good for Asa. An important truth was announced by the



prophet Azariah in 2 Chronicles 15:2. ***“Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”*** The same truth is taught in James 4:8. ***“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...”*** We find here the promise from God that if we seek and serve Him, He will bless us and will not forsake us. We see that illustrated in God’s dealings with Asa.

Unfortunately, the story does not end there. For some reason, Asa became self-centered and stopped depending upon God. This is a great danger of prosperity. We can easily become prideful and self-centered, beginning to think that we no longer need God. In 2 Chronicles 16, Baasha, the king of Israel, came against Asa. Rather than turning to God

as he did earlier when Zerah came against him, Asa went to the king of Syria for help. Initially, the plan seemed to work as Baasha ceased his opposition against Asa. Soon, however, the prophet, Hanani, came to Asa and told him that if he had depended upon God, not only would he have been protected from Baasha, but the entire Syrian army would have been delivered into his hand. Thus, what appeared to be a good plan from a human standpoint was in reality a foolish mistake.

Considering how Asa had lived for 35 years, one would think that he would have realized his mistake and turned back to God. Yet, such was not the case. Instead, he put Hanani in prison. He did not like the message, and so he became angry with the messenger and did something additionally foolish. He began to see himself as above God's law. In the 39<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, he was afflicted with a severe disease of the feet. Again, he only sought help from doctors instead of seeking help from God. Apparently, he never turned back to God as he died in the 41<sup>st</sup> year of his reign.

*For some reason, Asa became self-centered and stopped depending upon God. This is a great danger of prosperity.*

What happened to Asa? Satan turned his focus away from God to something else. Asa became a secular humanist long before that term was invented. He thought that he himself and other men could manage whatever problems came his way. Man became the center of his life, which is the definition of humanism. Who reigns in your life? When God was on the throne of Asa's life, all was good. When self was on the throne, defeat was inevitable. The same principle is true today. When God is on our throne, we may have problems, but God assures ultimate victory. When self is on the throne, ultimate defeat is likewise assured.

We do not know exactly what caused a man such as Asa to turn away from God, but the Bible is clear about his ultimate end. This Bible character can serve as a warning to each of us. It does not matter how long we have tried to serve God; Satan can turn our hearts and minds away from God. It is possible that we will begin to depend more upon ourselves than upon God. When we do that, defeat is assured. In contrast, if we continue to serve God, if we finish what we start, God promises us ultimate victory!✚

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# *The ABCs of the Lord's Supper*

Shane Fisher

## **The Authority of the Lord's Supper**

We know that pleasing God must involve our faith (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17). In order for us to understand what God desires, He had to reveal His mind to us. Thankfully, He has done exactly that (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). We can know what is authorized because of the “chain” of authority that we see linked in the Scriptures. This “chain” begins with God the Father who permitted His Son to reign at His right hand (Ephesians 1:20-23). Jesus the Son dispatched the Holy Spirit by endowing the apostles with miraculous power (John 16:7-15; Acts 2:1-4). The apostles revealed what God authorized us to do (Colossians 3:17). One of the revealed, authorized items was the partaking of this memorial known to us as the Lord's Supper, which was revealed in the following places: Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16-21; 11:17-34.

## **The Beginning of the Lord's Supper**

What is its origin? It was on a Thursday night that the Lord and His disciples were assembled together in an upper room in Jerusalem to partake of the Passover meal. It was after the Passover meal that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:14-16). Later, this memorial was commemorated under apostolic sanction since the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth

(John 16:13). In 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, Paul alluded back to that same night.

## The Contents of the Lord's Supper

There are two elements that our Lord took and signified as a memorial to His death on the cross.

1. **The first element was the bread.** What kind of bread was it – unleavened or leavened? When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, the Jews had just completed the Passover meal. We can deduce that they did not use leavened bread because all leaven was to be kept out of the house (Exodus 12:1-19). There could have been no leaven used in that upper room. Jesus also never broke the Law of Moses. He obeyed it with perfection (Hebrews 4:15). Another reason unleavened bread was used is because it represents Jesus' perfect body, in which He never sinned (Hebrews 7:26).
2. **The second element was the fruit of the vine.** The fruit of the vine refers to grapes that grew on vines in Palestine. There are ancient wine-presses all around where the grapes were stomped to extract grape juice. Notice that it was "*the fruit of the vine*" that was used, not the Greek word *oinos*, which is usually employed for wine (which is either unfermented or fermented based on the context). This represents the blood of Jesus that was shed for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28-29).

## The Day of the Lord's Supper

Was there a specific time the church partook of the Lord's Supper under apostolic sanction? While Jesus was on the earth, He did not reveal everything. An example is whether it was authorized to divorce the non-Christian spouse. Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 7:12, "*But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him*" (NKJV). The Lord did not speak on this specific issue during His personal ministry. Paul, an apostle, was to bind what was already bound in Heaven, and he revealed what God commanded (Matthew 18:18; 1 Corinthians 14:37).

The Lord had much to reveal. It was to be accomplished through the

apostles themselves. Jesus' will came into effect after He died on the cross (Hebrews 9:15-17). While the time to observe the Lord's Supper was not specified by our Lord during His earthly ministry, we can deduce we ought to follow the approved example that was set by the apostles, since they were guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth (John 16:13).

Paul the apostle assembled with the brethren in Troas to partake of the Lord's Supper on **the first day of the week** (Acts 20:7). It makes sense when we put together the data showing why we ought to observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

1. It was the day the Lord was raised up from the dead (Mark 16:1-2).
2. It was the day on which the church was established (Acts 2).
3. It became known as the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10).

### The Examination of the Lord's Supper

Since God desires us to worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24), it is very important that we examine ourselves when partaking of this sacred supper.

1. **The Lord's Supper is to be eaten with a look backward to the death of Jesus.** Jesus stated in 1 Corinthians 11:25-26, "*Do this in remembrance of Me.*" We are to discern (make a distinction) concerning the Lord's precious body that was given on the cross.
2. **The Lord's Supper is to be eaten with a look within ourselves** (1 Corinthians 11:28). "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*"
3. **The Lord's Supper is to be eaten with a look forward to His second coming** (1 Corinthians 11:26). "*For as often as you eat this bread, and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*"
4. **The Lord's Supper is to be eaten in a worthy manner** (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

### The Frequency of the Lord's Supper

There are many people who believe it does not matter when we observe the Lord's Supper. There are various denominations that take it annually,



semi-annually, quarterly, monthly or daily. Some people will even take it at weddings. **Does it matter? What does the Bible authorize?**

1. There was a time of assembling together as a congregation. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul pointed out when the Christians “*come together*” that it was an official worship assembly of the local congregation in Corinth. When did this assembling together of the church occur?
2. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul wrote, “*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*” Since they were **already** assembling together on the first day of the week (which we call Sunday), Paul ordered the Corinthian congregation to give as they had prospered to the needy saints in Jerusalem.
3. What was the **purpose** of assembling together? They came together to partake of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20; Acts 20:7). When the Corinthian Christians came together, unfortunately, they **abused** the Lord’s Supper. They should have partaken of the memorial in the right manner.
4. These official assemblies occurred in regular intervals according to Hebrews 10:25. However, some Christians were abandoning coming together, when they ought to have been assembling with their brethren to provoke one another unto love and good works.
5. In church history, the post-apostolic churches continued to meet together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord’s Supper (*Didache* 14.1; Martyr). This reinforces what was practiced by the early church in the first century under apostolic sanction.

If we truly love God and put our full trust in Him (John 14:15), then we will partake of the Lord’s Supper **only** on the first day of the week, and we will do it **weekly**.

### The Gist of the Lord’s Supper

What is the meaning of the Lord’s Supper? What ought we to cherish from it?

1. We remember Jesus and His death.



2. We spiritually commune with Him.
3. We personally reflect on our ourselves and as a corporate body.
4. It equips us to better devotion, dedication and commitment. †

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## God Cares

### Eddie Cooper

A number of weeks ago, a baby sparrow hit our sliding glass door. I thought the bird was dying, and so, I picked it up and held it in my hand. It was still breathing but very labored. I, then, put it on our banister to see if it would fly off, but I was afraid it would fall to the ground. So, I picked it up again, petted it with my finger, and it flew off. This reminded me of Matthew 10:29 where we find that God takes notice of the sparrows which fall to the ground. Then, in Luke 12:6, we learn God has not forgotten them, and in verse 7, we see that we are of more value than the sparrows. Remember, (1) God has not forgotten us, and (2) we are of more value than the sparrows. We need to remember that God cares about us, and God values us. †



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1932—2008

## Entertainment

J.C. Choate

The Bible describes the carnal man, the things of the flesh that are wrong – the sinful side of us – as being **the old man of sin**. Naturally, in obeying Christ, we put off that old man, and we obey God so that we might be saved. In that process, we become new persons in Christ. Paul wrote that in doing this, our old man is crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6). He stated that, as a result, “...*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed*

*away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Now what does entertainment have to do with this process? Just this: We must realize that there are many sides to our lives. We have work to do, we have families, we have friends, we have education and training, and then, we have entertainment, recreation and a holiday to enjoy from time to time. There are times when we need a change, a rest from what we are presently doing and some time off. During such times, we usually want to change our activities and do what entertains us – things that we enjoy. There is nothing wrong with entertainment, provided it is wholesome and beneficial. Actually, it is in one’s interest. It can even save one’s life, and certainly entertainment or recreation helps prevent from leading a boring life.

We know that children do a lot of playing while they are growing up. This is expected of them. At the same time, as adults, we can overwork ourselves to our own hurt. That is why it is necessary to take some time off for a change of pace. We may not be children any longer, but we also need to have some time for play. Our games may be more

mature – physically or mentally – but still they are games. There is a saying that all work and no play makes one dull, and that is true.

As with everything else, there is good entertainment and bad entertainment. Also, as is the usual case, so many choose entertainment that is bad or questionable at best. There is nothing wrong with a good movie, but the majority of them today are filled with nudity, violence, foul language, immorality and numerous other evils. Television and radio can also be good sources of entertainment, but these, too, can focus on sinful practices. What about sports, travel, reading, hiking, hobbies and such like for one's pastime? These choices would be more wholesome in most cases.

In considering the type of entertainment in which we can engage, we should ask some questions.

**1. Is it good and wholesome?** Is it something that I can do without being ashamed of it? Can I engage in it with others? Can I recommend it to my friends? If I must answer “No” to these questions, then I should not even consider it. Others may be doing it, but that does not mean it is suitable for a Christian to do it.

**2. Do I enjoy it?** Is it the type of entertainment that I can relax and do for the simple reason that I enjoy it? If it is going to be hard work and something that I really do not like to do, then why bother with it? That's not entertainment!

**3. Can I afford it?** Many types of entertainment are very expensive. Even though it might be something that I would enjoy, it might cost too much financially and timewise.

**4. Is it dangerous?** Many forms of entertainment are dangerous. There are rides and games that break arms, legs and other parts of the body. Also, the physical problems one may already have should prevent a person from participating in some activities, lest the **entertainment** result in a heart attack or some other physical disaster.

**5. Will it benefit me?** If the entertainment is in the form of sports, it may be the means of providing some physical exercise that is badly needed. One's entertainment could be cricket, soccer, golf,

badminton, table tennis or any of many other games. Or, it might be fishing, jogging, going on a trip or just staying around the house and relaxing. Recreation could be something that I do by myself, or it could include group participation. Entertainment might involve one's family. Whatever it is or whomever it involves, it should be designed to provide a change of pace, to bring some relaxation or to strengthen a person physically and mentally.




I could go on with other questions, but these are a few that will help me or you to determine if the kind of entertainment or recreation we seek is worthwhile. Above all, the Christian must realize that he is a Christian and that he can do only those things – whether in private life, his work or on leave – that are in keeping with Christian principles. To practice one thing at home but to go off somewhere where one is not known to indulge in questionable activities, is not only wrong, it is hypocritical.

We should keep certain Bible principles in mind when we choose our entertainment. For example, Paul wrote, ***“Do not be overcome***

*by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Romans 12:21). Again, he said, *“Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good”* (Romans 12:9). Whatever one does, he may be tempted to turn it into something bad. If he likes sports, he might gamble on the outcome of a game. If he enjoys a movie, he may decide to see one that portrays immorality or some other worldly plot. However, as Paul said, we must abhor such things and cleave to what is good. There are always wholesome things for us to do if we want to keep ourselves pure.

While the world thinks that a good time can be had only by engaging in behavior that is risqué or immoral, that is certainly not the truth. If a Christian, however, is tempted to listen to the world on such matters, then he should remember that the Lord is always there to help him overcome such temptations. The writer of Hebrews penned, in speaking of Christ, *“For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted”* (Hebrews 2:18). Paul wrote, *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Let me hasten to say that there is nothing wrong with a Christian being happy and engaging in things that entertain, provided they are neither wrong within themselves nor taken to the extreme. Sometimes people of the world think of the Christian as always being serious, sad and even unhappy. In being judgmental, some might even think it would be wrong for the Christian to be light-hearted, laugh and joke. Yet, this is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches about the followers of Christ. We are to be happy people. We have every reason to be happy and to enjoy life. Yes, we must walk *‘the straight and narrow way’* (Matthew 7:13-14); we must abstain from – avoid – sinful things. Sin brings terrible consequences. On the other hand, the Christian life brings true happiness (1 Peter 3:8-17). 

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



## My Favorite Song

**Byron Nichols**

Most of us have one or more favorite worship songs. It isn't necessary that we all share the same favorites, but I want to solicit your attention to my favorite and tell you why it is my favorite.

First, let's draw attention to a few things about our songs and singing in worship. It is only natural that we all like songs that we think are pretty. Consider with me what is of the most importance in our songs of worship. Is it **the music**, or is it **the message – the meaning**? The music (notes and rhythm) can certainly enhance the beauty of a song, but the **message** of the song is in **the words**.

Let's turn our attention now to my favorite song. It was written in 1707 by a young but very spiritually minded Englishman named Isaac Watts. He wrote the words, and a man named Lowell Mason wrote the notes – the music. In my judgment, their combined efforts were excellent. The words and the music just seem to have been born for each other.

This song was one of the more than 750 religious songs written by Isaac Watts. In spite of his work having taken place some 300 years ago, he is still widely revered as the greatest writer of hymns of all time. In addition to that, his song that has long been my favorite is also regarded by many as the greatest hymn ever written. It is, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." **Verse 1 reads:**

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*



When I consider the first verse, I am reminded of, not a cross, but the cross, the one on which Christ allowed Himself to suffer. I am impressed again by the fact that He could have



been spared that whole situation by calling upon His Father, who would have sent **“more than twelve legions of angels”** to deliver His beloved Son from that awful ordeal (Matthew 26:53). His enemies were mistaken in thinking that they were **taking** His life. Instead, He **gave** it, and He gave it **for His enemies!** As I survey that wondrous cross, I am made to realize that I could never gain enough wealth to equal the value of His sacrifice. I am also made ashamed of my pride in myself rather than having ever-increasing pride in Him. **Verse 2 reads:**

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my Lord;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

Verse 2 reminds me that I have no reason or right to be boastful, and it helps me to remember and to boast of the death of my Lord for such an imperfect fellow as I am. In remembering that He gave His life for me, I am reminded that I can at least be a little bit like Him by sacrificing earthly treasures as an expression of gratitude for the giving of His blood for me. **Verse 3 reads:**

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

Oh, verse 3! Just reading these words that recall merely part of all that



God's Son suffered physically for me is so overwhelming. He was flooded with physical misery and with sorrow, but He was willing to submit to it all – because He loved me so! The scoffers, the ruling Jews, the Roman soldiers all thought that the Lord was indeed being scorned and ridiculed by putting a crown of mockery and thorns on His head. However, in reality, their actions showed **their** guilt of sins rather than proving **Him** to be a liar, a blasphemer and a fake. Love and sorrow, what a mixture! How could He love me so much? **Verse 4 reads:**

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

It's true! Even if I owned everything in the whole world, my riches would not be equal to the incredible love of Jesus! The closest I can come to paying my great debt is to devote to Him and His great cause **my soul and my life – my all**. May God help us all to be alert and sincere in what we sing, and I thank the Lord again for Isaac Watts and my favorite song. †

**Byron Nichols is Editor Emeritus of The Voice of Truth International. He resides in Springfield, Missouri, USA.**

## **Robison's Rubies**

Just like an attorney calls witnesses to the stand to prove his point, Jesus had varied witnesses to prove that He is the Son of God. One of those witnesses was the prophesied person of John the Baptist (John 5:31-35). As great as John was – preaching in the wilderness and attracting the multitudes – he was careful to point out that he was just preparing the way for Jesus, the Savior. He said of Jesus, **“He must increase, but I must decrease”** (John 3:30). He pointed to Jesus as **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). That was just one point of witness, and there were many, many others! History also verifies the stir both John the Baptist and Jesus created. Wouldn't you like to examine more about these historical characters and their claims?



# HYMNS



## Jesus Is King

Words and Music  
by: Paul Mays

1 Je - sus is king, so for - ev - er we will sing! All glor - y to His name,  
 2 Je - sus the way, to e - ter - nal life to - day! Our re - fuge in the storm,  
 3 Je - sus is life, He's e - ter - nal with - out strife! Be bap - tized to re - ceive,  
 4 Je - sus the light, yes, He shines so ver - y bright! He's call - ing out your name,

for - ev - er He will reign, on the righthand of God, give Him glor - y praise and laud!  
 when lifewould bringyou harm, but you first must o - bey, by His Gos - pel to be saved!  
 for - give - ness that you need, there is no o - ther way, to be co - vered by His grace!  
 you'll ne - ver be the same, once you're washed in the blood, and you're co - vered by His love!

