

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

CHRISTIANS ARE A PECULIAR PEOPLE

IN HIS EPISTLE TO CHRISTIANS the apostle Peter wrote, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9 KJV).

How are Christians different or distinct from all other people of the world? They breathe the same air, eat the same food, drink the same water, and enjoy the same sunshine. Then how are they different or peculiar? Christians are different because they do not follow the standard set by the world, they are trying to live by following the steps or teachings of Christ. (1 Peter 2:21). Christ taught that His followers are in the world but are not of the world, as He was not of the world when He was on earth. (John 17:14-16). They are urged to not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their mind. (Romans 12:2). By becoming Christian, they have put off the old man of sin and have put on the new man, which is Jesus Christ, when they were baptized into His death. (Romans 6:3, 4; Ephesians 4:17-24). Philippians 3:20 says, our citizenship is in heaven. Sure, on earth we are citizens of the country we live in, and as Christians we are to live as responsible people in our nation. Our first responsibility, however, is to God, as Christ taught in Matthew 6:33. We must, therefore, try to live daily our lives on earth in such manner that through our actions and words



God's name may be glorified. (Matthew 5:16).

As Christians we are also responsible to our fellow beings. Jesus taught, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them. (Matthew 7:12). We want others to speak well of us and do good for us, so we should do likewise to others. We don't want others to mistreat us, so we should do the same to them. We don't want others to cheat us, or lie to us, or to harm us in any way, and so we must first do the same to others.

As Christians we owe a debt to our nation. We enjoy freedom and protection from evil and lawless men. Only a settled government can provide these things. Then there are a wide range of public services all of us enjoy each day, and there is no way that each individual could provide for himself services such as water, electricity, roads, sewage, etc. This places us under obligatory debt. As responsible citizens we know that to fail in good citizenship is to fail the Lord to whom we belong. We must, therefore, adhere to civil obedience. There may be things we do not like, or we might think those things should be handled or done differently than they are presently being done. But instead of grumbling and complaining, we should be thankful for those things we have and enjoy each day.

Of course, if there is a law that violates the law or the will of God, the Christian should resist and have no part in it. (Acts 5:29). But the Christian should never take thought of vengeance or revenge, The Bible teaches: "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regards for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved do not avenge yourselves. But rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay', says the Lord. Therefore, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:17-21).

As Christians we are taught to believe that the government is divinely ordained of God. This means we are to discharge our duty as law-abiding citizens, even if evil men are serving in high places, We believe that God is supreme and nothing is hidden from His eyes. As obedient children of God, we try to live peaceably with all men, taking no thought of vengeance or revenge. We trust in God, and even if a tyrant like Nero, under whose reign both the apostles, Peter and Paul, lived, is on the throne, we must follow what God has taught us in the Bible.

Again, we read, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance

of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who are good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” (1 Peter 2:13-17).

God -fearing and law -abiding Christians, therefore, will never join those who are involved in civil disobedience. We may disagree when a law is contrary to the law of God and is against the people in general. In such a case we can work to change that law so that it conforms to the divine law and for the betterment of all people, especially when we have the opportunity to exercise our constitutional right to vote, but we must never seek to bring such a change by becoming law-breakers.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

J.C. Choate



THE CHURCH IS SIMPLY a group of people called out or set apart for a special purpose. The Church of Christ is composed of a body of people who believe in Christ and are determined to follow his teachings and his will.

Many years before the church ever came into existence such men as Isaiah, Joel, and Daniel prophesied that it would be established, where it would be established, who would establish it, when it would be established, and the purpose of its establishment. Isaiah said, “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:2,3).

Joel wrote “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall

see visions; And upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.” (Joel 2:28,29). Then Daniel made the statement, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.....” (Daniel 2:44).

There are many other prophecies that could be used but we will pass now to the days of Christ to find some of the Lord’s promises that the church would be established. Christ said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16: 18). Please note that it has not been established yet and even the Lord points to it in a future sense. That is, it would be established sometime after the time he made these statements. After Peter confessed him as being the Son of God, he said, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17). He tells Peter here that he will build his church on the confession that he made. What was that confession? That he was the Son of God. So the church was to be build upon Christ, not upon Peter. Also, notice who promised to build the church. Christ said, I will build my church.....” Hence, the church of Christ.” Not a man made church wearing a man-made name, but the church belonging to Christ, wearing his name.

In Mark 9:1 he said “Verily I say unto you That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.” Now notice, the Lord makes a promise here concerning the kingdom, or the church, which are the same. He says that some of the very people who were present at that time would still be living when the kingdom, or the church, came in power. So it was near at hand. It hadn’t been established yet, but it would soon be there.

When we turn to Acts 2 we read of the establishment of the church. The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. That is the Apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit and they had the power to speak in different tongues or languages and perform miracles. Well, that fulfills Marks 9:1. But to absolutely settle the matter, Peter himself said, “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.” (Acts 2:16). Then he goes on to quote Joel Chapter 2 concerning the pouring out of the Spirit and the kingdom coming with power.