*traverse* ◊

I said Je - sus is the king, so for - ev - er we will sing!  
 I said Je - sus is the way, to e - ter - nal life to - day!  
 I said Je - sus off - ers life, He's e - ter - nal with - out strife! Je - sus is, Je - sus is, Je - sus is,  
 I said Je - sus is the light, yes, He shines so ver - y bright! *Je - sus is,*

*p mp mf*

◊ CODA

Je - sus is my, King!  
 Je - sus is my King!

Paul Mays is a Christian hymn writer who resides in Roanoke, Virginia, USA. Visit <https://www.youtube.com/user/neanderpaul> to listen to the hymns.

# HYMNS

## May God Be Glorified

Words & Music  
by: Paul Mays

May God be glor - i - fied His saints ed - i - fied glor - y to His name,

May God be glor - i - fied His saints ed - i - fied praise His ho - ly name.

1. Ev - ery sing - le word in the Bi - ble has been breathed out by the Lord,  
2. Ev - ery sing - le thing oh that we've been giv - en is a gift from God,

Go - ing through our life with - out that know - ledge we can - not a - fford;  
We need to be us - ing all these gifts to give Him praise and laud;

Ev - ery sing - le soul needs to hear the gos - pel it they draw de - serve to know,  
Ev - ery sing - le day oh that pass - es by it draws us to the end,

Je - sus has co - mman - ded all the Christ - ians to go and seek their souls.  
We need to be read - y for that day to hea - ven we'll as - cend.

Paul Mays is a Christian hymn writer who resides in Roanoke, Virginia, USA. Visit <https://www.youtube.com/user/neanderpaul> to listen to the hymns.

# **Jerusalem Headlines**

**Rebecca Rushmore**



Pick up any newspaper in the world. One of the first things you will notice are the headlines. These phrases alert the reader to the main events or stories of interest found in the paper. They also give some important information about the following article. Imagine for a moment the possible headlines of a Jerusalem newspaper one weekend almost two thousand years ago.

## **Friday's Headline**

- Late Night Sanhedrin Meeting Finds Man Guilty

## **Saturday's Headlines**

- Self-Proclaimed Son of God Sentenced to Death
- Son of God Crucified: Where Were His Angels?
- Vandalism at the Temple During Mid-Day Blackout

## **Sunday's Headline**

- Jesus' Body Missing from Tomb: Stolen by Followers or Resurrected?

The account of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, as well as the events leading to the crucifixion, appear in all four Gospel accounts (Matthew 26:47-28:8; Mark 14:43-16:8; Luke 22:47-24:12; John 18:2-20:10). The information found in these passages can give us a good idea

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about the contents of articles corresponding to each of the above headlines.

### **Late Night Sanhedrin Meeting Finds Man Guilty**

An article about the arrest of Jesus would follow Friday's headline. As Jesus and His disciples were preparing to leave the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas arrived with a mob to take Jesus into custody. From the Garden, Jesus was taken before the Sanhedrin for trial. This trial was illegal; trials were not to be conducted on feast days, days in preparation for feasts or on the Sabbath (Kittel). The trial was obviously not an honest one either. The Sanhedrin was determined to find Jesus guilty at any cost. The prosecutors found false witnesses, and finally the Defendant's own words were misconstrued as proof enough to condemn Him. The Sanhedrin's call for the death penalty could not be carried out on its own. Though they were Israel's governing authority, their decisions were subject to Roman law. Plans were made to appeal to the governor for a death sentence.

### **Self-Proclaimed Son of God Sentenced to Death**

On Friday morning, the members of the Sanhedrin took Jesus to Pilate, the governor. Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews. Jesus agreed that He was. When the chief priests and elders of the Sanhedrin accused Him, He declined to answer. Pilate realized Christ was innocent but agreed to the death sentence at the insistence of the Jews. They were very adamant about seeing Jesus put to death. Pilate gave in to avoid rebellion that could bring unwanted attention from Rome. Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion.

### **Son of God Crucified: Where Were His Angels?**

As was custom, Jesus was beaten and abused before bearing His cross to the place of crucifixion. While on the cross, those around mocked Him. Many had heard His claims that He was the Son of God. Those present also acknowledged that, as the Son of God, He would have the power to call angels to rescue Him. Mockers told Him to save Himself as He had saved many others (healing, raising from the dead). Some said, "*He*

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*trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'”* (Matthew 27:43). When Jesus died on the cross that day, His adversaries thought they had won.

### **Vandalism at the Temple During Midday Blackout**

Two events occurred while Christ was on the cross that must have puzzled many in Jerusalem. At noon, while Jesus was hanging on the tree (1 Peter 2:24), the world became dark. This darkness lasted until three o'clock. At a time when the sun should have been its brightest and the temperature the warmest from the midday sun, the sun was not to be seen. Other mystifying events marked the moment of Jesus' death. The veil of the Temple tore from top to bottom. Earthquakes shook the land. Looking back, we understand the tearing of the veil represents the end of the Old Law and the beginning of the New. Anyone could now see into the Most Holy Place, a symbol that one no longer needed to go through the priests to have access to God. Now, we go directly through Jesus (John 15:16; 16:23). Darkness occurred at the world's blackest hour spiritually – a time when Christ took upon Himself all the sins of the world, past, present and future.

### **Jesus' Body Missing from Tomb: Stolen by Followers or Resurrected?**

On Sunday morning, a most amazing thing happened. Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. The unbelieving Jews of the day claimed followers of Christ stole the body. However, there was no proof of this, and so, they had to pay the guards to lie. The guards falsely said the body was stolen while they were asleep. This was an absurd claim for a couple of reasons. First, the guards, Roman soldiers, knew such neglect of duty was punishable by death. Only money and a promise by the Jewish leaders to come to their aid would make this report acceptable to the soldiers. How, except by later telling the truth, could these Jews prevent Roman law from being carried out? Second, it would take many men to remove the stone in front of a tomb, and then, to remove a body (that was also guarded by armed soldiers). With such a number and task, enough noise would

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have been made to wake a sound-asleep guard. The only true and plausible explanation was a resurrection from the dead, especially since Christ was later seen by many who knew Him well.

One weekend almost two thousand years ago, newspapers in Jerusalem would have had some very interesting headlines. A great number of important events took place. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ changed the world. We no longer have to offer blood sacrifices; Christ was the last blood sacrifice that will cover all humanity for all eternity (Hebrews 10:11-12). The Old Testament was nailed to the cross with Jesus (Colossians 2:14), and a New Covenant was established. Many people often say, “That was a day I’ll never forget,” when referring to something that happened to them. One weekend two thousand years ago is a date no one should ever forget. It changed all our lives forever! †

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## ROBISON'S RUBIES

Adoption is a fascinating phenomenon. Many people have benefitted from actually seeking out a child and adopting him or her into their own families. They have love to give and seek out a real human being with a special, unique soul. Further, on that soul, they heap their generosity, goodness and guidance.

The figure of adoption is used to depict how God loves His followers. Galatians 4:4-5 records, “**God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**” God seeks us, though we are sinful human beings, to be His children, and we can be, if we will obey Him as our loving Heavenly Father. †



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# One Egg


Raymond Elliott



This morning, I held in my hand one boiled egg, and I asked my Beloved, “How many eggs do you see?” She replied, “One.” Then, I asked her what it was on the one egg that I was peeling from the egg, and she replied, “The shell.” I took a bite of the one egg, and I asked this time, “What do you see?” She answered, “The yellow.” I asked her one more time how many eggs she saw before I began to peel the egg, and she replied, “One.” Yet, she identified three parts of the one egg before and after I began to eat the one egg. This is so common to us that we simply accept the ingredients of an egg that God made it that way.

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The Bible clearly states there is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Ephesians 4:6)! However, we read in Matthew 3:16 when Jesus was baptized that the **“Spirit of God”** descended like a dove. Then, the Father said from Heaven, **“...This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”** (NKJV). Here you have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. There is one God, but also you have **“one Lord”** and **“one Spirit”** (Ephesian 4:4-6). While the word “Trinity” is not mentioned in the Bible, it is evident there is one God but three distinct personalities, all having the same essence.

Now I can see that an egg is one but has three parts. I accept this, though I may not understand how God made the egg as it is. In my finite mind, I surely do not fully understand how there is one God but three distinct personalities, but I accept it by faith because the inspired Word of God teaches it! After all, believers **“walk by faith, not by sight”** (2 Corinthians 5:7)! 

Raymond Elliott is a semi-retired preacher who lives in Prattville, Alabama, USA.

[Editor’s Note: There is one God race – Godhead – comprised of three Persons, and there is one human race composed of billions of persons. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]



# Is the Bible Still Relevant Today?

Jeremy W. Barrier

*“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).*

## Introduction

Recently, I was asked the very question that provides the title to this article: “Is the Bible Still Relevant Today?” To be honest, I was a little dumbfounded and didn’t know how to answer for quite some time. I have a PhD in “Biblical Interpretation,” and I have been a professor of religious literature for roughly seventeen and a half years, teaching both within a university that is training ministers as well as in a state-run public institution, yet I hadn’t attempted to answer such a fundamental question in quite some time. Of course, the answer for me was, “Yes, it is relevant.” However, I realized that this demanded two more questions for me: (1) For **whom** is it important? and (2) **Why** is it important? Now, my mind was really churning. With these thoughts in mind, I ask that you consider the following.

## It’s Christmas Time in the City: Personal Experiences that Involve Religion

In December of 2022, a friend of mine and I had just risen 50 floors in about 30 seconds in an elevator taking us to the viewing level of the Bitexco Financial Tower in downtown Ho Chi Minh City. The skyscraper is impressive with a massive helipad sticking out horizontally from the 52nd floor, making it one of the most iconic skyscrapers in the modern world. While the magnificent view of the city below was interesting to me as we walked around the viewing level, what really caught my attention was the Christmas music playing in the background.

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On the one hand, as an American, hearing Christmas music produced by the legendary Phil Spector from 1963 was not unusual to me. What was unusual was that this music was blasting from the speakers in this downtown location in the heart of Vietnam. What an unbelievable paradox! Music that epitomizes western, capitalist and Christian values was blasting in the heartland of a socialist nation in the heart of Asia – a nation that is officially atheistic and where the majority of the people (86% plus) practice a form of folk religion that mixes elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, amongst other things.

### Religion Matters

In case you are missing the significance of my story, allow me to make it clear. Religions of the world, and especially Christianity, have so interwoven themselves with the mass of society that it is impossible to separate them. Religion is like one strand of strings that has been woven into the fabric of society, like a rug made of thousands of strands, colors and textures ultimately producing a beautiful tapestry. Christianity, while not the religion of most of the people of Vietnam is deeply within the mix of emergent cultures of the society. Christmas itself is recognized and experienced religiously and economically the world over, even in societies that could care less about the faith at a deeper level. In short, whether one is personally interested in religion, and Christianity more specifically, or not is irrelevant. The fact remains that religions of the world matter. Christianity matters, and the religious texts of Christianity matter.

Nominal Christianity represents nearly 2.4 billion people. In total, nearly 85% of the people on planet earth are religious and explicitly express their faith within a particular, organized, institutional faith group – whether it is Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or something else. Religion matters in numerous ways to most of the inhabitants of the earth. Religion matters if we are trying to understand the world politically, sociologically, culturally, historically and in numerous other ways. Even the all-powerful economic structures of the world **must** take religion seriously in a globalized economy. In short, religion matters.

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## The Bible Matters

Taking this one step further, for the reasons stated above, not only does Christianity matter, but the Bible – the source book for Christianity – matters, too. The Bible is sometimes referred to by believers as the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, the Book or by the two major sections within Christian Bibles: the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is the book that represents the Word of God spoken to humanity over a period of roughly 1000 years (plus or minus a few centuries). Does it matter? Yes. To Whom? If you are a thinking, rational human being, then, it should matter to you. However, more specifically, if you are intrigued by the idea that the Creator of the heavens and the earth may have made the decision to speak to humanity, it will matter to you as well. Of course, this last comment answers the “why” question stated above (i.e., ‘Why does the Bible matter?’) at the beginning of this article. **If** there is a God, and **if** He has spoken to humanity, this makes this book important and piques my interest.


## Am I Reading the Word of God or Is God Reading Me?

In this section, I realize that I am getting ahead of myself. Some of you may be saying “But I don’t believe that God wrote it, and I don’t believe He created the universe.” Well, if this is the case, and you have made it this far, then I think it is safe to presume that you are nevertheless interested in this subject. With this in mind, I would like to end this article by considering the mention of the **“Word of God”** as expressed in the quote above from Hebrews, one of the books found in the New Testament of the Bible. Without getting into too much detail, many readers of Scripture today acknowledge that the reference to the **“Word of God”** in this quote is, in essence, a reference to the Bible. With this being the case, the quote becomes interesting for several reasons. It seems to imply that if we engage with the **“Word of God,”** it is not us who are doing the detective work, but rather we are exposing ourselves to God, Who seems to be able to reveal our true identity rather easily. Metaphorically, this image reminds me of

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the surgeon who is able to use his knives and tools to perform delicate and precise surgery that results in the altering and eventual healing of the human body. This image **turns the tables**, so to speak. It is really God working on me, rather than me working on Scripture. In other words, the passage implies that when we read the Bible, we are allowing ourselves to be open to God working on our hearts and our minds. This ‘surgical’ procedure can be life altering and even healing. That’s a compelling image to consider and an interesting thought as well.

### Concluding Thoughts

To say that the Bible matters to the entirety of the world – due to history, politics, cultural and social factors, or even economic realities that involve humans, religions and their faiths – is true, and I would even say indisputable to the average thinking, rational human being. Yet, to go one step further and to acknowledge the possibility that a Divine Being could be attempting to communicate and alter the course of individual human lives is a different thought altogether, and worthy of examination. My hope is that as you read this article, you will consider these ideas and consider the quote of Hebrews 4:12. In closing, maybe the pressing question is not “Does the Bible matter today?” but rather, “Does the Bible matter **to me**?” 

**Jeremy W. Barrier is a missions evangelist and head of the graduate program at Heritage Christian University in Florence, Alabama, USA.**

**[Editor’s Note:** Owing to its historical and literary value, the Bible has contributed to the formation of societies and even nations. In any case, the indirect impact of the Bible on the world could hardly be denied. Curiously, within its pages, the Bible anticipated scientific discoveries and recorded geographical information before either were widely known. Further, the Bible is the most widely validated ancient document on earth. Importantly, the Bible also answers man’s most puzzling and universal questions: (1) “From where did I come?” (2) “Why am I here?” or “What’s the purpose of life?” (3) “Where am I going?” and (4) “How do I get there?” or “What preparation do I need to make?” Validation of the Bible respecting its historical, scientific and prophetic characteristics serves to equally validate its answers to the questions every human ponders. The Bible is a map of where humanity has been, where it is and where it is going. Consequently, the Bible has always been and is still relevant today. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

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# The Elephant-Nose Fish

**Dave Everson**

In the creation of the fish, God showed a great deal of innovation in giving them amazing abilities. The fish that we will examine in this article is the elephant-nose fish, which has a unique ability to detect electrical fields that are very faint and even to use those fields for talking. Let's look at this amazing fish.

Freshwater elephant-nose fish are native to Africa. It is a large family with around 200 members in the species. These fish are also known for having a large brain size and unusually high intelligence that seems to give them special talents. Elephant-nose fish are a diverse family, with a wide range of different sizes and shapes. The smallest adults of this group are just 2 inches in length, while the largest reach up to almost 5 feet long.

All of them do, however, have a number of unique features in common. First, the cerebellum is greatly enlarged, giving them a brain to body size ratio similar to that of people. This is likely to be related to the interpretation of bioelectrical signals that living things give off. Some of the species possess modifications of the mouthparts to facilitate feeding upon small invertebrates buried in muddy bottoms of streams. The shape and structure of these mouth parts are part of what leads to the popular name of elephant-nose fish. The extensions to the mouthparts usually consist of a fleshy elongation attached to the lower jaw. They are flexible, equipped with touch and possibly taste sensors. Their mouths are non-movable, and their head (including the eyes) and belly are covered by a thin layer of skin that is perforated with small pores leading to electroreceptors. These receptors are electric organs and are able to generate weak electric fields that allow the fish to sense their environment in muddy water and even in total darkness.


All electric fish in the world can be classified into two types: pulse fish or wave fish. Pulse-type discharges are characterized by long intervals between the electric discharges, whereas wave-type discharges occur when



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the interval between consecutive pulses is so brief that the discharges fuse together to form a wave. The elephant-nose fish finds its bearings by means of weak electrical fields. Scientists from the University of Bonn have now been able to show how well this works. In complete darkness, the animals can even distinguish the material of objects at a distance or dead organisms from living ones. Yet, its characteristically shaped chin does not work like a particularly sensitive nose. Instead, it contains more than 500 electric sensors with which it senses its surroundings. The chin of an elephant-nose fish is basically its eye, and its tail is the corresponding flashlight. In specially adapted muscle cells, it produces regular electrical pulses of a few volts. At 80 times per second, the fish switches this little battery on and off. “At the same time it measures the electrical field which builds up around it via sensors in the skin,” explains Professor von der Emde. Nearby objects distort the field so that the fish obtains an image of its surroundings, which is a surprisingly complex one. It can use these senses to distinguish living things from dying or dead organisms without touching them. The electrical field image even tells it of what material the object in question is made. The image will appear very bright for metal and duller for non-conductors, and it can even measure distances to a precision of several millimeters.

However, the elephant fish has perhaps one of the most unusual methods to communicate by using this electricity. As the elephant-nose fish uses electroreception to sense its environment, it can also generate an electric charge and uses it like sonar to find its way around and communicate. Each of these fish produce a different current electrical field. They can all feel each other’s currents to be able to tell who is around them. They can also determine sex and social status – all with this electricity. The males will also serenade females with lower frequency humming. It’s a fish that sings an electric song.

So, indeed, God has marvelously created the elephant-nose fish to show His power and majesty. May we ever praise Him for what He has done in the world around us. 