In the next place, a kingdom was set up that would never be destroyed. Paul said in Hebrew 12:28 that a kingdom had been set up that could not be moved. That kingdom or church still stands and will stand forever. Thus Daniel 2:44 was fulfilled.

Then finally, Isaiah 2:2, 3 was fulfilled with the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost. The place was Jerusalem. The time was about A.D. 33. The kingdom or church was established. The gospel was preached and all who obeyed it were added to the church. (Acts 2:47). But what did the Lord say in Matthew 16:18? He said that he would establish his church, and he did through his apostles. Further, it was founded upon a rock, and Christ was that rock. (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Neither John nor Peter established a church but Christ did. Now whose church should one be a member of? Christ's church, of course. No other church was authorized or established with God's approval. He seeks followers only one way—through his kingdom.

There are many man-made churches but are worthless. Christ has the true church. He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18), saviour of it (Ephesians 5:23), foundation of it. (1 Corinthians 3:11). It wears his name (Romans 16:16) and he is coming back for it one day. (Ephesians 5:27). Now why should anyone want to be a member of any other church when he can be a member of Christ's church?

But how can one know the difference between a man-made church and the church of Christ? That is simple. If it was not established in the city of Jerusalem then it is not the right one. If it was not established in A.D. 33 then it is too-young. If it doesn't wear the name of Christ then it does not belong to Christ. If it does not follow the New Testament as its only guide, it is not following Christ.

Paul says there is but one church, or body. (Ephesians 4:4). That's the one Christ established.

Characteristics Of The Inspired Word

William Woodson

THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE VERSES concerning the nature and characteristics of the Word of God are: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Timothy 3:16,17). As one considers his/her reading, understanding, appreciation, and submission to God's Word, a noting of these characteristics may be helpful. These are listed briefly.

1. Scripture is the **written** will of God. The very term Scripture derives from the idea of writing: hence, the written Word. Thus it is fixed, allows transmission from one time to another,

and enables continued study for understanding and insight.

2. Scripture is **inspired of God**. What was written was the product of God's superintendence by the Holy Spirit, and it was/is His Word, not the word of man. We learn from and appreciate the greatness of Moses, David, Paul, Peter, etc., but, in fact, the words are the words of God by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.
3. Scripture is profitable for **doctrine**. The teaching one does in the spread of God's will, to convert the lost and edify the church, seeks to guide the reader and hearer in better understanding the meaning of God's will. This is the center of the teaching and preaching God's people are to do.
4. Scripture is profitable for **reproof**. When mistakes are made concerning God's will, in doctrine and/or conduct, there is a need for firmness in admonition that correction is to be made. Concern and love are to be present; but genuine regard for God's truth and righteousness, when spurned by anyone, is to be made clear as well.
5. Scripture is profitable for **correction**. The guidance of Scripture shows how one is to return to and serve God. The prodigal is guided not only concerning how to return home, but also how to conduct his/her life upon that return.
6. Scripture is profitable for **instruction in righteousness**. A growing and maturing of life and love should characterize the child of God. This growth process is nurtured and guided by the truth of Scripture.
7. Scripture produces, when truly followed, the man of God thoroughly furnished to every good work. Scripture, while intended for intellectual grasp and appreciation in teaching and maturing, is not confined to intellectualism alone. There is the application of the Word in personal development, loyalty, service, and reverence for God and others. The equipping means for such a life of service is the Scripture truly understood and followed.

These verses provide a remarkable insight into the characteristics of the Word of God. It is well to consider such qualities of the Bible as we love, study, and follow it.

LESSONS FROM THE CATACOMBS OF ROME

Wayne Jackson

THE TERM “catacomb” derives from a compound Greek term with the components *kata* (down) and *kymbe* (hollow). The word is used of that vast network of tombs beneath the city of Rome (and at other places as well) where ancient Christians buried their dead—and even met for worship during times of severe persecution. It has been estimated that this maze of corridors and burial vaults, if strung together, would stretch out some 600 miles. Estimates of the number of tombs vary from 1,750,000 to 4,000,000; they represent the burial of Romans from the 2nd to the 5th centuries A.D. There are a number of valuable lessons from the catacombs.

Historicity of Christ—The catacombs are filled with art works (ancient graffiti) which testify to the martyrs’ deep faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Epitaph inscriptions like this one are frequent: “Victorina, in peace and in Christ.” Common among the inscriptions was the sign of the fish. The Greek word for fish (*ichthus*), became an acrostic symbol for: *Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior*. Surely the ancient martyrs had a better sense of whether Jesus Christ was an actual historical character than some modern atheist.

The Scriptures—The fact that much of the art work in the catacombs was taken from various accounts in the Bible—both Old Testament and New Testament—reveals how widely the Scriptures must have been circulated in those early centuries of the church’s history. There are representations of Adam and Eve, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, Moses’ miracle of bringing water from the rock, Daniel in the lions’ den, Jonah, the visit of the Wise Men, Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd, etc.