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**"TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES  
I WILL GRANT TO SIT WITH ME ON MY  
THRONE. AS I ALSO OVERCAME AND  
SAT DOWN WITH MY FATHER ON HIS  
THRONE." REVELATION 3:21**

**THIS IS CERTAINLY BETTER  
THAN THE ALTERNATIVE.  
SEE REVELATION 3:16.  
OBEY CHURCH!**

SPECIAL THANKS TO MY NIECE, REANNIA LUPO FOR ILLUSTRATING THE SPIRIT VOMIT FIELD. CHART CONCEPT BY RC LUPO 02/16/23  
POWERPOINT VERSIONS OF SOME CHARTS AVAILABLE BY CONTACTING RC LUPO AT RC\_LUPO@YAHOO.COM.

# In Christ Reside All Spiritual Blessings

Brian R. Kenyon

There are many plans of salvation in the religious world today that purport to offer spiritual blessings. However, according to Truth, there is only one place where spiritual blessings are found, including salvation from sin. Consider what Paul wrote to the Ephesians concerning these blessings.

## Praise God

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul wrote, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”* (NKJV). In this verse, Paul first praised God, the Father. The word translated *“blessed,”* in *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,”* is from a word that means blessed, praised, the Blessed One (of God, Mark 14:61). This word is always used in connection with deity (Mark 14:61; Luke 1:68; Romans 1:25; 9:5; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 11:31; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3). The second word translated *“blessed,”* in *“who has blessed us,”* is from a different, though related word. According to Barclay Newman, this word means to bestow a blessing upon (Matthew 23:39; Luke 1:42; Romans 12:14), to act graciously toward (with God or Christ as the subject, Luke 6:28), to praise (with God or Christ as the object, Matthew 21:9; Luke 24:53) or to ask God’s blessing upon (as with food, Matthew 14:19). Here, it refers to **God blessing us in ways unique to His faithful people and to His faithful people alone!** Paul stated the fact that all spiritual blessings for which God is to be praised are found only in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Paul uniquely characterized these blessings in three ways that should help us appreciate God’s goodness toward His people.

## Spiritual Blessings

The blessings about which Paul wrote are *“spiritual.”* The word translated

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“*spiritual*” means pertaining to the spirit, supernatural or spiritual (Ephesians 5:19; 6:12; Romans 7:14; 15:27; 1 Corinthians 2:13, 15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3-4; 14:37). All people, whether or not they are God’s faithful, receive physical blessings from God! The Heavenly Father “*makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Matthew 5:45). **The spiritual blessings, however, are only for God’s faithful people.**

### In Heavenly Places Blessings

These blessings about which Paul spoke are “*in heavenly places.*” This Greek word means heavenly or celestial (1 Corinthians 15:40), in the heavenly world or in the supernatural sphere. It is found five times in the Book of Ephesians. “*Heavenly places*” is where Christ is seated at the Father’s right hand (Ephesians 1:20). It is figuratively where all who have been raised with Christ through obedience to the Gospel sit with Him (Ephesians 2:6). It is where the “*manifold wisdom of God*” is made known by the church to the “*principalities and powers.*” According to F.F. Bruce, these terms also denote cosmic spiritual powers thought to “control the movements of the heavenly bodies... thus to control the destinies of mortals” (Ephesians 3:10). It is the place where the “*spiritual hosts of wickedness*” reside against whom we “*wrestle*” [“*struggle,*” NAS] (Ephesians 6:12; cf., 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). These spiritual blessings being so designated as “*in heavenly places*” lets us know that these blessings involve the unseen nature of our being and identity.

### “In Christ” Blessings

These blessings about which Paul wrote are “*in Christ.*” The term “*in Christ*” and its related forms appear several times in Ephesians (1:1, 3-4, 7, 10-13, 15, 20; 2:6, 10, 13, 21-22; 3:6, 11-12; 4:21; 5:8). While these and other verses indicate the great blessings associated with being in Christ, there are **only two verses that tell us how a person gets “into Christ.”** In one, Paul asked, “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*” (Romans 6:3). In the other, Paul said, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have*



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*put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27). In both these verses, **baptism is the way to get into Christ!** Since there are no passages that authorize another way for one to get *“in Christ,”* **baptism is the only way a person can truly get into Christ** (cf., 1 Corinthians 12:13)! **To be in Christ is to be in His body, the church** (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23; Colossians 1:24).

## Great Blessings

**Therefore, the blessings about which Paul spoke in Ephesians 1:3 are unseen with the physical eye, effected in the unseen, spiritual world, and are only for those who are a part of Christ’s body, the church.** In the immediate context of Ephesians 1, the blessings are **(1)** being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, which includes the promise of adoption according to His foreknowledge and eternal purpose (Ephesians 1:4-6), **(2)** being redeemed and having the forgiveness of sin (Ephesians 1:7), **(3)** having understanding of the *“mystery”* of God’s plan now revealed (Ephesians 1:8-10) and **(4)** having the guarantee of obtaining an inheritance from God (Ephesians 1:11-14).

Generally, though, these blessings include all that God has done (and continues to do) for us in redemption. Peter said that Christians, *“as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ,”* and he continued, *“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people ... who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Peter 2:5, 9-10). As an exile on the isle of Patmos, John said that Jesus *“loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father”* (Revelation 1:5-6). Certainly, these statements by two apostles later in their lives summarize the scope of *“spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”!* **We must remember that only those who obey the Gospel, and are thus added to the body of Christ (Acts 2:47), partake in these eternal blessings!** †

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## SALVATION

# God's Ways

Royce Pendergrass

When we start out on an unfamiliar road trip, we must have a map or some kind of directions to know where we are heading. Otherwise, we could get lost or end up in unfamiliar territory where roads are closed or there are other issues with which to deal. Most of us don't want to end up in a lost condition when we can get some direction or instruction to keep us from getting lost. Years ago, when Alice's paternal grandmother passed away in Mississippi, we made our way there for the funeral. Usually, it's hard for me to get lost. However, I met my match on that trip as I was unfamiliar with the roads we were traveling in the dark, and we ran into heavy road construction. We wandered aimlessly until we could get direction from others on how to get to our destination. **We needed guidance to go the right way.**

**Just so, we need guidance on how to go the right way to reach the goal of Heaven.** We can't live on earth and take part in its sinful activities and expect to receive God's blessings. Therefore, we must have a road map to teach us the right way. God didn't leave man guessing what he must do; He provided **the Bible**, which is **the Christian's road map to Heaven.**

**First, we must understand that to go in the right direction, we must admit that we are going in the wrong direction.** There is Someone Who has all the answers when we need a solution to correct us from heading the wrong way; God knows the answers! The prophet Isaiah admitted his human weakness and God's greatness as he said, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts'"* (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV). In other words, God is far above man in His ways and thoughts; after all, He created man. He is the great God!

Moses' road map for the Israelites to keep them in the right way was *"...You shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in*



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*His ways and to fear Him*” (Deuteronomy 8:6). With that exhortation to faithfulness, Moses also told them to **“Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes...”** (Deuteronomy 8:11). Not only were they given instruction to go the right way, but the Israelites were warned of severe consequences if they went the wrong way. **When we forsake God and go our own way, we will reap the consequences of our actions.**

We live in a society of people where it is common to hear someone say, “I’ll do it my way.” There was even a popular song years ago which lauded, “I did it my way.” We are instructed in Proverbs 12:15, **“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise.”** In matters of religion, we don’t have the option of doing things our way. God declared that **“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death”** (Proverbs 14:12). **In all matters of religion, it is God’s way, or one must suffer the consequences.**

Peter described the consequences for those who have the right road map to get to Heaven and begin following it but then get off on side roads. He said:

*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”* (2 Peter 2:20-22)

Please learn and keep God’s ways. 

Royce Pendergrass (1941-2017) was a Gospel preacher who lived in Arkansas, USA.

### Did You Know?

If you could travel at the speed of light (about 186,000 miles per second), it would take you 28 billion years to fly across the universe.



# How Do You Measure Up?

*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. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 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. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

*So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 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. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...*

2 Corinthians 5:1-11

# ***The Church and the Kingdom Are the Same***

**Sunny David**

Reading from Matthew 16:18-19, we observe that Jesus told Peter that He would build His church on the rock, which was on Peter's confession of Christ as the Son of the living God. In the same breath, Jesus also told Peter that He would give him the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and that whatever he would bind on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever he would loose on earth would be loosed in heaven. This promise was also made to the other apostles (Matthew 18:18). However, in this case, Christ was foretelling that Peter was going to preach the Gospel, and that He would be the first one to let people know what they must do to enter the church or the kingdom of Christ (Acts 2:37-41). He used the word "church" interchangeably with the word "kingdom." It is noteworthy from the preceding texts in Matthew 16 that when Christ made the statement about building His church, He made no difference whatsoever between the two words "church" and "kingdom." When He said that He would build His church, He also meant that He would establish His kingdom.

True to the promise, when the first Gospel sermon was preached on the day of Pentecost following our Lord's ascension, in the city of Jerusalem about A.D. 33, it was Peter who told those who had become believers in Christ to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Again, it is also significant that it was the apostle Peter who told the backsliding Simon what one must do to return to Christ if one goes back into the world after becoming a Christian (Acts 8:22).

According to the Bible, those who believed in Christ, repented of their sins and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Consequently, they were saved, and the Lord added them to the church, which is the body of the saved ones (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-47). The Lord has not changed His plan for human redemption from sin. Acts 2 tells us how the church that

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Christ had promised to build was established.

To the saved ones, who were in the church, the apostle Paul later wrote, ***“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins”*** (Colossians 1:13-14 NKJV). What was the apostle saying? He was saying that those who were added to the church, after receiving the forgiveness of sins, were, in fact, put into the kingdom of the Lord. From this we learn that the church of Christ is the kingdom of the Lord, or the kingdom of Christ is the church of the Lord. Both are the same.

Another remarkable passage that proves the point is Mark 9:1, wherein Christ said to the apostles, ***“...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.”*** There, Christ assured His apostles that the kingdom would come during their lifetime. They would not die till they saw the kingdom of God present with power. Has the kingdom come? Surely it has, since it was to come, according to Christ, when the apostles would still be living. There are no apostles living on earth today. They all died almost 2,000 years ago. Yet, millions of people around the world are still ignorantly parroting “Your kingdom come.” When Christ taught that prayer of example to the apostles in Matthew 6, the kingdom had not yet come. He had promised them, though, that during their lifetime the kingdom would come. The kingdom did, as the apostle Paul said to the Christians in Colosse who were translated into the kingdom of the Son.

Notice too, according to Christ, the kingdom was to come with power, and the power, according to Acts 1:8, was to come with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit and the power came, as we read in Acts 2:1-4, on the day of Pentecost when the apostles began to preach the Gospel. The preaching by Peter and the other apostles caused the listeners to ask, ***“...What shall we do?”*** (Acts 2:37). They were told to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), and as they did that (Acts 2:41), the Lord added them to the church (Acts 2:47). By the same process, Jesus translated or put them into the kingdom!

Also note that Acts 2:38, 47 and Colossians 1:13-14 talk about the “forgiveness of sins,” and on the basis of receiving the forgiveness of

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sins, converts were added to the church or put into the kingdom. The forgiveness of sins, which they had received by being baptized into Christ, was possible through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5).


Now look at Acts 20:28, as the apostle Paul conversed with the elders of the church from Ephesus. He told them, ***“to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*** Here the church of Christ (Romans 16:16) is called the church of God (cf., 1 Corinthians 1:2), and the apostle said that God purchased the church with His own blood, stating thereby that those in the church have been redeemed by the blood of God – God the Son – Jesus Christ.

So, we learn that the church of Christ is the church of God, and the church of God is the church of Christ. Similarly, the church is called the kingdom. The kingdom of the Son of His love, as we read from Colossians 1:13, is the kingdom of Christ, also called the kingdom of Heaven or of God, because both Christ and God are in Heaven.

On the day of resurrection and judgment when Christ will appear, His kingdom or the church will be lifted up to meet with Him in the air, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and as Christ receives His kingdom, He will deliver it to the Father, so the earthly will become heavenly (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Yet, on earth, both good and bad people, as God sees them, may be in the church. Speaking about the heavenly kingdom, the apostle John wrote in Revelation 21:27, ***“But there shall by no means enter in anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”***

While He was on earth, Christ warned, ***“The Son of man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”*** (Matthew 13:41-42; 47-50).

The truth of the matter is that God’s kingdom exists today in the form of His church. Those who are in the blood-bought church have the conditional assurance that if they will remain faithful to Him until death, they will receive the crown of life – eternal life in Heaven. 

Sunny David lives in New Delhi, India, and he is a Hindi-speaking TV evangelist and an elder for the Lord’s church.

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# Just Stay Away from the People

Gary C. Hampton

Ruth Pearson is a dear Christian in Cookeville, Tennessee. She is now battling cancer. The chemotherapy she is receiving is so severe that her blood count, both white and red, is dropping precipitously. The doctor told her to stay away from crowds. Ruth expressed her disappointment, and he asked her where she wanted to go. She told him that she wanted to go to worship. He said, “You can go to church. Just stay away from the people.” Ruth told me she thought the church was the people.

She is, of course, right. Peter described Christians “*as living stones*” and went on to say they were “*being built up a spiritual house*” (1 Peter 2:5 NKJV). Paul said God’s people are “*built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*” (Ephesians 2:22). He asked the church in Corinth, “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are*” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

One interesting feature of Paul’s trip to Rome as a prisoner was the power of getting to visit with God’s people. Julius, the Roman centurion who had charge of the apostle, permitted him to be cared for by his friends in Sidon (Acts 27:3). Paul and his companions found brethren at Puteoli and were invited to stay with them seven days, which may mean they wanted to partake of the Lord’s supper with them (Acts 28:13-14; cf., 20:6-7). Brethren from Rome came as far as Appii Forum and the Three Inns, resulting in Paul growing in courage and thanking God (Acts 28:15).

**Assembling with God’s people is one of the great blessings of being part of the church, the body of Christ.** Spending time studying God’s Word together, working with one another and generally helping each other are continual sources of encouragement. Let us not stay away from the people, but instead, let’s treasure our time together and help one another on Heaven’s road. 

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



# 5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

## The Good Shepherd

**Paula Bates**

1. I am the good Shepherd; and I know my \_\_\_\_\_, and am known by my \_\_\_\_\_. John 10:14
2. But you do not \_\_\_\_\_ because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep \_\_\_\_\_ my voice, and I know them, and they \_\_\_\_\_ me. John 10: 26-27
3. The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the \_\_\_\_\_ waters. Psalm 23:1-2
4. Then Jesus said to them. "All of you will be made to \_\_\_\_\_ because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be \_\_\_\_\_.'" Matthew 26:31
5. For you were like sheep going \_\_\_\_\_. But have now returned to the Shepherd and \_\_\_\_\_ of your souls. 1 Peter 2:25
6. Now may the God of peace who brought up our \_\_\_\_\_ from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the \_\_\_\_\_ of the everlasting \_\_\_\_\_, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20-21



- Answers:**
1. Sheep, own
  2. Believe, hear, follow
  3. Shepherd, still
  4. Stumble, scattered
  5. Astray, Overseer
  6. Lord Jesus, blood, covenant



# Not Grudgingly or of Necessity: A Precedent for All Worship

Robert C. Lupo

*“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7 NKJV). God wants us to worship Him in giving. However, it becomes quite clear that God does not want any part of our offering – if it is given with the feelings of reluctance or because we “have to.” Giving ought to be of one’s “own will and free choice, from his very heart, not as directed and forced by others, but according to his own counsel and determination” (Gill). We ought to be willing and happy to give to the Lord; don’t you agree?

Giving is just one part of the Christian’s worship to God. We are either commanded or we have apostolically approved examples in the New Testament Scriptures to offer worship to our God in addition to **giving** by **hearing** teaching from God’s Word, **singing** with our hearts, **praying** and partaking of the **Lord’s Supper** (Act 2:42; 20:7). **Which of these other acts of worship can be offered acceptably before God if we do not willingly and lovingly want to give it?**

First Corinthians 14:26-40 teaches that worship is to be done decently and in order. Please read this passage and note the commands and precedents set forth in the text. Christian men are needed to help other Christians to worship God. Women are not permitted to teach or to lead the congregation in prayer (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:8-12). If all of the men prayed a different prayer aloud and at once, no one would be able to understand, and chaos would ensue. In corporate prayer, one male Christian leads all the other Christians in prayer, to which all say, **“Amen,”** meaning “so be it” (1 Corinthians 14:16). For all things to be done decently and in order, we need to have men who will lead prayer.

A male Christian must lead the congregation in the singing. If all sang a different song at the same time or interrupted others who were singing, no

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one would be edified. We need song leaders to start everybody singing the same song, on the right pitch, with the right tempo, etc. Men are also needed to start and to assist in passing the communion and contribution plates [if that method of circulation is selected, for instance, instead of the congregation passing single file before the communion ware and contribution receptacles, or simply passing them from person to person throughout the assembly, LER]. They help to ensure that everybody is able to participate. Could we, or should we, expect only one man to do all these things?

### Planning to Worship God

If we are to plan how much we will give each week in our worship to God (2 Corinthians 9:7), certainly we ought also to plan how we will participate in the other acts of worship. If this is so, the men of the church **ought not to have to be told** to participate in the worship service. In planning to worship God, each one knows he might be asked – he might be on *the list*. His desire to serve should cause him to look for himself.

### Privileged to Serve

Christian men have been given the honor and the privilege of leading and of serving other Christians in their worship to God. “Privileged to Serve” is the heading that appears in our church bulletin above the list of those asked to serve. The heading is there as a reminder – to suggest that Christian men should feel honored, and, indeed, privileged to have a part in serving during the worship of God. Any man on the list is simply being asked to serve. A male Christian does not have to serve if he does not want to serve. It would be better for one not to serve at all than to serve reluctantly. There may be some reasons that some cannot serve during a particular Sunday or Wednesday assembly (e.g., laryngitis, not feeling well, injured, absent, etc.). Barring these, **why wouldn’t any God-loving Christian want to serve?**

### No Sighing in Heaven

One of my favorite hymns is “No Tears Up There” by Joe E. Parks. The first few words of the second verse say, “There’ll be no days of grief


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or sighing.” The whole song is about the fact that in Heaven, there will be no tears, no sorrows and no sighing from the weariness of death. There will not be any negative form of sighing in Heaven.

Do you suppose that if God asked anyone to take a leadership role in a worship service in Heaven that he would complain about being asked? Do you suppose anyone there would sigh and look as if someone has just stolen all his joy? When asked to serve in the worship service, some men sigh and hang their heads – taking several seconds to answer. It is so discouraging! I cannot even imagine what others must think of the spectacle. If a man does not want to take a leadership role in the worship when asked, he needs only to say, “No.” Do not discourage others from serving with all of the “drama”!

Everything we read about Heaven in God’s Word says there will be rejoicing there. The saints will gladly serve God both day and night in His temple (Revelation 7:15). Now, note this; no one will sigh or complain about serving Him there! No one will offer any complaints. There will be no complaining brethren in Heaven. There just won’t be any! They will have long since been parted to the left with the goats.

### Wanted: True Worshippers!

Jesus said that God the Father is seeking true (truthful, genuine) worshippers to worship Him. If our spirit (attitude) is not right, our worship will not be right either (John 4:23-24). Since God expects men to take leadership roles, all Christian men – if able – should want to serve in some way. Want is desire. Can a man worship God acceptably without taking on certain leadership roles? Perhaps so. He could pass the plates instead of speaking, singing, preaching, praying but still serve. No one can serve acceptably if he does not want to do it. 

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David Conley



HAPPY  
EASTER

It is true that Easter was originally a Pagan holiday. It was named after Eastra, the Goddess of Spring. Sacrifices were offered each spring in this false goddess' honor.

It just so happened that about the same time Eastra was being honored, the Jews celebrated Passover. This celebration commemorated God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian Slavery. Jesus celebrated Passover the night He instituted the Lord's Supper, which is a memorial of Christ's death on the cross for our sins. This Supper also helps us to remember His resurrection from the dead! [Though primarily about the sacrifice of Christ – His body and His blood – knowledge of our Lord's resurrection acknowledges the victory over death and sin brought about by the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor] Jesus came up from the grave the Sunday following Passover. We celebrate the sacrifice of our Lord **every week**. ***“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...”*** (Acts 20:7 NKJV).


When Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire under

## WORSHIP

Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., the false goddess Eastr was not being worshipped as fervently. Instead, however, the Easter holiday was quite appealing; therefore, Eastr observances were slowly changed to a so-called Christian celebration.

In fact, in Acts 12:4 the holiday “Easter” appears in the King James Version. All other standard translations properly translate the Greek word as “Passover.” The mistranslation in the King James Version of the Bible shows how powerful the Easter holiday had become. Christians enjoyed celebrating Easter. They changed the meaning from the worship of Eastr to the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

God requires that we Christians celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus **every Sunday** by partaking of the Lord’s Supper. (We also honor the death, burial and resurrection of Christ every time we witness a baptism as the person is baptized into Christ is “...*buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Romans 6:4-5).

I am personally glad that the world takes at least one day in the year to remember Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. However, we Christians do it **every Sunday** rather than once annually on the manmade holiday (holy day) of Easter Sunday! 

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

**[Editor’s Note:** Likewise, I appreciate general references to Jesus Christ and a gentler spirit exhibited during the Christmas season, though I celebrate neither Easter nor Christmas as religious holidays – both of which were authored by men rather than authorized by God per the Scriptures. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

Someone has observed that if you treat a dog with kindness, pet him often and feed him regularly, he’ll never leave you! Just think! That might even work with husbands or wives!



# Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

[Romans 6:1-11]

*“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? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.*

*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

How blessed we are, among all the peoples of the world! We are privileged to have God's written word in the form of THE BIBLE, telling us what we must do to become His children, transformed into the spiritual image of His Son, Jesus Christ!

How is that transformation done? It was when our Lord was on the cross that He took the burden of our sins as His own, dying for us. The beauty of the Gospel message is that we relegate our **old man of sin** to death – on a figurative, spiritual cross. We die to sin and are buried with our Lord – not in a literal grave but in the watery grave of baptism – by which our sins are washed away. Then, we are resurrected – as Jesus was resurrected from an earthly grave – as **new creatures** in Christ.

When Christ was *physically* resurrected, He had a *transformed* body, *immortal and never subject to death again*. When we are resurrected from our watery grave, our souls are cleansed of past sins so that if we are faithful unto death, we will one day be resurrected in an immortal body, never to die again!

# THE OBEDIENT WIFE

Martha Lynn Rushmore

I have some questions, ladies. What kind of woman was Sarah? Was she a devoted wife? Did she obey her husband, Abraham? Did she obey God? Are we following Sarah's example of being obedient wives as God would have us to be toward our husbands?

In Genesis 12:1, God told Abram to take Sarai (and his nephew Lot) and go to a land away from his family; God would show him the way to go. Now, let us suppose that Abram came home and told Sarai to pack up their belongings so they could move. Sarai might have asked, "Where are we going?" His answer might have been, "I don't know." Then, maybe, Sarai asked, "How long will we be gone?" Again, he may have answered, "I don't know." Her next question could have been, "Well, who told you for us to move?" Abram may have replied, "God did." Then, she may have said something like this, "Well, okay, then!" She immediately went to prepare for their journey. What would we have done?

Would we have been willing wives to go on a journey, not knowing where we were going and how long we would be gone? I really doubt this would happen today without many more questions and answers. It seems to me that Sarai was more obedient and submissive than most of us today would have been. What do you think?

Later in life, Abram and his family lived in Palestine. Genesis 12:10-20 records that at some time afterward, there was a severe famine in the land. That prompted Abram to proceed to Egypt, whereupon he asked Sarai to tell the Egyptians she was his sister. This was a half-truth, and so it was a lie. Sarai did as he asked. Many years in the future, Abraham and Sarah's (God changed their names from Abram and Sarai, Genesis 17:5, 17) son Isaac told the same lie, with similar results relative to the Philistines. King Abimelech saw Isaac sporting with his wife Rebekah (Genesis 26:8) and realized that they lied to him. The sins of one generation can encourage following generations to do the same sins.

Resuming references to Abram and Sarai in Egypt, Sarai telling Pharaoh



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she was Abram's sister led him to think things that though it was not totally a lie were still deceptive. Sarai did as asked by Abram, although that was not right with God. Do we knowingly do things today that God disapproves?

Do we disobey God, for instance, to do what our husbands ask of us? I understand that our love for our husbands is great, but our love for God should be greater. Acts 5:29 says, "...*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (NKJV). I understand the situations into which we sometimes get ourselves by marrying non-Christians or sometimes because a husband has fallen away from the church, but no matter what, God should and must come first (Matthew 6:33; 22:37-38). By putting God as a priority in our lives, we may win our husbands to the Lord. "*Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives*" (1 Peter 3:1). Remember, actions speak louder than words.

I know I wrote this lesson for us – married ladies. Yet, those of you – young ladies – that have boyfriends or fiancés need to practice this principle also. It is time to put Christ first in your lives, and if you do this at the beginning of any relationship, your boyfriend will know what to expect if your love for one another grows to the point of marriage. If your boyfriend is not a Christian, you may also win him to the Lord by your actions. ✝

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

**[Editor's Note:** Obedience of wives to their respective husbands is to be tempered with a primary love for God. Remember the downfall of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11; a lie proved deadly in this instance – spiritually and physically – for both the husband and the wife. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

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THE CHRISTIAN HOME

# Holy Marriages

Jenny Choate



Through my recent studies of God’s Word, I’ve come to a fuller understanding of how God views marriage. Unfortunately, I think the church has failed to understand this concept, at least during my lifetime. Churches are filled with divorce, cohabitation and unlawful marriages. Yet, many, including some elderships, believe this is okay. However, does God believe it is okay? ***“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge”*** (Hebrews 13:4 NKJV).

God created marriage in the very beginning. Now, here is what many miss; from the beginning, marriage was a foreshadow of God’s relationship with man. Adam was put to sleep, his side was opened, and he woke up with a bride (Genesis 2:21-25; 3:12). Sound familiar? Maybe not. Think about how Jesus went to sleep, had His side opened up, and then he woke

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up to obtain a bride – His church.

The **world** tells us that marriage should be **happy and perfect**. **God** tells us marriage should be **holy and complete** us in our service to Him. **People are so concerned with being happy that they honestly believe it is a commandment from God!** If this were the case, the church never would have grown. Think about all that Paul endured for the bride of Christ. He was abused to the point of death and was then later put to death. I don't think I would be **happy** according to worldly standards going through those difficulties. Based on extra-biblical church history, all but one apostle was murdered for Christ's bride. This is a beautiful and perfect example of the love we need in our marriages.

While Christians have gotten wrapped up in this idea of being happy, **we have neglected what makes our marriages holy**. This has created unions between believers and unbelievers wherein they frequently are **“unequally yoked”** (2 Corinthians 6:14). This more often than not causes the believer to abandon the faith for a **happy marriage**. Further, the pseudo, manmade doctrine of **happy marriage** has also been the catalyst for many unbiblical divorces. We hear, “God wouldn't want me to remain married because I'm not happy” or “My spouse doesn't meet my needs.”

The church also faces the plague of cohabitation. Some churches ignore or fail to address couples who **shack up** while they decide if they would be good fits in marriage. Usually, the only discipline the church does in these cases is not hosting a shower, but plenty of individuals still give lots of gifts and blessings for these individuals who have never repented of their sins.

Lastly, we have unlawful remarriages. Some churches don't expect a confession of sin for unlawful divorces and also have no issue with subsequent new marriages. Nevertheless, the words of Jesus Christ remain. **“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). Contrary to contentions otherwise, the apostle Paul did not alter or dismiss our Lord's directive. **“Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain**

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*unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).*

If the church actually saw marriage as God does, these would not be issues. The problem is, one learns more about how God views marriage primarily through the lens of the Old Testament, but Christians today refuse to learn from these books because “We are not under the old law.” God unites Himself in marriage with those He has called to be His chosen people. God fully understands what it means to be **cheated on**. His people were constantly committing spiritual adultery against Him by practicing idolatry.

*“Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,” says the Lord. Then the Lord said to me, “Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: ‘Return, backsliding Israel,’ says the Lord; ‘I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,’ says the Lord; ‘I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, That you have transgressed against the Lord your God, And have scattered your charms To alien deities under every green tree, And you have not obeyed My voice,’ says the Lord. “Return, O backsliding children,” says the Lord; “for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” (Jeremiah 3:8-14)*


This is why many believe God allows the innocent party to remarry when a spouse is unfaithful. God knows and understands that feeling.

Our marriages need to mirror what Christ set forward for us. Husbands are to love their wives to the point that they would die for them (Ephesians

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5:25). They should be willing to sacrifice for their wives. Wives should be willing to submit to the will of *“their own husbands”* (Ephesians 5:24). Even when we do not want to submit, just the same as when Jesus submitted to the will of the Father in the Garden, wives need to submit to their husbands (Colossians 3:18). We must deny ourselves and follow the authority of the husbands we chose (Titus 2:5). This is where many argue that we can leave our husbands if they are unfaithful to God or are not Christians. This is contrary to God’s Word. According to Peter, we are to continue to live our lives pleasing to God and in this set the example for our husbands. This is how we bring them to a faithful relationship with Christ (1 Peter 3:1-6).

Elderships need to ensure that husbands, as well as teenage and adult men generally – who may become husbands in the future – hear in the classroom and from the pulpit the biblical responsibility – what God expects – of husbands. Likewise, wives, as well as teenage and adult women – who may become wives in the future – need to hear in the classroom and from the pulpit the biblical responsibility – what God expects – of wives. If elders become aware of troubled marriages within the local congregation, they ought to express their concern and offer to convey biblical and helpful teachings about marriage openly for all and privately as needed. *“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. ...Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you”* (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

**We must stop seeing marriage through the eyes of our culture and see it through the eyes of God!** Persons in marriages that are not pleasing to God are lost. Anyone failing to repent of sins, including divorcing for unbiblical reasons, remains lost in sin. **Church, we need to do better!** God has called us to do so. 

Jenny Choate is the wife of a preacher and lives in Imboden, Arkansas, USA.

*Is Jesus Your Steering Wheel or Spare Tire?*

# Cornelius and Baptism


Mark McWhorter

There are many professed Christians who do not believe baptism is necessary for salvation. Many commentators even say it is not a mandatory thing to do. The conversion of Cornelius needs to be considered in such a discussion. Cornelius was a centurion of the Roman army. He lived in Caesarea.

Cornelius believed in God and evidently did everything he could to obey God. He had been praying to God, begging Him for instructions. In Acts 10:6, an angel from God told Cornelius to send for Peter, who would tell him *“what you must do”* (NKJV). That means there were some things Cornelius had to do. Acts 11:14 reveals what else the angel said. There it is recorded that Cornelius would be told words by which he and his house *“will be saved.”* So whatever Cornelius had to do was what would save him.

When Peter met with Cornelius, he started preaching to him and his house. While Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and others present there. They started speaking in tongues just like the apostles did on the Day of Pentecost. Notice that this was not something Peter told them to do. Neither did God giving them this ability save them.

The Jewish Christians were amazed when Cornelius – a Gentile – was given that ability. Peter asked the Jewish Christians if they could deny baptism to Cornelius and the others since obviously God provided that as a sign. No one responded negatively. So, Peter *“commanded”* Cornelius and those with him to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Notice that this is something Peter told them to do. Notice that he *“commanded”* it. That means it is **absolutely necessary**.

Study your Bible. Learn what is commanded. Obey those commands. Don't let anyone tell you it is not necessary to obey God's commands. If any of this is hard to understand, ask an adult to help you. 

Mark McWhorter has written daily devotionals for youth for decades. He lives in Pell City, Alabama, USA.





**Rebecca Rushmore**

**(answers inside back cover)**

1. Which son of David proclaimed himself king without his father's knowledge?
2. In what city was Solomon when God asked him what he desired?
3. How many governors over Israel provided food for Solomon and his household?
4. What people were considered the best cutters of timber?
5. How many years after the Israelites left Egypt did Solomon begin to build the Temple?
6. What was in the ark of the Lord when it was placed in the Temple?
7. In what two cities did Jeroboam place gold calves?
8. Which king of Israel built the city of Samaria?
9. God told Elijah that many remained faithful to him. How many?
10. What lie was told that led to the death of Naboth?





# DOUBTS AND FEARS

## Satan's Challenges

Betty Burton Choate

I wake in the morning to the consciousness of the presence of God. My heart speaks words of thankfulness to Him that while I slept He continued, watchfully and lovingly, caring for all the parts of life that required His attention.

Yet, Satan trails a thought through my head. “You haven’t **seen** God. Suppose He is, as the skeptics say, only a crutch in your head. What then?”

In willingness to be fair and open-minded, I try that concept. What then? There is blankness in my heart. The warm love I had directed toward God dries up at its source. My feeling of security disappears. I no longer have an anchor and a certainty to life. There is no sense of direction about where I am going, ultimately. With nothing greater in my head than myself, no purpose greater than the demands of today’s physical existence – because tomorrow may not come, and there is no eternal existence on the horizon – blankness, then fear and futility flood every crevice of my mind.

Without God, it is worse than, “Nothing is left.” It is, “I still exist, and all of the challenges of this world still exist. Yet, I face this existence with the acceptance of the dead fact that I have **no help**. There is no one greater than this frightened self to whom I can turn.” I marvel that suicide is not imminently on the horizon for all of those who lose faith in a Higher Being.

Still, a persistent thought pierces the fear of aloneness. “You exist, and all the wonders of life and of the physical world around you exist. Those are facts that

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cannot be denied, but it had to be through the power of Someone far greater than the most intelligent humans that such marvels of existence came into being.”

**In all of man's progress and sophistication, would humanity have outgrown this so-called primitive belief in God, if He were only a crutch dreamed up in the minds of humans?**

Another reality floods my mind. **“Yes, you know now that your greatest devastation would not be the loss of a husband, a parent or a child – whom you have seen. The greatest devastation would be in the very loss of belief in God – even though you have never seen Him.”**

The absoluteness of these facts in my heart speaks to Satan's mockery and doubt-raising. In all of man's **progress** and **sophistication**, would humanity have outgrown this so-called **primitive** belief in God, if He were only a crutch dreamed up in the minds of humans?

*“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”* (Psalm 19:1-4 NKJV).

The very soul of humanity cries out the existence of God.

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When You said, “Seek My face,” My heart said to You, “Your face, Lord, I will seek.” Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the Lord will take care of me”* (Psalm 27:7-10)!

Even today, there are two classes of people in the world: the minority who are conscious of their rejection of God and who have, statistically, a higher rate of behavioral and emotional problems, plus a higher suicide

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rate than believers. On the opposite side are the believers, who are the majority. In some form or another, they cling to their conscious awareness of the existence of God. They may be a million miles from the truth in their understanding of Him, but their hearts confirm that there is a God.

**In both minds, the base factor deals with God! No other single topic can claim such universal and total preoccupation, even while some people are in the throes of denial! This fact alone speaks decisively. If there were no God, in Whose image we are made and to Whom our spirits call as a lost child to a parent, this universal and continuing outreach to Him would have disappeared – out of existence – aeons ago.**

Another thought comes to mind. “I’ve never seen Satan either, but there is no doubt about his existence. Why?”