There is another point to be made. Many of the names mentioned in the epistles of Paul are found carved upon the walls of the catacombs. This does not mean, of course, that they represent the actual people in Paul’s correspondence; it does suggest that the biblical record is an accurate reflection of the nomenclature of that day, and thus possesses an aura of authenticity.

The Miracles of Jesus—The New Testament represents Jesus as a miracle worker. Some thirty-five individual miracles are ascribed to Him, in addition to numerous generic references (see John

20:30,31). Many modern scholars, yielding to the influence of skeptics like David Hume (1711-1776), deny that Jesus performed miracles.

Clearly, though, the primitive Christians were convinced of the Lord's miracle-working powers. Among the art works of the catacombs, there are depictions of Jesus' baptism, with the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. There are reproductions of the healing of the paralytic man (Mark 2), and the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11). There are reflections of the water-to-wine miracle at the wedding in Cana (John 2), as well as the feeding of the great multitude with the loaves and fish (John 6).

The Growth of the Church—A consideration of the material in the book of Acts shows how explosive the growth of the early church was, and the saints in Rome were no small part of this. The faith of the Roman Christians was widely known (Romans 1:8; 16:19). Blaiklock says: "The most conservative interpretation of the Catacomb burial figures would, therefore, suggest that. . . one-fifth of Rome's people in the middle Empire were Christians, and it is possible that the proportion was at times much greater." There is another factor to be considered as well. The tombs of the catacombs represent about ten generations of believers. This would suggest that the early devotees of Christianity passed the Gospel along to their offspring. It's called "vertical evangelism."

Christianity and Intellectualism—Atheism alleges that the Christian faith is only for the ignorant and those who are void of reason. Gibbon charged that the early church consisted almost exclusively of "the dregs of the populace." The catacomb evidence has shown, though, that Christianity invaded the ranks of the middle and upper classes, and made an impact even among the intellectuals. Many of the tombs appear to have belonged to families of the aristocracy (see Acts 17:4).

Persecution—The Lord had promised that His followers would be persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12). In A.D. 64, Nero launched a vicious reign of terror against the church, as did subsequent Caesars. The Christians went underground (amongst the tombs—where the superstitious Romans would not follow) to worship. Amazingly, though, the catacomb graffiti reveal no images of sorrow or complaining; rather, a vibrant spirit of joy and triumph is everywhere evidenced. What faith those saints possessed!

Apostasy—The record of the catacombs is not entirely positive. Just as Paul predicted that there would be an apostasy from the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:1ff; 1 Timothy 4:1ff), so the record of the tombs reveals a drifting from the primitive faith. For example, there is graffiti testimony that encourages prayers to and for those who are dead (which later becomes fully developed in Catholicism). Though the Christians constructed baptisteries in the catacombs, there is one picture where “baptism” is being administered by the pouring of water. But there is also a heathen god in the scene—which reveals a woefully compromised faith. Pristine Christianity was eventually corrupted. Eternal vigilance is the price of truth!

Fearfully And Wonderfully

John R. Vaughan

RAYMOND HULL STATED, “I have noticed, with few exceptions, men bungle their affairs.” He cited a three-quarter mile long highway bridge, which collapsed and fell into the sea because someone had botched the design of a supporting pier. He noted some town planners who developed a city on the flood plane of a great river, where it is certain to be periodically inundated.

We all remember the tragic rocket explosion that took the lives of Christy McAuliffe and several others because of a faulty O-Ring.

The best and wisest among us mess up. However, when God created man He did so flawlessly. No other machine can absorb the abuse pounded on the human body and continue to function without fail. But, if you are an adult, weighing 175 pounds, in 24 hours:

- Your heart beats 103,689 times.
- Your blood travels 168,000,000 miles.
- You breathe 23,040 times.
- You inhale 438 cubic feet of air.
- You eat 3.25 pounds of food.
- You drink 2.9 pounds of liquids.
- You lose in weight 7.8 pounds of waste.
- You perspire 1.43 pints.
- You give off 2.6 degrees Fahrenheit.
- You speak 4,800 words.
- You move 750 major muscles.
- Your nails grow .00046 of an inch.

Your hair grows .017414 of an inch.

You exercise 7,000 brain cells.

No wonder the Psalmist exclaimed, “*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well*” (Psalm 139:14).

Of Judgment and Wisdom

Joe C. Magee

“So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him.’ But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:6,7).

HERE WE SEE A MILESTONE in the history of God’s people. Against God’s knowledge of what was best for them, they had insisted that they have a king, that they might be like the nations around them. Saul, whose stature and appearance fit the peoples’ idea of kingliness, had proved to be a poor choice. Now, in the choosing of David, the judgment of the people was not considered. Divine intervention was to make its impression upon Israel.

It is good that our powers of discernment are not limited to first impressions. When our knowledge of a person is enriched by time and association, we often find that those first impressions were faulty. We should recognize that life is a series of judgments; and the ongoing exercise of such tends, by the very nature of experience, to develop within us wisdom which grows with age. Yet we will never reach the depth of discernment which God knows.

God’s judgment does not graduate from the lesser to the greater, from the unseen to the seen. He sees all of man from the very start. He knows his character, his ambitions, his weaknesses, and his strengths. He does, however, allow the instrumentality of man’s devices to bring about His purposes. The drastic contrast between King Saul, who *looked* like a king outwardly, and David, who had the *heart* of a true and godly king, is a case in point.

This very principle of God’s superior judgment is paramount in Christ’s coming to earth. Who among men would have ushered in the King of kings and the Lord of lords in such fashion? Who would

have chosen the Majestic Monarch from among the lowly craftsmen of Nazareth? Surely we can see the parallel between the shepherd boy David and the Good Shepherd; and, seeing, submit to the wisdom of God.

Perhaps we can learn from this that God does not exalt men for their social station, but for their spiritual dependency. May we be reminded that the Lord's words, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*" were not the moral platitudes of mere man. They were wisdom from above.

Talking Back To God

Harvey Porter

THERE WAS CONTROVERSY IN THE early church concerning the salvation of the Gentiles, the Old Law being set aside by God, and the Israelites basing their salvation on the fact that they were the seed of Abraham by birth and not by faith. Paul wrote on this great problem in the letter to the Romans. He said, "*But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, Why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?*" (Romans 9:20,21).

The human family has had a long history of "talking back to God." It is not uncommon today to hear some who are not well informed concerning God's Word say, "The God I serve is a God of love and could not have made anything like hell!" They are in effect telling God that He could not condemn sinners. They have not studied the many passages that speak of the justice of God. It is true that God is a loving and forgiving Father. It is also true that He hates sin and that His holy nature cannot abide sin; therefore, sinners cannot live in His holy presence.

Many have felt that baptism is not necessary for salvation, even though the New Testament clearly teaches that it is. Peter told those who believed in Jesus on the Day of Pentecost to, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven*" (Acts 2:38). Other translations often say, "**for** the remission of sins." Baptism "*puts us into Christ,*" "*unites us with Christ,*" "*baptism does also now save us,*" "*baptized into the body* (the church)," and "*washes away our sins.*" Sinful man should not tell God and Jesus, the Savior, how to save us.

It is not uncommon for man to tell God how and what he will give

as worship to God. Some say that they do not have to worship at all, because God knows how they feel. Others declare, "Well, going to church never saved anybody!" The Bible says a lot about worship. Jesus specified that *"true worshipers must worship the Father in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24). What a dangerous thing to make up our own way and then have the audacity to tell God that He should like it after we have rejected what He directed us to do over nineteen hundred years ago! The pot cannot tell the potter anything.

Paul closed the doctrinal section of Romans with these great words: *"Oh, the depth of the riches, the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."* Paul quoted from Isaiah 49 and Job 41. The heart of the quote is, *"Or who has been his counselor?"* God had never had nor needed a counselor.

God is filled with wisdom and knowledge. Puny man's wisdom does not even measure up to the foolishness of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:25). His judgments are unsearchable. He always makes the right decision, gives the right command. Truth is established by Him. Man can never call God into question.

Mankind's duty and response to God is to humbly obey His every wish and to walk in fellowship with Him by faith. *"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."*

Please, never talk back to your Heavenly Father!

He Came And Preached Peace

Dayton Keesee

OUR WORLD IS BREEDING GANGS, racial slurs, domestic fights, and conflicting lifestyles, all growing in the bitter pool of abused freedoms. An increasing number would rather react than relate, create conflict rather than cooperate, slander or shoot one another rather than serve one another.

With all of these problems, it is important that we strongly emphasize one of Christ's primary reasons for coming into the world: *"He came and preached peace to you"* (Ephesians 2:17). The context shows that Jesus not only preached in all the areas where our generation is losing it!

In Ephesians 2:11 Paul urged his readers to remember a day when every brand of reaction and rebellion prevailed instead of peace. His punch line was that when Christ came into their hearts, all of that changed. Blessed be that day and praises be given to God when peace prevails where hurt and strife have been. We need to remember again what Christ can do.

Paul pointed to where racial (Jew and Gentile) and cultural (circumcised and uncircumcised) alienation prevailed, adding *“But now in Christ Jesus, ye that once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ”* (Ephesians 2:13). Racial and cultural differences disappear when the blood of Christ is applied!

Social differences also faded away as He *“broke down the middle wall of partition.”* Why should the wall stay there since He *“made both one”* (Ephesians 2:14)? The media that gave such jubilant coverage to the wall in Germany coming down should telecast and broadcast Christ to everyone, for He can make us one internationally!

Christ removed doctrinal differences, *“having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances”* so that He could *“create in Himself of the two one new man, so making peace”* (Ephesians 2:15).

He even removed ecclesiastical differences by reconciling those differences *“in one body through the cross,”* which is in one church (Colossians 1:18). Would to God that every preacher, pastor, and priest would be honest enough to surrender to Him in this matter, ending all church divisions to become *“one body”*—one church—as He built it (Ephesians 2:16; Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:19-22).

Most glorious of all, He ended the human-Divine differences, *“for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father”* (Ephesians 2:18; 1 Timothy 3:15).