◆ **Reason number one:** I can look around and see His work on every hand, as sin and evil and the resulting destruction take their toll.

◆ **Reason number two:** In contrast to Satan’s tactics, God doesn’t trail through our minds a barrage of questions and doubts about Satan’s existence! God Himself tells us that Satan exists and that he is our unrelenting enemy: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). God fosters our belief in the reality of Satan – **because he is real** – and God wants us to be forewarned so that our defenses will be up.

Following this line of reasoning, since the prevalence of evil in the world is unquestioned testimony to the existence of Satan, is not the unquenchable good, in contrast, evidence also of the existence of God? Further, we expect the enemy of God to be the continual instigator of doubts, since God forewarns us, *“...the devil...was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it”* (John 8:44).

Finally, I think, “Thank you, Father, for Your watchful care while I slept, and for a living faith that sustains me during my waking hours.”✝

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

## DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

# A Father Raises His Children, But a Nation Rebels

Aaron Cozort

A father raises his children. He invests in their upbringing. He encourages their education. He provides structure, a home, food on the table and hope for the future. He watches over them while they sleep and teaches them when they are awake. He wants them to grow up and to be strong. He wants them to have a great future, free from strife and anguish, sorrow and misery. He gives them stability. He encourages them to work and to improve themselves – to flourish under his protection and guidance.

Then one day, a child declares, “I’m not your child. Look what I have done for myself, how great I am, how strong I am and how prosperous I am. I do not have to obey you, and I will not recognize you as my father.” Many times this type of situation has played out in families throughout time, but none are more tragic than in God’s family. Isaiah wrote, **“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: ‘I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me; The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master’s crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider’**” (Isaiah 1:2-3 NKJV).

Some parents will not admit the truth about their children’s condition. They will hide from reality. They will say things like, “They’re good kids; they just got in with the wrong crowd.” God is more honest than that. God said of His children, **“Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward”** (Isaiah 1:4).

The people of Israel, the nation of God, the descendants of Abraham, had become a brood of corrupters. The root meaning of this word is “to decay.” Their influence was rust to metal and disease to a body.

Israel had become an influence for moral and spiritual decay in their

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world. They were supposed to be the light of the world. They were supposed to be the salt of the earth. However, they had become “...*good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men*” (Matthew 5:13).

What kind of child of God are you today? How do you live, and what is your relationship to the Father in Heaven? What would He say about your life and your relationship with Him? God called Israel to reason with Him and to cleanse themselves, but He also sent them a warning, “*If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken*” (Isaiah 1:19-20). †

Aaron Cozort preaches for the Church of Christ in Collierville, Tennessee, USA.



### ***Did You Know?***

Exodus 20:11 states that God made the Earth and everything in it in six days. From the time of Jesus to the present day is approximately 2,000 years. Bible genealogies (some of which are actually chronologies) indicate a span of about 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ. Based on the genealogies listed in Genesis 5 that include the ages of many of the fathers, there are roughly 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham. The theory of evolution claims the earth is millions or billions of years old, but the Bible indicates the earth is only about 6,000 years old, give or take a few hundred years at most.

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*“Awake you who sleep: ‘Therefore He says: Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light’”* (Ephesians 5:14 NKJV). Those who sleep need to awaken themselves. *“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:15-16). Paul, writing to the Romans, said:

*And **do** this, knowing the time, that now **it is** high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation **is** nearer than when we **first** believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to **fulfill its** lusts.* (Romans 13:11-14)

There is a danger that Christians can go to sleep spiritually and fail to walk in the light of God’s Word. Children of God need to walk wisely in



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the light of day and not as fools who walk in the darkness of this world. Slumbering is spiritually disastrous to our souls!

We need to awaken because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. When I was just a boy, my mother would often say, “Boy; it’s high time you” do this or that. Mom would not say it was time for me to do something, but she’d tell me it was *high time*, meaning no doubt what the Bible means by using it. She meant it wasn’t just *time*; it was *past* time. I should have done it a long time ago! The emphasis was that I needed to immediately get it done because time was wasting, and I had neither used my time well nor had I accomplished the task she wanted me to do.

God tells us it is “*high time*” that we awake from sleep. We should have awakened a long time ago! Why? Life is swiftly passing, and we need to be wise, redeeming the time. God challenges us to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. We need to make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lust, but we must walk circumspectly. What does it mean to walk circumspectly? To walk circumspectly means given to or marked by circumspection – watchful, cautious. To walk circumspectly is to tread carefully, considering all circumstances and possible consequences. It means to walk prudently. The question is, “Are you walking watchfully, cautiously, discreetly and carefully attending to the crucial things of God?” Having our minds set solely on the things of the world is a failure to walk pleasingly before God (James 4:4).

It’s a sorrowful day when one lives in the lust of the flesh only to satisfy himself or herself rather than pleasing the God Who created this world. One day God will require each soul to stand before His Son in the Judgment. The Bible teaches:

***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 Je-***



## CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

*sus and by the Spirit of our God.* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

This text warns individuals who fulfill the lust of the flesh and practice unrighteousness that they will not inherit the kingdom of God. The people in Corinth were pagan and given over to debauchery. Corinth was strategically located and was the crossroads of trade and commerce. The wealth in Corinth made it a cultural center, but its people were morally bankrupt. Corinth became known for its licentiousness. Because of Corinth's wickedness, the term "Corinthianize" meant to live a promiscuous life, a life of debauchery.

Paul told the Corinthian Christians that God would not save fornicators, idolators, adulterers, homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners. Those who accepted Christ were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God. Have you been baptized into Christ? If not, you need to do so immediately. Those washed, sanctified and justified in the blood of Christ will be saved eternally if they remain faithful (Hebrews 5:8-9; 1 Peter 4:17).

Worldly individuals live as though there is no God and as though they aren't accountable to anyone but themselves. However, we will all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give an account of how we have lived. ***"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"*** (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). Worldly people have said, "I don't intend for anyone to tell me how I'm going to live and especially not some preacher!" Well, that same person will not listen to anyone and especially a preacher since he lives for self, for sin and enjoys a life of folly and debauchery. Like those in the city of Corinth, such ones will one day bow their knee to the Christ they rejected. They will give an account. ***"For it is written: 'As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God'"*** (Romans 14:11-12).

Awake, you who sleep! Do not love the world and the lust of it, but instead, love God and His righteousness. Many say they love God but

## CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

completely live to fulfill the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the sinful pride of life. John, the apostle, wrote in 1 John 2:15-17, ***“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.”*** Loving God means we will obey His commands. ***“If you love Me, keep My commandments”*** (John 14:15). ***“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him”*** (John 14:21).

Notice John stated that the world is passing away and its lust. We are swift individuals from time to eternity. Realize, ***“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”*** (Hebrews 9:27).

The truth is that if Jesus doesn't return to judge the world in our lifetime, we are all going to die and go to our long home. We will be saved in Christ and spend eternity with God in Heaven, the home of the soul, **or** we will be lost and spend an eternity in Hell, a place of punishment for the wicked. Matthew 25:30 reads, ***“And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** Some say, “Well, I don't believe in Heaven or Hell.” Just believing that Heaven and Hell aren't real doesn't change the reality of those places. **Where will you spend eternity? †**

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## Gospel Gazette Online

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A monthly Gospel magazine on the Internet, begun by Louis Rushmore in 1999. Thousands of articles, written by faithful Christians, are archived and selectable through the onsite search engine. **GGO** is free to users throughout the world, and it is visited regularly even in parts of the world that remain virtually inaccessible to missionaries. ([gospelgazette.com](http://gospelgazette.com))

## CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

# I Believe that I Believe

Robert Johnson

I remember a conversation years ago between two people. One asked, “I’m just curious, but do you have faith?” “Oh yes,” the other answered, “I have faith. I believe.” The first then asked, “Well, what is it you believe?” The answer was, “I believe what the church believes.” “Well,” the first person said, “What is it the church believes?” “Oh, the church believes what I believe,” was the answer. Still not satisfied, the first person pressed on. “Okay, but what is it that you both believe?” The response? “Oh well, you know, we both believe the same thing.”

There are those who claim to believe but aren’t sure what it is they really believe. I’m sure in the Lord’s church there are those who genuinely and sincerely read the Bible daily and seek to take its principles and precepts to heart. They seek to allow God to work through His Word to transform their lives. How many, though, would reflect the attitude of culture, speaking reverently about Scripture but do not really know the transforming power of Scripture in their personal lives? How many believe but don’t know what it is they should believe or how they should respond to what they believe?

The problem is not just a lack of knowledge of Scripture but a disconnect between what the Bible teaches and how a person goes about making the decisions that guide his or her actions in life. So, one must know what it says for there to be real faith. Yet, **faith without transformation is useless.** Jesus asked, “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46 NKJV). **Saving faith, a relational faith with God and Christ, is never simply a mental acknowledgment of the truthfulness of Scripture, but it is a submission by faith to the life it demands. “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”** (James 2:17).

We could play out the scenario with which we started the article and find out if one **just believes in believing or has a genuine faith** in the spiritual, in God and in His will for life. “Do you believe?” “Oh, yes, I certainly believe.” “Do you faithfully worship God and fellowship your

## CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

brothers and sisters in Christ?” “Well, not necessarily, but I believe in that.” “Do you take advantage of opportunities to serve others?” “I do believe that is important, but I have a busy schedule.” “Do you spend time in God’s Word and try to apply it in your own life situations?” “I believe in that, too, but doing it, not so much.” If we objectively examine our faith and how we live, what would we find? **Do we just believe in believing, or do we have a real faith that acts?** *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”* (James 1:22).

Perhaps the greatest challenge we have as Christians is what Paul noted in Romans 12:2. *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* We must spend time in Scripture so God can transform us from the image of the world around us into His image, but that transformation won’t happen if we have no idea of into what it is we are to be transformed. Even if we know what it says, its power to transform can’t be energized in us if we won’t do it. Even of Christ the writer of Hebrews said, *“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Do you believe? What is it you believe? **Do you believe in believing, or do you have a faith that will respond in doing?** One will save, the other will not. Choose wisely. *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). †

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

### Did You Know?

Many things we use in everyday life were invented after studying something in God’s creation. George de Mestral invented Velcro after looking closely at the tiny hooks that caused the cocklebur to stick to him and to his dog after taking a walk.



# Verse Search



## 2 CORINTHIANS 5:12-21

Jerry Bates

1. In what were some of the Corinthians boasting? (5:12)
2. What compelled Paul to do what he did? (5:14)
3. Since Christ died for us, for whom should we live? (5:15)
4. Paul regarded no one regarding the flesh. (5:16) True or False
5. How did Paul say he no longer knew Christ? (5:16)
6. If anyone is in Christ, he is a \_\_\_\_\_ . (5:17)
7. Since that is true, what does that mean regarding our old things (habits, desires, etc.)? (5:17)
8. What things belong to God? (5:18)
9. Through whom have Christians been reconciled to God? (5:18)
10. Paul said that he had given the ministry of \_\_\_\_\_. (5:18)
11. What does that ministry involve? (5:18)
12. Paul said that Christians are \_\_\_\_\_ for Christ. (5:19)
13. Through whom is God pleading to the world to be saved? (5:20)
14. For what did Paul implore the Corinthians to do? (5:20)
15. According to Paul, how many sins did Christ have? (5:21)
16. Because of that, what can we become? (5:21)

(See the back cover for the answers.)

## VERSE SEARCH

**12** For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. **13** For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. **14** For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; **15** and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

**16** Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. **18** Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, **19** that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

**20** Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. **21** For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

**NOTE:** In the first few verses of this section, Paul defended his ministry to his enemies in Corinth. He was not trying to glorify himself in any way. Rather, his only interest was to glorify God, who worked through and in spite of his weaknesses. His opponents gloried in external things, but those external things were of no value to Paul. He relied upon the Gospel message of salvation. When we are converted to God, we are changed into new creatures, and all things become new. That means old external values should have little importance to us as well. **Do we give evidence of a new birth?**

Paul said that he had been given the ministry of reconciliation. The word "reconciled" means to be made friends again. Through the sacrifice of God's sinless Son, Jesus Christ, we can once again become friends of God, in spite of our sins. This ministry was not just given to Paul. The word of reconciliation (the Gospel) has been given to us as well. It is not just the responsibility of preachers or teachers. Paul said that God is pleading through us that the world might be reconciled to Him. That means we play an important role in God's plan to save the world. As we teach and preach God's Word, it is as God is speaking through us. However, if we do not preach His Word, God is not speaking. People may be lost because we do not preach or teach the Gospel. That also means that we must be true and faithful to the Word of God. If God is speaking through us, we must be sure to accurately teach His Word. God cannot speak through us unless we teach the Truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

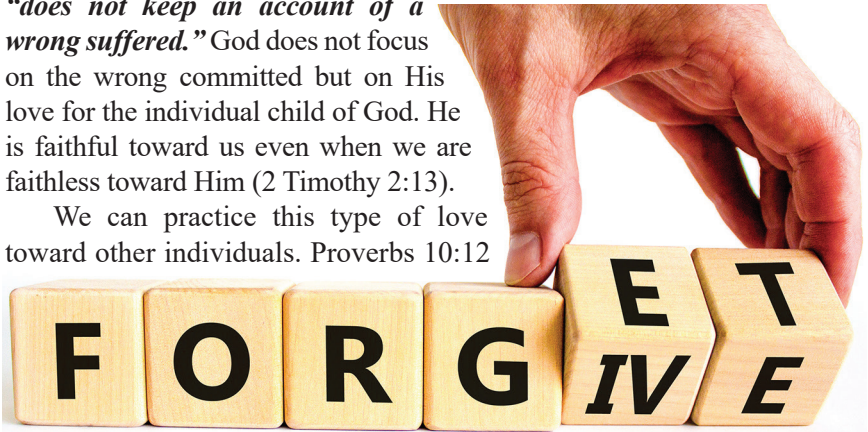
# No Record of Wrongs

Ralph Clevinger

How many times have people hurt our feelings or treated us wrongfully? This number may seem to be too many to count. How many times has the person who mistreated you repeatedly done so? This number may also be a huge number. How many times were you the one needing forgiveness? The answer may not seem as numerous as the other answers. Why? We seem to be forgetful when it comes to our wrongdoings. We can become just as forgetful about the wrongdoings of others.

God practices **true forgiveness**. Listen to the writer of Hebrews, *“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more”* (Hebrews 8:12 NKJV). The phrase translated *“remember no more”* means “not to recall,” “not to call to mind” and “not to mention.” The Almighty God of the universe chooses not to keep a record of wrongs committed by His children. Why can God choose not to recall the wrongdoings? It is because love *“thinks no evil”* (1 Corinthians 13:5). The New American Standard Bible translates this phrase *“does not keep an account of a wrong suffered.”* God does not focus on the wrong committed but on His love for the individual child of God. He is faithful toward us even when we are faithless toward Him (2 Timothy 2:13).

We can practice this type of love toward other individuals. Proverbs 10:12





## DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

states, *“Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.”* Peter pointed to this proverb when he encouraged Christians by writing, *“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins”* (1 Peter 4:8). The word *“fervent”* describes a zealous, constant and intense love. The extent of this love is not for a short period of time but is of a permanent nature. This type of love looks past the wrongdoings and inconveniences of life and focuses on the individual.

When we love others with this type of love, the wrongdoings of life seem like minor incidences. This love is not always easy but helps us get through even the darkest of times. **May we love one another with a fervent love, desiring the best for one another!** †

Ralph Clevinger preaches for the Greenville Church of Christ in Greenville, Tennessee, USA.

### “No, Eden, It’s Not”

Due to what my doctors have diagnosed as neuropathy in my feet, it is difficult for me to get into the pulpit. I was scheduled to lead prayer one Sunday morning, and so, those in charge provided me a hand-held microphone and suggested I lead from where I was seated. Eden, three-year-old daughter of a Christian family, heard the sound of my voice, looked all around, and not seeing anyone, asked, “Is that God?”

**Cecil's**

**C O M M E N T S**

## DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

# A Premillennial Football Analogy

Emanuel Daugherty



**Jesus was fulfilling His mission:  
"running for a touchdown."**

Premillennialists believe that Jesus, when He was rejected and crucified, caused God to change His plan for the kingdom: (1) that Jesus will yet return to the earth, (2) set up an earthly kingdom and (3) rule on the earth for 1,000 years.

**Truth.** The Lord was **not caught off guard**, He was **not blindsided** by His opponents. He **wasn't surprised** by the cross looming before Him. He **knew what was in man** (John 2:24-25). Scripture shows plainly that Jesus came as prophesied, lived among men and fully completed the work God gave Him to do! In His High-Priestly prayer, Jesus said, **"I have finished the work which You have given Me to do"** (John 17:4 NKJV). The work Jesus came to do included the **cross** and to be killed (Isaiah 53:3-6; Matthew 16:21). When the writer of Hebrews wrote saying the blood of animals could not take away sin (10:4), he further wrote:

*Therefore, when he came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me – To do Your will, O God.'" ...He takes away the first that he may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10)*

It is not Jesus who failed but the Premillennialists who deny the very blood shed for their salvation! If Jesus failed, then **none** have been saved

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over the past 2,000 years! Their doctrine calls for a restoration of animal sacrifices! What blasphemous teaching!

### Jesus Was Rejected and Crucified: "Interference."

**Truth.** Yes, Jesus was rejected and crucified, but this did not interfere with the Lord's plan of redemption, for it was according to God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 3:8-12). The crucifixion of His Son was part of God's plan to save man. Again, John said, "*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*" (1 John 2:2).

### God Changed His Eternal Plan: "Called an Audible."

**Truth.** Peter said the Savior was "...*delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God...*" (Acts 2:23). The apostle John wrote of Jesus, calling Him "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8). To imagine, and even preach, that the Creator, the Omniscient God of the Universe, did not know Jesus would be rejected is staggering to a reasonable mind! That Almighty, Infallible God did not know that He would turn away from His plan of Redemption, yielding to weak, mortal men, is inconceivable! What the forces of death, hades and the grave could not do, men did do (Matthew 16:18)! What an absurd doctrine!

### Peter Used the Keys to Open the Church but Not the Kingdom: "punted."

**Truth.** A careful, unbiased reading of Matthew 16:18-19 shows plainly that when Jesus spoke of building His church, He was also addressing the coming of His kingdom. "...I will build my church... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." The two are one and the same; to be in the one is to be in the other. Believers are added to the church by repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). Believers are added to the kingdom by the same process, by being born again by water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5).

### Kingdom Postponed: Is This a "Trick Play?"

**Truth.** It has now been nearly two millennia since Christ went to

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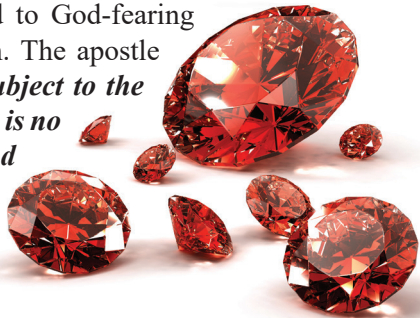
the cross. Premillennialism insists He is coming again to this earth to rule as King. Their followers wait in vain, generations come and go, and still no return, no rapture, no kingdom, no throne and no reign of Christ on earth. Their “prophecies” of the “when” of Jesus’ return flood the airways, Internet, televisions and bookstores. Every generation sees Premillennialism recalculating, redoing its charts, rewriting and reprinting. In this, Premillennialists are much like the Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah and gave up their Messianic hope. Premillennialism is a sad, embarrassing, disappointing and soul-crushing doctrine. He that errs therein is not wise.

Before the *season* is over, we beg the *fans* of Premillennial doctrine to search the Scriptures (John 5:39). ***“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...”*** (2 Corinthians 13:5). †

Emanuel Daugherty is a longtime Gospel preacher and the former director and an instructor at the West Virginia School of Preaching. He serves as an elder for the Beville Road Church of Christ in Daytona Beach, Florida, USA.

### *Robison's Rubies*

Romans 13:1 gives a command to God-fearing people and teaches a great truth. The apostle Paul said, ***“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”*** Christians would do well to remember



that obedience to the law of the

land is required of us! The only exception to this would be if the government ever demanded that we disobey God’s revealed will. In that case, the words of the apostles in Acts 5:29 should guide our steps, ***“...We ought to obey God rather than men.”*** By and large, though, Christians ought to be the best citizens and law-abiding people there are in a nation!



# *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.

\_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 28:19 7th word \_\_\_\_\_

John 3:5 5th word \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 2:38 2nd word \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 10:48 4th word \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 22:16 15th word \_\_\_\_\_

1 Corinthians 12:13 24th word \_\_\_\_\_

1 Peter 3:21 20th word \_\_\_\_\_

**Bible text: New King James (NKJV)**

**(See the back cover for answer.)**

# Influential Women in Jesus' Life

**Hiram Kemp**

Jesus is the most influential person in the history of the world. There have been more books written about Him than anyone else in history. When we read the Gospel accounts, we see why Jesus left such a large imprint on the world. He went around doing good for all people (Acts 10:38). He taught, healed, died and rose from the dead as proof of His deity (Romans 1:4).

One of the things often overlooked in the life of Jesus is the influential people who were involved in His life. Many of the most influential people in Jesus' life were women. These women's lives should be noted and studied. Jesus was as equally interested in women as He was in men throughout His ministry. Although Jesus selected twelve men to be His apostles, He had women serve near Him throughout His earthly ministry.



## Mary His Mother

The Old Testament foretold that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a Son Who would be called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). The New Testament tells us that Mary, who was espoused to Joseph, is the one who gave birth to Jesus (Matthew 1:16-25). She was special enough to be chosen by God to give birth to the Son of God. The angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, telling her that she had been chosen for this great task (Luke 1:26-35). She was

## BIBLE CHARACTERS

willing to undergo ridicule and mockery in order to do God's will. We are not surprised to later read of her Son experiencing the same (Matthew 27:31, 41-44). When all the disciples fled, Mary was with Jesus at the foot of the cross (John 19:26-27). When the disciples of the Lord were assembled after Jesus' ascension, Mary was there also (Acts 1:14). She is the constant picture of faithfulness and obedience. From before Jesus' birth to His death, resurrection and ascension, Mary was loyal to her God.

### Canaanite Woman: Great Faith

Jesus' primary mission was to seek and to save the lost of Israel while He was on earth (Matthew 15:24; Luke 19:9-10). Eventually, His saving blood was going to be spread throughout the world and reach all people, but this was to happen in stages (Acts 1:8). Though Jesus was focused solely on Israel during His earthly ministry, there were instances where Gentiles were healed as they boldly petitioned Jesus for help. On one occasion, a woman of Canaan came crying for Him to heal her daughter who was demon possessed (Matthew 15:22, 25). She told Jesus that she was willing to take the crumbs that fall from the table, meaning that although Jesus was focused on Jews, He could spare a blessing for a Gentile on this occasion (Matthew 15:26-27). Jesus praised her for her great faith, and her daughter was healed immediately (Matthew 15:28). This unnamed woman showed us that persistence pays off (Matthew 7:7). She also showed us the value of great faith and demonstrated that sometimes those we think least likely to believe have the greatest faith (Mark 6:6).

### The Widow: Sacrificial Giving

Jesus often instructed about money and how His disciples were to view it. He taught that we should lay up treasures in Heaven and not on Earth (Matthew 6:19-21). Once, He challenged a rich man to sell everything and follow Him (Matthew 19:21-22). He said, "**...only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 19:23-24 ESV). One day, He saw a widow putting money into the temple treasury. She had put in two copper coins which make a penny (Mark 12:42). Jesus claimed that the widow had "**put in**" more money than all others who put into the



## BIBLE CHARACTERS

treasury because she cast in everything she had on which to live (Mark 12:43-44). This woman did not have much, but she gave much. She showed her love for God by what she was willing to give to God (2 Corinthians 8:24). Shortly after this widow gave all of her money, Jesus was going to give His life (Mark 10:45). In Jesus' eyes, giving is more important than receiving (Acts 20:35). The widow showed the disciples how **true giving** was to be done. We learn from her that God honors **quality more than quantity**. The Savior Who sacrificed delighted in others who sacrificed.



### Mary: Anoints Jesus for Burial

Before Jesus was crucified, we are told that Mary [not the mother of Jesus] took a very expensive perfume and anointed Him for His burial (Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). While some were upset with what they considered to be a waste, Jesus praised the work of Mary on this occasion. He promised that wherever the Gospel is preached, the good deed done by Mary was to be told as a memorial of her (Mark 14:9). Her extravagant gift showed


## **BIBLE CHARACTERS**

her concern for Jesus and the love and devotion she had for Him. Jesus praised her for it. We learn from Mary that when we do what is right, Jesus is pleased with us, too. God will not forget us (Hebrews 6:10). Our works follow us, and our God rewards us (Revelation 14:13).

### **Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna: Sponsors**

As Jesus went throughout cities and villages preaching the Gospel, He was followed and supported by several women. Luke tells us that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and many others provided for Him out of their means (Luke 8:2-3). These women seemed to have been affluent to some degree as they had enough money to contribute to the public ministry of our Lord. Jesus was a carpenter by trade, but His ability to work with His hands probably decreased as His teaching and preaching ministry blossomed (Mark 6:3). God provided for the physical needs of Jesus through the liberal contributions of these women. The kindness of these faithful women shows us that we can partner with God in His work in a variety of ways. These women neither taught, preached nor performed miracles, and neither were they chosen as apostles of the Lord. Nevertheless, they did what they could, and they are mentioned as helpers of the Lord's work. May we, like these women, not focus on what we cannot do. Let us, instead, focus on all of the things that we can do to help the Lord's work go further.

### **Conclusion**

When we study the life of Jesus, we should keep our eyes open for all of those who were a part of His life. These women were faithful servants who were involved in Jesus' life and are remembered for their works. Let us model their dedication and submit our lives to His service. From the beginning of Jesus' life unto the end, we see women doing noteworthy things. The Holy Spirit included these things in Scripture for a reason. May we be influenced by their righteousness! 

**Hiram Kemp preaches for the Lehman Avenue church of Christ in Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA.**


# WHO RULES HELL?

Terry Wheeler

*Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." (Revelation 14:9-11 NKJV)*

The idea that Hell is the devil's kingdom and that he rules is plain make-believe. First, Satan did not create Hell. God did (Matthew 25:41). Next, Hell is designed to be Satan's punishment and prison – forever (Revelation 20:10). Finally, it is not the devil who rules or is in control of eternity. It is Jesus Christ (Revelation 14:10; 20:11-21:8).

Many fail to understand the justness of Hell. "How dare we be punished in such a way!" However, the facts are that Hell makes justice real. It also demonstrates that those who suffered at the hands of the wicked here for Jesus' sake chose well; those who rejected Christ did not. Further, to be made for God's presence for eternity, and then to reject that purpose, puts one in the unenviable position of existing forever without the possibility of fulfilling the reason for one's existence.

On the other hand, God is satisfied because He demonstrated His love and glory over His enemies; it is always by one's own designs that anyone will end up in Hell (Isaiah 59:1-2, 18). **So, who rules over Hell? The Lord, of course** (Psalm 103:19; Acts 10:36). 

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

## BIBLE QUESTIONS

# When Are We Born Again?

George McNulty

A lot of people believe that Saul (later better known as the apostle Paul) was born again (John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23) on the road to Damascus. However, this is untrue! The Bible makes it clear that he was still very much in his sins. Therefore, Saul was unconverted until he did what the Lord told him to do. When Saul arrived in the city, he prayed for three days and was still in his sins. So, he did not become, as some claim, born again when he fell to the ground when the Lord appeared to him. All three accounts of Saul's journey to conversion (Acts 9:3-4; 22:6-7; 26:12-14) tell us that when he saw the light from heaven, he fell to the ground. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read that he fell from a horse or a camel. This assumption is one that we have inherited from medieval art and human tradition, not from God's Word! It is no more true that Saul was born again or saved on the road to Damascus.

Far too many assumptions are made about God's Word, based upon human tradition and misunderstandings. In Acts 22:16, the Bible tells us that Saul was still praying and unhealed of his blindness. Only when he was baptized, that is, fully immersed for the forgiveness of his sins, was he truly converted. This is when Saul was born again and entered into the kingdom of his Lord. He did not become a Christian on the road as he fell to the ground because of the light of God the Son. Saul prayed for three days straight in Damascus, and yet he remained in his sins! Saul was only right with God when he obeyed the command to be baptized! ***“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”*** (Acts 22:16 NKJV).


Many people have the mistaken belief that one who is a born-again Christian is somebody who was once a Christian, then stopped being a Christian and became a Christian once again. That is clearly not found in the Word of God. Again, human tradition is not confirmed by Scripture but instead clearly contradicted (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-10).

Many people believe that they are born again through prayer! Yet, Saul himself said in Galatians 3:27 that in order to be in Christ, we put on Christ

## BIBLE QUESTIONS


when we are baptized (cf., Romans 6:3)! Our Lord Jesus said in Mark 16:16 that we must be baptized in order to be saved. In the realm of theological discovery, **one simply must put aside everything he thinks he knows to embrace Scripture as the sole authority for understanding God's will.**

It is of supreme importance that a person is right with God in this life. In fact, it is the most important thing anyone will ever do. We find these somber words in the book of Revelation. ***“He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still”*** (22:11). When tradition is cast aside and we let the Bible interpret itself, the meaning becomes clear. The state of our relationship to God when we die is the state of our relationship with Him that we will continue to have for all eternity!

Will you, Dear Reader, obey the Gospel call to become born again in Christ through immersion for the forgiveness of your sins? Or, will you reject Him and His teachings in favor of man's traditions? Be like Saul and waste no time in obeying the command of the Gospel! Remember, **Scripture always supersedes human tradition.** Trust in God's Word and His promises. **Obey before it is too late!** 


**George McNulty is a Gospel preacher who resides and labors for our Lord in Ireland.**

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# Four Imperative Things for a Congregation to Grow

**Ernest S. Underwood**

- I. Put the kingdom first in your lives (Matthew 6:33).**
  - A. The mother of James and John had the wrong idea.
    1. She thought position was more important than service.
    2. Jesus showed her, and them, that such was not the case.
  - B. Far too many want the **position** in the kingdom, rather than having the interest of the kingdom at heart (e.g., Diotrefes).
  - C. Question: If any one of you knew that an action on your part would solve the problems that plague a congregation, would you take that action?
- II. Present bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2).**
  - A. This means more than attending services.
  - B. It means working in the kingdom.
  - C. It means keeping one's self unspotted from the world.
  - D. It means denying self ("*...If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me,*" Luke 9:23 NKJV).
- III. Each one must truly love the other ("*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,*" John 13:35).**
  - A. This involves putting their interests above your own.
  - B. It may involve a refusal to extend fellowship unless they repent.
  - C. It certainly means more than an outward show of affection.
- IV. Each one must have a deep and an abiding respect for the authority of the Scriptures.** 

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# Noting Your Bible



Emily Fisher

## ***The Glory of God from Creation***

There is no comparison to the Creator of the universe! God is All-knowing, All-powerful and All-present. He is Love, Just and Holy. We, as His creation, falling short (Romans 3:23), can only strive to be like our Creator in a small way. A study of God's glory, which is a theme throughout Scripture, helps us understand more clearly our Great God and also see who we really are in reflection of His glory.

1. Write, "**The Glory of God**" in the front of your Bible and next to it, "(See **Psalm 19:1**)."
2. Turn to Psalm 19, and read all of it, noting, "**The creation shouts, 'There is a Supreme Creator!' – how can man ignore the evidence of design? (See Romans 1:18-23).**" Other Psalms about God's glory include 29:3, 57:5, 72:19, 97:6, 104:31 and 113:4.
3. Read Romans 1. Underline or highlight verse 20. Consider what happens when people "**suppress the truth**" (verse 18) and "change the glory of the incorruptible God" into something perishable (verse 23). Write: "(See **Deuteronomy 5:24**)."
4. Not only is God's glory seen in His creation, but throughout time, He has gradually revealed His Word to man, making known His Glory – namely, through Israel, to bring the Messiah into the world, and now, through the body of the Messiah, Christ's church. Let's note in the Old Testament where God's glory was manifested. Turn to Deuteronomy 5:24. Underline "glory" and "greatness," and write, "(See **Exodus 16–20**)."
5. Read Exodus chapters 16-20, noting the events to which Deuteronomy 5 refers: The people saw God's glory in the cloud (16:10). The God above all gods made a covenant with a small, insignificant nation. Israel witnessed the



mountain on fire, thundering, lightning, the sound of a trumpet and smoke (19:16-20; 20:18-21). Go back and read Psalm 104 again, making any notes of similarities. Also here, note 1 Corinthians 10 and the application for us today. Write, “(See Exodus 24).”

6. Turn to Exodus 24; read the whole context, especially noting verses 16-17. After establishing the covenant with Israel through blood (verse 8), the “*glory of the Lord*,” like a consuming fire, was upon the mountain. Note here also **Exodus 29:43** where God gave the law concerning various aspects – one of which involved the tabernacle that was sanctified by His glory. Write, “(See Exodus 33–34).”




**“May the glory of the Lord endure forever; May the Lord rejoice in His works” (Psalm 104:31 NKJV).**

7. Turn a few more chapters to Exodus 33. Moses talked with God “*face to face*” (Exodus 33:11), after Moses asked to see His glory (verse 18). God told him that “**no man shall see Me, and live**” (verse 20). From what occurred in the following verses and chapter 34, we conclude that the phrase, “face to face” means a close, personal relationship – not literally seeing God. Underline Exodus 34:6-7, noting the characteristics of the Lord God, and in verses 29-35, consider the effect God’s glory had on Moses – referencing 2 Corinthi-

ans 3:7-18. Space does not allow us to discuss all the great truths here, but we should take the time to study it further. Write, “(See Exodus 40).”

8. Read Exodus 40. Note, Israel obeyed the Lord in all things (verse 16), and the chapter ends with God’s glory filling the tabernacle in the cloud covering (verses 34-38). Here, write, “(See Leviticus 9).”
9. Turn to Leviticus 9, and note verses 22-10:3. This sobering passage conveys to us the reverence and obedience due our Glorious God. Note, “(See Numbers 14:10).”
10. Read a sad account of Israel’s history in Numbers 14, noting verse 10. Even in the midst of God’s glory, Israel’s fear and lack of faith cost them (verses 23, 29), but the Merciful Creator’s will would be done (verses 18-20)! Reference here **Numbers 16:19, 42 and 20:6**. Read these chapters to see other instances of rebellion among the people and their leader who had seen the glory of the Lord over and over. Here, write, “(See 2 Chronicles 5–7).”
11. Turn to 2 Chronicles and read these chapters, which tell of the dedication of the Temple. Again, noting the characteristics of the Lord in relation to His glory, underline 5:14 and 7:1-3. Write, “(See Isaiah 6).” You may want to note here that Solomon’s Temple is the last time God’s glory is mentioned “filling the temple” until Christ came (John 1:14).
12. Read the 6th chapter of Isaiah, and note what happened when Isaiah saw the God of Glory on His throne. “Verse 3 – Isaiah saw *Who God is*; Verse 5 – Isaiah saw *who he is – a sinner before a Holy God*; Verse 7 – God mercifully forgave him; Verse 8 – Isaiah saw *his responsibility*.” Underline, “Here am I, send me.”

This short study does not cover all the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the glory of our Lord. For example, the book of Ezekiel has as its theme God’s glory throughout. In the next issue, we will look at what the New Testament teaches about God’s Glory. 