Racial, cultural, social, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical peace—what a delightful and devoutly-to-be-desired concept! Christ can do it, did do it, and desires yet to do it! Let’s call Him *“LORD, LORD”* and do what He says (Luke 6:46; John 10:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10).

Why Does God Allow Human Suffering?

Kevin L. Moore

THERE ARE SOME THINGS GOD cannot do. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2), He cannot be unjust (Deuteronomy 32:4), and He cannot do what is logically impossible. In order to bring about the greatest

state of goodness in the world, God had to create some specific goods whose existence necessarily entails the possibility of certain evils. Human beings were designed with the ability to think and the freedom to choose. Although we often take these things for granted, anyone who has ever been a slave or a prisoner will tell you that freedom is one of the most precious commodities a person can have. Being a God of love (1 John 4:8), He does not force us to act against our wills, but grants us freedom. Freedom involves choice, and choice includes not only the possibility of making right decisions, but also wrong ones. It is **impossible** for God to have made man a free moral agent, and yet take away his capability of making wrong choices.

Now God has given us an instruction book to guide us in the right direction (2 Timothy 3:16,17), but when people disregard God's directives and make bad decisions, pain and suffering are often the result. It is man, not God, who has created slavery, whips, guns, bombs, death camps, liquor, pornography, and so on. The blessing of freedom, when it is misused, accounts for the majority of human misery.

Most people consider something to be good if it brings pleasure, and bad if it causes pain, but this is shallow and shortsighted. The imperfections of this world serve a purpose in allowing individuals to grow and develop into mature, responsible beings in a way that would otherwise not be possible. *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope”* (Romans 5:3,4). God's desire for his creatures seems to be, not the suffering itself, but the positive and beneficial effects.

Pain, loss, and hardship also help to create an acknowledgement of human weakness and a need for God in one's life. Pride and arrogance are self-destructive traits (Proverbs 16:18), but suffering has a way of helping us put things in perspective. It is said that when a man is flat on his back, the only direction he can look is up. *“My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever”* (Psalm 73:26).

Life in this physical world is a brief, and necessary, preparation for eternity. The trials we face help us to avoid complacency and to look forward to that place where *“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:4). More than a perfect world, God desires a

loving relationship with His creation. Out of suffering, pain, hardship, and loss God can and will accomplish His good purpose (Romans 8:28-39).

HOW TO SHINE IN A DARK WORLD

Hiram Kemp

THE WORLD IN WHICH WE live has always been dark. Since the fall of humanity in Genesis 3, sin has been in the lives of people and destroying those who submit to sin rather than God. Though we may look at our current times as intensely dark and sinful, the things being done today should come as no surprise to the student of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:13). Jesus told His disciples that they were to be different. He wants us to shine our lights in this world so God our Father will receive the glory (Matthew 5:16). The idea of shining our light is normally taken to simply mean Christians should be good examples. Most certainly, Christians should be examples, but in what ways? How can we practically let those around us know that this world is not our home? I believe there are practical ways that we can let our light shine, which will catch the attention of those around us (Philippians 2:14-16). Near the end of 1 Thessalonians, Paul gave several commands that we should take to heart and adopt. When we examine 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, I think we get a clear picture of how we can shine our light in a world that desperately needs it.

ALWAYS REJOICE (1 THESSALONIANS 5:16)

Paul told the Thessalonians to rejoice evermore (1 Thessalonians 5:16 KJV) or to rejoice always (NKJV). This does not mean that Christians never experience sadness. We do, but **our overall disposition should be one of constant joy** (Romans 12:15). We can have an abiding joy that is more permanent than momentary happiness because we know that God is in control of the world. We rejoice *“in the Lord”* at all times (Philippians 4:4). When we consider God reigning in Heaven, we can have joy even when many others think the sky is falling. In a world overrun with bad news, those of us who have the good news should demonstrate it by not being downcast or sullen but instead by rejoicing continually (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Many people in our world seek joy through substance abuse, perfect circumstances or material possessions. We should be paving

the way to show others that true and lasting joy is tied to our relationship to God, not to things of the world.

Paul previously praised the Thessalonians for being examples to all of those around them because of their conversion (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10). They would continue to be examples if they demonstrated persistent rejoicing in a world of persistent negativity and pessimism. We should sing with joy (James 5:13). Most importantly, we should share the good news of forgiveness with joy in our hearts (Ephesians 1:7). Jesus told us that we could be of good cheer because He overcame the world (John 16:33). **If our joy is full, it will spill over into every area of our lives.** Our friends, neighbors and relatives will take notice (1 John 1:4). We will be able to point them to Jesus, who is the True Light, when they see the light in us (John 1:4).