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## PROVERBS 17:22

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A cowboy was trying to buy a health insurance policy. The insurance agent was going down the list of standard questions.

“Ever had an accident?”

“Nope, not a one.”

“None? You’ve never had any accidents.”

“Nope. Ain’t never had one. Never.”

“Well, you said on this form you were bitten by a snake once. Wouldn’t you consider that an accident?”

“No. That varmint bit me on purpose!”



A farmer was milking his cow. He was just starting to get a good rhythm going when a bug flew into the barn and started circling his head.

Suddenly, the bug flew into the cow’s ear. The farmer didn’t think much about it until the bug squirted out into his bucket.

It went in one ear and out the other.



A friend asked a gentleman how it is that he never married. The gentleman replied, “Well, I guess I just never met the right woman. I guess I’ve been looking for the perfect girl.”

“Oh, come on now,” said the friend, “surely you have met at least one girl that you wanted to marry?”

“Yes, there was one girl once. I guess she was the one perfect girl, the only perfect girl I really ever met. She was just the right everything. I really mean that she was the perfect girl for me.”

“Well, why didn’t you marry her?” asked the friend.

“She was looking for the perfect man,” he said.



I saw a pen in a store the other day. I picked it up and took a look at it because it was prettier than most. The clerk said, “It’s made in Germany.”

I said, “That’s too bad, I can’t use it then.”

The clerk said, “What’s the matter? You don’t like German pens?”

## PROVERBS 17:22

I said, “No, that’s not it. I just never learned to write German.”



Three boys were in the schoolyard bragging of how great their fathers are.

The first one said, “Well, my dad runs the fastest. He can fire an arrow, and start to run, I tell you, and he gets there before the arrow.”

The second one said, “Ha! You think that’s fast! My dad’s a ball player. He can throw a ball and be there before the ball lands on the ground.”

The third one listened to the other two and shook his head. He then said, “You two know nothing about fast. My dad is a civil servant. He stops working at 4:30 and he is home by 3:45.”



A man had a collection of valuables he really wanted to take with him. He bound them carefully in a package and told his wife he was placing it in the attic right above his bed. He hoped to die in bed, and, as his spirit soared upward, he hoped to pick up the package and take it with him to Heaven. He did die in bed as he had planned.

Sometime later, his wife remembered his scheme, and she and the children went upstairs to see if he had been successful. The bag was still where he had put it. “Well,” she exclaimed. “Maybe the rascal should have put it in the cellar!”



### Some new definitions

**Arbitrator** (ar’-bi-tray-ter): A cook that leaves Arby’s to work at McDonald’s.

**Avoidable** (uh-voy’-duh-buhl): What a bullfighter tries to do.

**Baloney** (buh-lo’-nee): Where some hemlines fall.

**Counterfeiters** (kown’-ter-fit’-ers): Workers who put together kitchen cabinets.

**Eyedropper** (I’-drop-ur): A clumsy ophthalmologist.

**Heroes** (hee-rhos): What a guy in a rowboat does.

**Paradox** (pare’-uh-doks): Two physicians.

**Pharmacist** (farm-us-sist): A helper on the farm.

**Sudafed** (sood’-a-fed): Brought litigation against a government official.



# *What Is Legalism?*

Louis Rushmore

## *Introduction*

What is legalism, or who is a legalist? The terms “legalism” and “legalist” have been and continue to be brandished about freely by public speakers and penmen alike.

Who is a “legalist,” and what is “legalism” is the question of the day. The answer seems to depend on what part of the road you’re on, which way you’re facing, and whether or not you’re moving in either direction. Some preachers, teachers, and elders have been dubbed “legalists” because they dared to proclaim the whole counsel of God and refused to accept denominational theories as doctrine. Others have been called “legalists” because they insist on the Lord’s standard of conduct for Christians. (Reeves 41)

“Brethren with a liberal attitude toward biblical teaching make accusations against the church for adhering to what the Bible – and especially the New Testament – teaches. They say, ‘**Teaching obedience and commandments is legalism**’” (Gardner 13). “It is fashionable today to characterize anyone who is concerned with biblical doctrine as pharisaical. The biblical condemnation of the Pharisees; legalism has been misread as a denunciation of doctrinal precision” (MacArthur 5). “...The charge liberals make against those who wish to follow the Bible and allow it to be their strict guide in doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). They claim we are guilty of the same sin as the Pharisees of Christ’s time – legalism” (Suiter 23). “Christians today are called ‘legalists’ when they obey God – as if obedience was a terrible sin” (Brown 6). “Obedience to God was equated with legalism...” (Summers 3). In all cases, “legalism” and “legalist” bear a negative and distasteful connotation. Brother Earl Trimble wrote, “Legalism is a bad word” (77).

It is apparent that orators and writers use the terms “legalism” and “legalist” differently from other presenters and scribes using the same words. Legalism and legalist have become **red flags** or **catch phrases to demonize** whatever and to whomever one attributes them. Simply applying the label – with neither explanation nor definition and without evidence – to something or to someone is supposed to be sufficient to demonstrate some practice or person to be evil. That carelessness and casual behavior when uttering the words “legalism” and “legalist” is a reckless and an unbalanced handling of the Word of God. Similarly, Hall had this to say about “doctrine.”

Doctrine is a word that has fallen on hard times. It has become a “loaded” word, pronounced with a sneer. It is associated with authoritarianism and **legalism, labels designed to produce prejudiced conclusions without thinking and**

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**without evidence.** Doctrine smacks of right or wrong and true or false, unacceptable concepts in this postmodern relativistic age. Thus, doctrinal preaching, always difficult, is now disdained and despised. (1 emphasis added)

In the first place, the words “legalism” and “legalist” do not appear in the Bible in either testament. One must resort to dictionaries to ascertain their meaning. According to *Merriam-Webster*, “legalism” has two **different** definitions. “1: strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code. . . 2: a legal term or rule.” Christians often wield the first definition to castigate and disarm practitioners of the second definition. That is a travesty.



In other words, not pleased with God’s biblical legislation, some Christians employ the words “legalism” and “legalist” to rebuke fellow Christians who readily accept what God caused to be recorded upon the pages of inspiration – the Bible. Using the first definition of legalism against the second definition is an unvarnished and ignoble attempt to disarm the impact and application of God’s Word. In that vein, anyone who proceeds to obey biblical instruction would falsely be labeled as a legalist. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is “the Author of eternal salvation to all who **obey** Him” (Hebrews 5:9). Dismissing the application of the Word of God – for we who live today, the New Testament – is spiritually criminal (Revelation 22:18-19).

Similarly, as the word “trinity” does not appear in the Bible but what that word means is defined in the Bible, though the word “legalism” does not appear in the Bible, its meaning is defined in the Bible.

First, the Bible defines legalism. What is the Bible definition of it? The Bible defines it as being an attempt to hold on to the law and to be justified by the law. Three books in the New Testament discuss this subject from three different views. All three (Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews) show that the ones that were caught up in this were Jews that wanted to hold onto the law, or Jews that wanted to return to the law, or Gentiles that were being misled by Judaizing teachers that attempted to bind the law on Gentiles. (Camp, “A Review” 3)

Already, one can discern that there is a difference between the frequent misapplication of the label of legalism or legalist and the true, biblical treatment of the concept.

### ***Validating Obedience***

Obeying the New Testament or the Gospel of Christ is maligned as “soul-shackling legalism” (Fred Blakely qtd. by McClish, “Are They Really So Nice”). Others describe



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obeying the Scriptures as *cold legalism*, the *stagnant pool of legalism*, *ceremonial legalism*, *pharisaic legalism*, *formalism* and *heartless legalism*. Some of those terms (cold legalism, ceremonial legalism, formalism and heartless legalism), when correctly applied, do describe the disease of the first century Pharisees, and that disease can infect Christians today, too. However, willingness to obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to implement it in one's life, as well as to announce it others, is **not legalism**. Instead, it is obedience – without which a person cannot be saved (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). “It is not ‘legalism’ to be concerned about following God’s will and being obedient to His commands, but rather it is following the example of Jesus to be so concerned. Jesus said, ‘If ye love me, keep my commandments’ (John 14:15)” (Ayers 82).

Much of the time, brethren who scream “legalism” or “legalist” do so to conceal, disguise or justify their own behaviors. “Outcries of ‘legalism’ serve as convenient smoke screens to justify departure from the faith and to cloak innovations in the Lord’s church” (Wilmoth 7). “These ‘ministers of righteousness’ use the smoke screen of ‘legalism’ in undermining the idea of a *Biblical pattern* and a ‘*thus saith the Lord*’ for what Christians must do to be pleasing in God’s sight” (McWhorter 1225).

Legalism is the cry that some make when error is pointed out. Quite often when we emphasize the importance of strict adherence to the word of God we are accused by our religious friends of denying the grace of God and trying to be justified by commands. For example, when we show them from the word of God that remission of sins follows scriptural baptism, or insist that the New Testament Christians were commanded to sing in worship instead of playing some mechanical instrument we are accused of being legalistic. Also, when we show from the word of God that all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3), and that we cannot be in Christ without being in his church (Eph. 5:23) we are often branded as legalists. Neither can they understand why we follow the Bible example of observing the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7). ... The Apostle Paul tells us that the Lord will take vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9). (George 2)

“Matt. 5:19 – It is evident from this verse that one cannot obtain the Lord’s approval while violating any of His commandments. Consequently, charges of ‘legalism’ which are leveled at those striving to honor the entirety of Christ’s New Testament are grossly unreasonable” (Berard). In an article entitled – “Is it Legalism?” – Himmel masterfully disassociated the terms “legalism” and “legalist” from obeying God’s instructions.

As Lot and his family were brought forth out of Sodom they were told, “Escape for thy life; look not behind thee...” (Gen. 19:17.) Lot’s wife did not follow this command in the strict sense, for she looked back. God turned her into a pillar of salt. Had she strictly conformed to God’s command, that



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might have made her a “Legalist,” but who wants to be a nasty “Legalist” when he can be a pillar of salt? Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, offered fire before the Lord which he had not commanded. (Lev. 10.) The liberal view is that details do not matter. They may have reasoned that fire is fire, so what difference does it make. Well, God sent fire which devoured them both and they died. If they had been “Legalist” enough to do only what God commanded they would have lived, but they chose fiery death to that terrible thing called “Legalism.” At Kadesh, Moses was told to speak to the rock and it would give water. (Num. 20:8.) As if in opposition to the idea of strict conformity to divine law, Moses took the liberty to smite the rock twice and to say, “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?” He got the water without being a “Legalist,” but he missed the land of Canaan. (Num. 27:12-14.) But who wants the Promised Land if he must be a “Legalist”? If strict conformity to law makes one a “Legalist,” and “Legalism” is as terrible as many preachers describe it, why not hail Lot’s wife for her practice of individual liberty and think of the pillar of salt as a memorial to freedom? Why not praise Nadab and Abihu for their broad-mindedness and view them as martyrs for the cause of freedom to worship as we please? Why not exalt Moses as one who denied himself the blessings of Canaan rather than be guilty of strict conformity? Is strict conformity to God’s word “Legalism”? ...Or is it just plain obedience? Is this opposition to strict conformity to divine law anything other than opposition to doing exactly what God teaches? What is “Liberalism” but “Infidelity” in disguise?

Brother Guy N. Woods astutely observed:

To say that if we must comply with the commandments in order to be saved is legalism is both false and foolish; to urge that justification is received in the act of believing and not on condition of keeping the commandments is contradictory since the act of believing is as much a human act as is either repentance, confession or baptism. To those who asked, “What must we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him, whom he hath sent.” (John 6:29.) (68)

The ramifications of declining to obey New Testament teaching include disregarding the plan of salvation when it comes to baptism for the remission of one’s sins. “It would be interesting to hear one of them explain how one can become a Christian in obedience to the demands of the gospel, and still have their obedience not be legalistic” (Camp, *The Word* 22-23). Apparently, their response to the scheme of redemption is to dismiss it. “Larry Dotson, in *Integrity*, March/April, 1990, on ‘Baptized into Christ... Without Getting Wet,’ denounces as ‘legalism’ a ‘plan of salvation’ which emphasizes conditions of salvation” (Liddell 5).

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Essentially no part of the Christian faith is safe from assault. The following excerpt demonstrates the wide critical swipe liberals unabashedly make against biblical Christianity.

The sermon was entitled, “What Is So Wrong with Legalism,” and was an unrelenting attack from beginning to end against the church of the Bible for which Jesus Christ died to establish and over which He is Head. The so-called *sermon* was loud, angry and harsh. Decried were patternism and legalism, and a long list of non-essentials in religion were assembled to include: church organization, church autonomy and a cappella music in Christian worship. As it turned out, the *preacher* plagiarized word for word and punctuation mark for punctuation mark a chapter from the book of an elder, lawyer, politician who has already crossed the biblical Rubicon. (Rushmore 54-55)

Liberals regularly pit grace and love against obedience, elevating grace and love – distancing them from obedience. “‘If you understand grace,’ they say, ‘you are above do’s and don’ts’ and ‘legalism, and rules, and commandments.’ Yes, we hear them all the time, but we recall that Jesus said, ‘If ye love me ye will keep my commandments’ (John 14:15). And again he said, ‘Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you’ (John 15: 14)” (Moffitt, *Denominational Doctrines* 11-12).

Were liberal brethren granted their evaluation of the Holy Scriptures, God’s revealed Word would be relegated to the status of bedtime stories and at best a love letter from God. McGee quoted one such outburst. “Anyone who has been confronted by Christ in the pages of the New Testament cannot possibly imagine that he who swept all traditional ritual and ecclesiastical legalism as a means of getting right with God into the religious trash heap, thereafter invested a book with the authority to set them up again! ...God’s answer to the human condition is not an idea, a plan, a system, or a book – it is a person” (Lanny Hunter qtd. by McGee, “A Brother Rejects” 18-21). “Rather than deal with what the Bible says, many simply label biblical positions as ‘traditionalism’ and ‘legalism’” (Sanders, “Paving the Way” 13). “They do not believe in a literal interpretation of the Scriptures; they think we should not make a rigid application of the word of God, especially to minor matters. To do this is legalism” (Brewer 3). “Some brethren are wanting to classify all ‘rule keeping,’ scripturalness, and a ‘thus saith the Lord’ authority, as legalism” (Trimble 76). “Expressions of concern about moral issues are met with dire warning about legalism and the failure to focus upon **the weightier provisions of the law**” (Banks 46).

The battle within the Lord’s church over following the Word of God or dismissing it is not a new challenge at all. The smear of “legalism” or “legalist” has long been the assault of liberal brethren upon their brethren.

The “Old Paths” in the 1870’s were called “legalist” and they were constantly criticized. In 1871 David Lipscomb wrote, “We have been pained

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for some time to see reproach cast upon those who insist upon faithful obedience to the law of God, as the condition of his blessing, a legalist, and the principle that required the submission as legalism. ... Some of our progressive brethren have even gone so far as to deny there is any law in the New Testament as there was in the Old.” (Cline 52)

Faithful brethren refuse to surrender to the slander and disregard for Scripture characteristic of wayward brethren – false teachers. “Loving obedience to God’s law is a response to God’s grace, not legalism. Christ himself required obedience in order to demonstrate love (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23)” (Sanders, “Facing Moral Dilemmas” 38). “In God’s eyes careful obedience is not self-righteous legalism but a cause for blessing” (Sanders, “Speak” 20). “It is not legalism to insist upon obedience to that which Jesus has commanded” (Dub McClish qtd. by Hill 4). “Nowhere does the New Testament say that being obedient to Jesus Christ whether becoming a Christian, or being a Christian is legalism! Instead in the New Testament, there is great emphasis on the importance of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord himself stressed obedience to him. He said to some, ‘And why call ye me, Lord, Lord...’ (Luke 6:46)” (Overton 2). “It appears that you think that everyone who loves the truth and is willing to stand on it is a legalist. ...I contend it is not legalism to obey the Lord. It is not legalism to follow the Word of God by rightly dividing the truth and making proper application” (Robinson 75).

### ***First Century Legalism Correctly Defined***

The following quotation distinguishes between the defamation liberals heap upon Bible believers as legalists and the legalistic Pharisees of the first century.

The voices which ridicule and condemn brethren who insist, upon sensitivity to truth, are becoming louder and more numerous. They brand as “legalistic” and “fundamentalist” those who refuse to capitulate to their lax and open attitudes toward the “strait and narrow.” In many quarters of the brotherhood, one is eyed with suspicion if he becomes too vocal in stressing to Christians the need to conform strictly to the will of God in all matters of faith and practice. He is set aside as an immature and pharisaical misfit who has simply never grown to the point of grasping the true spirit of Jesus. He is a “negative” and “brutal demagogue.” He is a “legalist.” ...One generally thinks of the Pharisees as the classic example of “legalism.” But how so? (1) They were guilty of hypocrisy. They pretended to be devoted and went to great lengths to appear righteous, but they did not actually follow through with genuine, loving obedience to God. (Matthew 23:4-7, 25-28.) (2) They gave attention to some biblical matters but neglected others of greater importance. (Matthew 23:23-24.) (3) They misinterpreted Mosaic law (Matthew 5:17-48) and even went about binding and enforcing their fallacious interpretations, elevating these human traditions, laws, and doctrines to the level of

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Scripture. (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13.) With these errors in mind, notice that “legalism” does not have to do with fervent attention to fulfilling the “letter of the law.” The Pharisees were not condemned because they were too zealous about strict obedience to God’s will. They were condemned because “they say, and do not.” (Matthew 23:2.) ...In reality, outcries of “legalism” can serve as convenient smoke screens to justify departure from the faith and to cloak innovation in the church of our Lord. (Miller 1, 18)

Brother Miller aptly identified the original legalists, or as Jesus called them, “Hypocrites!” (Matthew 15:7) – “the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 15:1). “The Jews who let their hearts wander from God ended up either in the liberalism of Sadduceism or in the legalism of Phariseism” (Webster). “He [Jesus] refused to pay homage to their [the Pharisees] man-made, inconsistent legalisms, accusing the Pharisees of approaching God with the mouth and with the lips while keeping their heart far from the Father (Matthew 15:8)” (Key 22). “The Pharisees in their legalism made the existing legal system unbearable” (Sheerer 373). “On the one hand there was the Pharisical legalism that had perverted the Law of Moses. Jesus warned His disciples to obey the law, but to avoid its perversions that exalted the legalism about the Truth, (Matt. 15:7-9)” (Taylor 8).

The Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders in the first century did not represent the Law of Moses or Judaism correctly. Furthermore, it is a gross misunderstanding of the Old Testament to view it, like they did, merely as a collection of rules that didn’t require any emotional or spiritual investment.

It is wrongfully assumed that worship in spirit and truth was not a requirement under the Law of Moses. This goes to the mistaken notion that any doctrine of worship which strictly required certain rituals could not be “in spirit and truth.” It is thought to be legalism when there is law and insistence on rules. This totally misses the purpose of God in the Jewish system. Though often ignored by the people, it was always God’s purpose that their worship be spiritual and certainly that it be according to truth. One who assumes that the Old Testament system was a mere system of legalism should reflect seriously on the fact that God is the Author of that system. When under the Law of Moses they worshiped sincerely and according to the rules of the Law, they were true worshipers, the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. It was under the Old Testament system that Joshua urged the people to “serve him [the Lord] in sincerity and in truth” (Josh. 24:14). Another text for comparison is Samuel’s admonition to “serve him in truth with all your heart” (I Sam. 12:24). **Acceptable worship has always been “in spirit and in truth.”** (Pharr 10 emphasis added)

“When Jesus talked of the necessity of exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), he did not indict the Old Testament law as a system of legalism. He indicted those Jews as legalists!” (Workman). There was a huge discrep-

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ancy between the sacrifices and other rules followed by the Jews versus their spiritual involvement in the Law of Moses. At best, the Jews went through the motions of obedience without putting their hearts into the performance. At worst, there was a complete disconnect between their outward religious practices and their godless lives.

*“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” Says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword”; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 1:11-20 NKJV)*

Yes, God had commanded the sacrifices, but because the sacrifices were not accompanied by a proper spiritual participation in the appointed worship, God rejected their worship. Secondly, God rejected His own appointed worship because His people’s lives were filled with ungodliness. Under those circumstances, the Jews’ worship was worthless – **not really worship at all!** Luke 18:9-14, the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, illustrates the hollowness of the Pharisaic religion contrasted with the humbleness of the tax collector.

Additional interchanges between our Lord and the Pharisees bring into focus the disposition of the Pharisees.

To understand better their legalism, let us look at one of the clearer examples in connection with their traditions of the Sabbath. The fourth commandment to the Jews was to “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The sabbath was the seventh day of the week. On this day they were to rest and worship God; it was to be set apart and no work was to be done. The Pharisees added their traditions to the Sabbath and broke down into minute detail every possible circumstance and how they were to act. Thus in Mark 2:23-27 they debated with Jesus concerning his disciples’ use of the sabbath. It must be kept in mind that they

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did not violate the sabbath from the scriptural point of view, but they violated the traditions concerning the sabbath which the Pharisees had bound upon the people. Thus the Pharisees were highly incensed when the disciples of Jesus went through the grain field and plucked corn and ate it on the sabbath. They accused them of being sabbath-breakers. They had not committed just one sin in the sight of the Pharisees; they had committed two. The Pharisees reasoned that if one violated the sabbath every act must be broken down into an individual sin. Thus they felt that the disciples sinned first by plucking the grain in that they had harvested it, and secondly that they sinned again in rubbing the ears of corn which was threshing or grinding it. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and attempted to show them that they were legislating where God had not and were binding things upon the people which God had not. (Bell 373-374)

Though the apostle Peter hadn't developed an appendix of rules to the Law of Moses, he did share a legalistic perspective with the Pharisees. "Peter, ever ready to ask questions, inquires, like a Jewish legalist, for some rule to limit the number of times one must forgive another; and he suggests seven times as a proper limit. But Jesus gently reproves his loveless legalism. 'Not seven times,' said he, 'but seventy times seven'" (Williams 9).

Aside from the Pharisees, Judaizing Christians later tried to blend Judaism and Christianity. Both the Pharisees and Judaizing church members were legalists in the sense that they made rules where God had not authored commandments. "In the background of Galatians, Judaizing teachers were calling for Gentile converts to obey the law of Moses if they wanted to be saved (cf Acts 15:1). Paul wrote the epistle to defend the liberty of Christianity against such legalism" (Winkler 91). **In the strictest sense, "legalism [is] (binding what God has not bound)"** (Hicks).

Instead of making laws where God has not made laws, we need to concern ourselves rather with obeying what God has commanded. Christianity is difficult enough, and so we don't need to make it any more difficult than it is already. Remember, "if demanding a 'thus saith the Lord' and teaching commandments are to be obeyed is legalism, then Paul, the other apostles, and prophets as well were all legalists" (Weekley 6-7).

### ***Manifestations of Contemporary Legalism, Part 1***

**Legalism is a disposition to make laws; liberalism is a disposition to disregard law. The former seeks to bind where God has not bound, and the latter would loose where God has bound. Both extremes are wrong.** The problems of legalism and liberalism confronting the church today are not new, but have existed through all the history of man. . . . We should content ourselves with continuing to "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." Let us not add to that which is written, or take away from that which God has spoken. "Whosoever goeth onward and abi-

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deth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). (Dobbs 18-20)

The contemporary legalists in one sense are those who have added interpretations of Scripture that go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6). These are commonly referred to as anti churches, and there are several different forms of them (i.e., schisms opposed to located preachers, multiple communion cups, Bible classes, inter-congregational cooperation, benevolence toward non-Christians, eating in the church building and several other matters involving the church treasury). “...The long shadows of Daniel Sommer’s legalism still haunt us. In the last 100 years, the body has been rocked time and again by antischisms” (Waddey 11). Daniel Sommer has been ascribed by some to be the father of antiism. “When legalism (‘anti-ism’) threatened the church in the early 1950’s, good men sat by in silence until it did untold harm to the body of Christ” (Shelly 1-2). Not only do legalists in the sense here entertained make Christianity more difficult than it is already, but they also harm the brotherhood of Christ, resulting in unnecessary and arbitrary divisions.

### *Manifestations of Contemporary Legalism, Part 2*

There is a second way in which one can be a legalist today, and that danger is more widespread than antiism, which has severely harmed and hampered the Lord’s church across the USA and around the world. One characteristic of legalists among Old Testament Jews and New Testament era Jews was **hypocrisy** – a contradiction and contrast between God-authored religion and worship versus attitudes of disinterest or sinful behavior by the children of God. Thus, part of the definition of “legalism” involves the void of heartfelt worship, Christian living and Christian service. “The term is used derogatively to signify a conformity which has missed the inner spirit or purpose of the laws and degenerated into **a barren observance of externalities**” (Waddey 11 emphasis added). **Cold** legalism, **ceremonial** legalism, **formalism** and **heartless** legalism describe the disease of the first century Pharisees, as well as their forefathers about whom we noticed in Isaiah 1:11-20. That disease can infect Christians today, too.

Our Christian worship can be cold, ceremonial, formal and heartless; we can simply be going through the motions without having our hearts in it. **We are mistaken if we presume that our worship is acceptable to God simply because we do the right things, in the right way and on the right day but have no spiritual attachment to them.** This type of an attitude has never been acceptable to God!

Not only one’s worship, but Christian living and Christian service are derailed because of the same disposition. “A church spawned in indifference, cradled in legalism, spoon-fed on spiritual pablum, and rocked to sleep in the lap of material luxury will never share its treasure with others” (Shipp 4). “We have been so strong in the legalistic part of the gospel that we have often been stranded on the rock of legalism. We have been so busy on formal obedience – baptism, the Lord’s supper,



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attending church – that we have failed to be filled with the spirit of Christ, and to imitate his life of service to those around us” (Otey 4).

Forasmuch as the churches of Christ have capitalized on teaching the Truth, there is more that ought to characterize the church of God (1 Corinthians 1:2). For instance, Christians are called upon to “worship in **spirit** and truth” (John 4:24). Not the outward formality of worship alone, but the internal, spiritual participation in our worship is necessary in order for Christian worship to be acceptable to God. Wandering minds, sleeping, texting, etc. during our worship cheapens it and quite possibly makes it unacceptable to our God. Scripture calls upon Christians to examine themselves before attempting to worship the Almighty (1 Corinthians 11:28). **Stop and consider your preparedness to worship God “in spirit and truth.”**

“We are just as afraid of liberalism as of legalism. One extreme is as bad as the other. We do not believe that the Bible teaches either extreme. It is non-biblical to preach that one may, by doing good works, earn brownie points toward a crown with stars in it. It is just as non-biblical to teach that we are exempt from law” (Lemmons 9). Throughout the worldwide brotherhood, there is a noticeable and lamentable absence of earnest conviction in conversions as well as in Christian worship, Christian living and Christian service. There exists an obvious hypocrisy in worship, deportment and evangelism. **This type of legalism – going through the motions without spiritual participation – cold, ceremonial, formal and heartless – remains a real danger to the Lord’s church.**

### **Conclusion**

“Legalism, in a good sense, simply refers to acting according to law” (*McClintock and Strong* 5:325). “Christians are under (amenable to) law (cf. Gal. 6:2). Therefore, if, by *legalism*, one means ‘acting according to law’ then legalism, in this sense, is not something to be avoided. However, there is a legalism that should be avoided” (Pugh 11).

“The history of religion is one of extremes. Two manifestations of religious extremism are *liberalism* and *legalism*. *Liberalism* is the doctrine of those who ignore the restraints of the Sacred Scriptures and loose where God has not loosed. *Legalism* is the doctrine of those who ignore the liberties of the Sacred Scriptures and bind where God has not bound” (Pugh 11). “The Legalists make and bind laws where God has not done so. The Liberalist looses laws that God has made and bound” (James 359). “Some have espoused LIBERALISM and *loosed where God has bound*. Others have embraced LEGALISM and *bound where God has loosed*. Both extremes are wrong for both violate the authoritative headship of Jesus” (Adams 10). “If we neglect love and grace, for example, we will probably head toward legalism. If we emphasize grace and love too much, we put ourselves in jeopardy of thinking that obedience is not important” (Summers 101).

The following lengthy quotation summarizes much of the exchange between Jesus and the legalists of His day.

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Jesus, in preparation for His coming kingdom (the church of Christ), addressed both liberalism and legalism. He was in controversy with the liberal Sadducees (Matt. 22:23-34; cf. Acts. 23:7-8). He also debated the legalistic Pharisees who taught as doctrines “the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9) and bound “heavy burdens, hard to bear” and laid them on others (Matt. 23:4). Legalism was evident in the early church when “certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). Legalism involves *binding on others what God has not bound* (cf. Matt. 16:19). Some of the basic aspects of legalism are seen in the epistles written to the Galatians and the Colossians. To the latter, Paul wrote, “...[W]hy... do you subject yourselves to regulations. Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle ... according to the commandments and doctrines of men?” (Col. 2:20-22). ... ***This is the basic aspect of legalism – to make, and bind, a law where God has not bound.*** ... Although there is a standard/pattern (i.e. the law of Christ), which is prescribed, legalism makes additional standards/laws in the realm of liberty. ... Where there is a pattern we must adhere to such (i.e. 1 Tim. 2:12). Where there is no pattern we must not fabricate one (i.e. James 1:27; Gal. 6:10). ... The major legalists whom Jesus confronted (i.e. Pharisees) were interested in self-exaltation and personal merit. They taught as doctrine the commandments (laws) of men (Matt. 15:9) and did their work “***to be seen of men***” (Matt. 23:5, emp. added). For a pretense (a show) they made long prayers (Mark 12:40). (Pugh 11, 14).

“If legalism is to be defined as the doctrine of salvation by good works, then let us oppose legalism with every fiber of our beings. Isaiah dealt with Israel’s legalism, that is, the idea that salvation came as a result of doing the deeds. They believed as long as they followed the rules they would be blessed by God” (Kee 562-563). Again, this is a primary danger facing the churches of Christ today – **a lethargic exercise of Christianity – in worship, Christian living and Christian service.**

On the other hand, false accusations by erring brethren and false teachers attribute legalism to Christians who conscientiously endeavor to practice what the New Testament teaches. “It has become quite common to assume that the scriptures are subject to a type of rather hazy relativistic interpretation and that to oppose such a view is to deny freedom of will and to surrender to legalism” (Trout 25-26).

Far too many, both inside and outside the church, have rejected the authority of God. Yet, even if every person on earth were so to do, the fact that Christ’s revealed will is the standard by which all of us who have lived in the Christian Age will be judged remains unchanged (John 12:48). Those who profess to love the Lord while rejecting His authority may continue to call faithfulness legalism, Pharisaism, bibliolatry, ultraconservatism, or some other derisive term. What these liberals are really expressing is the same rebel-

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lous attitude most people had toward following the “old paths” and “good way” in Jeremiah’s day: “We will not walk therein” (Jer. 6:16). (Ellis 31)

“Change agents accuse many in the church of being Pharisaical for alleged legalism. They hurl, ‘You Pharisees think you are going to be saved by meticulous law-keeping.’ ‘You Pharisees don’t believe in grace’” (Moses 4). However, “urging obedience to God’s conditions is not legalism; it is telling people how to love. Jesus said, ‘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. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words’ (Jn. 14:23-24)” (Sanders, “Is Salvation” 38). “To contend that truth is absolute (100 percent right) and that there is no middle ground (‘gray’) between truth (‘white’) and error (‘black’) in the view of liberals is to become guilty of ‘legalism’” (Warren 15). “‘These things command and teach’ (I Tim. 4:11). Are we under law today? Must we keep commandments? Paul clearly says, ‘These things command and teach.’ And we have seen that that is not legalism. It is love, for Jesus said, ‘If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments’ (John 14:15). He even said, ‘Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you’ (John 15:14)” (Moffitt, *Denominational Doctrines* 164-165).


“‘Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded...’ Is that legalism, Noah? No, it isn’t. What liberals think is legalism is spirituality in its highest form” (McGee, “The Need” 107). “Human adherence to Divine law while trusting in grace and the provisions thereof for atonement does not constitute legalism. The concept of the Old Testament being exclusively a law system and the New Testament a grace system is utter foolishness! The Pharisees endeavored to make the law of Moses a legalistic system, but that was their doing, not God’s” (Chesser 388).

Finally, Moffitt recaps the libel directed toward scrupulous Christians.

When God knew we could not be saved by being sinless, He found another way – grace through obedient faith. Because we love Him, may we keep His commandments, and may we oppose all who tend toward saying “grace only,” “faith only,” “no law,” “law-keeping is legalism.” Such statements are not only shallow, they reveal that the one speaking them has not yet understood the nature of grace or law. ...Liberals sometimes call those who want to follow closely the law of Christ “legalists.” They chide us for not realizing that we are under a “law of liberty” rather than a law of legalism. “We do not have to pay such close attention to law, rules, commands, and precepts,” they aver. “We are free,” they say. “We are above rule-keeping and all shades of legalism. If we are just loving and spiritual, grace takes care of all these nit-picky violations. We are not to bear a harsh, cold pack of rules and regulations. We can loosen up and enjoy a real liberty from mundane regulations and do’s and don’ts.” (Moffitt, “Law, Transgression”)

With brother Woods we concur. If the inaccurate name-calling – legalist –

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because we revere and try to implement in our lives the Word of God – were to stick, we would wear it proudly as faithful children of God, rather than surrender our faith and confidence in God’s Word. “If it is legalism to insist that every command of Christ should be equally respected and faithfully obeyed, then let us all be legalists! Far better this than to deny the plain affirmations of his word and thus, in effect, to become infidels” (Woods 296). 

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## **What Can You Do to Help Spread the Word?**

- \* For just a moment, put yourself in a village in Africa, or even in a large city in India, or in the jungles of South America. You are an immortal soul, living in a perishing body. How will you knowledgeably prepare for the judgment and eternity that awaits us all?
- \* Does the church of Christ exist in your community, so that you can hear the Gospel preached? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- \* Is there a source for buying Bibles in your community? Though the Bible has been translated into most languages, villages seldom have bookstores. For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- \* If you have found the Truth and are a Christian, is there a bookstore from which you can order additional study materials? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.

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## ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

### Verse Search (page 75)

1. Appearance or external things
2. The love of Christ
3. Live for Christ
4. True
5. According to the flesh
6. New creature
7. Old things have passed away
8. All things
9. Christ
10. Reconciliation
11. God is reconciling the world to Himself
12. Ambassadors
13. Us
14. Be reconciled to God
15. None
16. The righteousness of God

### Bible Word Scramble (page 82)

baptism

### Bible Find (page 30)



### Scavenger Hunt (page 63)

1. Adonijah (1:5, 25)
2. Gibeon (3:5)
3. 12 (4:7)
4. Sidonians (5:6)
5. 480 (6:1)
6. two tablets of stone (8:9)
7. Dan, Bethel (12:25, 29)
8. Omri (16:23-24)
9. 7,000 (19:18)
10. "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king" (21:13)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

**Jerusalem Headlines** ~ page 25

**Crossword Puzzle** ~ page 30

**The Elephant-Nose Fish** ~ page 35

**5-Minute Bible Study** ~ page 49

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**Doubts and Fears** ~ page 64

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**No Record of Wrongs** ~ page 77

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in Jesus' Life** ~ page 83

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**When Are We Born Again?** ~ page 88

**Humor** ~ page 94