PRAY INCESSANTLY (1 THESSALONIANS 5:17)

Paul's command to pray without ceasing is easy to quote and hard to practice. Our light will shine bright in this dark world if we actually take the Holy Spirit's words seriously and pray constantly. When we see crisis in our world, we should be those who fall on our knees in prayer before we do anything else. Instead of posting on social media about all that is wrong, we should be praying to the One who can make it right. Rather than pouting about how terrible things in the world have become, we should be petitioning God to allow us to continue to spread the Word freely, which can change hearts (2 Thessalonians 3:1). The Colossians were told to be steadfast in prayer (Colossians 4:2). The Romans were admonished to be constant in prayer (Romans 12:12). The darker things get, the more we have about which to pray. We should accompany our prayers with action as we have the opportunity to put our faith into operation.

Yet, we should always remember that prayer is in itself an action. When we pray, we involve the God of the universe Who can do the most about our situation. People should hear Christians say, "I'm praying for you." When people express fear and anxiety about the events in the world, we should be saying, "I'm praying and trusting the Lord." **If we are just as faithless and overwhelmed as unbelievers, we will never draw them closer to God. Prayer must not be regulated to a last resort. Prayer is our first line of defense as we boldly approach the throne of grace and find the help that we need** (Hebrews 4:16).

BE THANKFUL (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18)

One thing that sets Christians apart from the world is our attitude of thankfulness. We are told to **“give thanks always and for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Ephesians 5:20). Paul told the Thessalonians that it was the will of God for them in Christ Jesus to give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18). In a world of gripes and ungrateful people, we can shine our light if we fail to voice our complaints. The New Testament describes the worldly person as ungrateful (2 Timothy 3:2) and unthankful (Romans 1:21). It is not that we do not see things that enrage us or make us wish things were different, but we know things could always be worse. Also, we appreciate that God can use anything to His ultimate good (Romans 8:28). Practice gratitude. Do not just feel thankful inside but express it to God and to others. It will be impactful. Gratitude shows that we know we are undeserving of God's blessings, and we want to thank Him for them. Count your many blessings and name them one by one. It may help someone else to count theirs, too.

LOVE GOOD AND REFRAIN FROM EVIL (1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22)

The last few verses in this section deal with our relationship to the truth of God's revelation. We should not quench the Spirit or put out His work (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We should not despise prophecy (1 Thessalonians 5:20). We need to test everything and hold onto what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Lastly, we must abstain from evil in every avenue it appears (1 Thessalonians 5:22). One could summarize Paul's thoughts here by saying we should love the good and refrain from the evil (3 John 11). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to treat the Word of God properly and reject everything that was opposed to it.

Much of what on which people meditate today is contrary to the Word of God. The nightly news can keep us informed, but it will not help us to be conformed to the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). **If we love the things that God loves and reject the things He hates, people will know that we are different.** Shining our light in this dark world is not about being an example in a general way. There are concrete and specific ways by which we can announce to the world that our citizenship is in Heaven. Study 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22. Go and do likewise.

When Family Stands Against You

Terry Wheeler

THE PROPHET ISAIAH LED A school of prophets (Isaiah 8:16-18). Two of his students were Nahum and Micah. I say this because the phrasing in these two books is very similar to Isaiah's use, and their ministry is in the appropriate time frame for Isaiah's graduates.

Micah was well-known in Judah, and his writings were used in Jeremiah's time to show the lawfulness and legitimacy of Jeremiah's work (Jeremiah 26:16-19). Micah was a champion for the poor and oppressed. He railed against the false teachers of his day. He gave further prophecy of the coming Messiah; it was Micah's writings (Micah 5:2) that indicated to Herod where Jesus was born (Matthew 2:4-6).

Yet, Micah did all this without the support of his wife. Micah was a man with a family, but his text at the end strongly indicates that, rather than support him, his wife actually worked against him in his efforts to spread God's Word (Micah 7:5-10). Jesus quoted Micah to let His disciples know that, as with Micah, so it can be with us in our service to the Father (Matthew 10:34-37). Sometimes, even as you seek to do your best, and surrounded by family, yet you may find yourself all alone in devotion to God. The Lord says that this should not discourage us. Instead, be prepared to walk alone hand-in-hand with God.

We must love our families and always seek their welfare, caring for them and being the examples they need. However, they must never be allowed to compromise our service to the Lord. Never!

DEALING WITH DOUBT IN MARRIAGE

Denny Petrillo

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:1-4 provides an interesting "dream story." The story is plainly told, but the application of it can be difficult to grasp. It seems clear that the Shulamite, just a few days before her wedding to Solomon, was concerned about his devotion to her. Several nights came and went, but there was no sign of Solomon. His absence spoke volumes to her about his commitment. She decided to find him and had to go through some effort to do so. Finally, she succeeded in finding him and embraced him with all her strength.

There are some valuable lessons that can be learned from this short little story.

First, it is logical that both the man and the woman will have some doubts and reservations before they “tie the knot.” Marriage is a big day, and arguably the second most important day of one’s life (the first would be to put on Christ in baptism). When a couple considers the permanency of this move (God binds them, Matthew 19:6, and the expectation is that the two will stay together for the rest of their lives), it can be quite intimidating. Yet, these thoughts are good and healthy. The man and the woman need to look long and hard into the decision they are about to make. They need to have a high level of assurance that “he is the one for me” and that “she is the one for me.”

Second, when there are doubts about the love and the commitment of the other, be proactive in getting it resolved. The Shulamite could have stubbornly said, “We’ll see how long it takes before he finally shows up!” Instead, she went out to find him. This was not an easy task for a country girl trying to navigate her way through a big city. However, her willingness to do this (even at night) showed her level of commitment. She just needed to learn about Solomon’s level of commitment. As couples approach their wedding day, they should have long talks with each other. This is the time to learn as much about the desires, goals, dreams and aspirations of the other as possible. It is, especially, the time to see each other’s level of commitment to God. The bottom line is that he or she will **not** be a good life-mate if there is not a true, genuine devotion to God.

Third, when doubts are removed, it is time to move on in love and in trust. It is not healthy for one to live day-to-day wondering about a partner’s commitment. When the Shulamite found Solomon, she hugged him and would not let him go. He was her choice, and she was comfortable with it. She also was comfortable with his level of commitment to her. In a short time, they were to be married.

More On Solemnised Pronouns

C. Philip Slate

REGARDING *SOLEMNIZED PRONOUNS*, it is worth noticing that words tend to undergo meaning changes over time and space. I have known and know of fine Christian people in the former British colonies (India and Nigeria) who used words that were naughty back in England, but the colonials did not know that when they picked up the English language.

Further, words change meanings within the same country over time. Words have meanings *as used*, and often that use bears little relationship to their root or original meanings. This change has occurred with the use of the pronouns “thee,” “thou” and “thine.” It is the transition in meanings that causes confusion. In neither the Hebrew Old Testament nor the Greek New Testament are there two sets of pronouns—common and solemn. That point is well made in citing God’s speaking to Satan (Genesis 3:15 KJV) and Christ’s speaking to the devil (Luke 4:8 KJV); neither the Father nor the Son were acknowledging Satan as deity by the use of “thee” and “thy.” Scripture uses the same pronouns for humans and for deity. In German and at least one Scandinavian language there are more and less formal pronouns but not in Scripture.

The common use of “thee” and “thou” is found in the writings of Shakespeare and other writers of the Elizabethan period. When Shakespeare wrote, “Go, prick thy face, and over-red thy fear, Thou lily-livered d boy” (*Macbeth*, 5.317-18), he was neither being reverent nor respectful. In his day, being “lily-livered” was to be cowardly. Nor was he being reverent in the lines, “If thou neglect’st or dost unwillingly what I command, I’ll rack thee with old cramps, fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar that beasts shall tremble at thy din” (*The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene 2). Those pronouns were used in common relationships, and that is the usage reflected in the King James Version (1611) of the same era.

I lived and worked in England during the decade of the 1960s. Gradually, I learned about the marked regional differences in accents and vocabulary. During that time, I witnessed one incident and heard about another, both in Yorkshire, that illustrate the changes.

Ralph Limb told me about a time (perhaps the late 1940s or early 1950s) he and another preaching brother were working as evangelists in the Morley area. For their tea break, they went to the home of Donald Hardy, which was in the back of his general provisions shop. The two preachers thought it was fun to wait on the customers, as far as they could. During tea break one day, Ralph said the shop door opened and he said, “My turn.” He arose, walked into the shop area but saw no one. When he heard a faint sound, he leaned over the counter and saw what he described as a “grubby little urchin.” Ralph said to him, “Yes, sonny, what do you want?” In a surprisingly deep voice the little fellow said, “Thou knows.” He had been in the shop earlier, had insufficient money to pay for the item and went back home to get more funds. So, his “Thou knows” meant, “I was in earlier and now I have the money. You know what I want.” In that area, people

from the lower economic classes were still using “thee” and “thou” in everyday speech. There was nothing sacred about it.

The other incident occurred perhaps a couple of decades later, oddly enough in the same Donald Hardy’s home. A couple of his wife’s elderly aunties and a gruff uncle were also there. The uncle did not stay long, but while there, he used “thou” and “thee” a few times in conversation. He spoke stiff Yorkshire. In one sentence he referred to “t’ larum clock” (the alarm clock). After he left, I remarked to his sisters, both faithful Christians, “I noticed your brother’s using ‘thee’ and ‘thou.’ Under what circumstances do people use those words?” One sister answered, “Ah, brother Slate, only country bumpkins such as brother say that. In fact, when I hear brethren at church using those words in prayer, it sounds a bit irreverent.” The sweet lady was referring to the confusion she felt during the transitional use of those pronouns in prayer.

Of course, those old pronouns are preserved in many of the older hymns we sing, but even there, they are not used exclusively for deity. Francis Havergal’s 1858, “I Gave My Life for thee,” is a case in point. “I gave, I gave My life for thee: What hast thou giv’n for Me?” John M. Neale’s 1862 translation of the 9th century words by Stephen the Sabvaite is another case. “Art thou weary, art thou languid; Art thou sore distressed? ‘Come to me,’ saith One, ‘and coming, Be at rest.’” The KJV was still “the Bible” of the English-speaking world when those hymns were penned.

When the RSV appeared (1948, ’52) the translators preserved the old pronouns for what they called the *liturgical texts*, meaning prayers and the Psalms. There was no basis in the Hebrew or the Greek languages for that decision. It was in deference to common usage in some “church” situations. Thus, for some, the transition continues. Oddly enough, though, in German and at least one Scandinavian language, there are levels of formality in pronouns. In German, the Christians use the familiar “du” rather than the formal “Sie” when praying to God—the opposite of some pronominal usage in the USA. “Why?” I asked a German-speaking Swiss brother, “do you use the familiar in prayer to God?” “Because He is our Father,” he said. By usage, one can argue the case both ways—solemnized pronouns as an act of reverence or ordinary pronouns regarding a familial relationship to our Father. So, it is important for us to be understanding with each other during this long transition. God knows our hearts, whether we address Him as “Thou” or “You.”

The Duties Of Parents To Youths

Ronald D. Reeves

WE LOVE OUR KIDS DEARLY. No doubt we would go to the end of the earth to assist them in a worthy cause, despite the burdens and heartaches that sometimes come our way because of the misadventures of our children. Sometimes, we may ask, in a moment of frustration, "What are we going to do with our kids?" In response, I suggest that we be responsible parents to our children as they experience the maturation process. Accordingly, may we generate full and balanced growth in our youths (Luke 2:52), including intellectual (Proverbs 13:1), physical (Titus 2:4), spiritual (Ephesians 6:4) and social growth and well-being (Ephesians 6:2-3). May we study a child's temperament and mold his way of life accordingly (Proverbs 22:6). May we maintain parental character that is worthy of honor (Ephesians 6:2), reverence (Romans 12:3) and piety (1 Timothy 5:4). May we practice discipline and instruction in order to provide a foundation for our children that will serve them well throughout their lives (Ephesians 6:4). May we do all things with a sense of fairness and justice that will motivate our children to receive good instruction and leadership, which we may provide from time to time (Acts 10:34-35). Yes, our dear children are most certainly worth this noble effort!

New Testament Giving Versus Old Testament Tithing

Brian R. Kenyon

A PREACHER WAS ONCE ASKED why he did not preach tithing. He responded by saying he could not afford to preach it because it would cut the contribution too much. His point was that where he preached, the members gave well beyond 10% of their income. However, not many congregations would fall into that category. Some have estimated that our brotherhood's contributions represent 5-7% of our collective income, while other estimates claiming to be more accurate say our contributions only represent 2-3% of our collective income. In either case, it is not too difficult to see why many congregations do not have the funds to properly do the Lord's work. Contributions would probably double or even triple if members gave 10%. This often brings up the question, "What about tithing?" Thus,

a comparison of Old Testament tithing with New Testament giving is profitable.

OLD TESTAMENT “TITHING”

The practice of tithing existed long before the Law was given to Moses at Sinai. Many nations in ancient history tithed property, produce and currency. Some biblical examples are Abram, who paid a tenth to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-20) and Jacob, who promised to give God a tenth of everything (Genesis 28:20-22). According to some sources, when considering all the requirements under the Law of Moses, the Israelite may have given closer to 30% (“Tithe”). According to the Pentateuch, there were three different tithes. First, a tithe was to be given by the people to support the Levites who had no inheritance (Numbers 18:20-32). Second, a tithe was to be given of the land that was **“holy unto the Lord”** (Leviticus 27:30-33). Third, a yearly tithe was to be given to keep appointed feasts along with a special tithe that was to be given every third year (Deuteronomy 14:22-29).

The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote two relevant statements in *Antiquities of the Jews* concerning tithing. First, “Let there be taken out of your fruits a tenth, besides that which you have allotted to give to the priests and Levites. This you may indeed sell in the country, but it is to be used in those feasts and sacrifices that are celebrated in the holy city” (Book 4.8.8). Second, “Besides those two tithes which I have already said you are to pay every year... you are to bring every third year a third tithe to be distributed to those who are in want” (Book 4.8.22). To say Jews always only gave a tenth may not be accurate.

As we examine the writing of prophets, we note that God’s people abused tithing in at least two ways. First, they “tithed,” but with no intention of showing concern for justice, righteousness or mercy (Amos 4:4). Tithing was supposed to be motivated by genuine love and joy for God and one’s brethren (Deuteronomy 14:23,26,28-29). However, when given from wrong motives, tithing was an abomination to the Lord. Second, God’s people withheld their tithes, thus “robbing” God (Malachi 3:8-10). This was also an abomination to God and would result in a withdrawal of God’s blessings if continued. Under the Law, tithing gave Israel the following opportunities: (1) to declare they were giving back a portion of what already belonged to God (Deuteronomy 8:18; 26:10-15); (2) to remember the blessings God gave them by imitating Him and His care for those in need (Deuteronomy 14:28-29); and (3) to serve God sacrificially, at a cost to themselves (Deuteronomy 14:22). These same opportunities are also available to us in our giving.

NEW TESTAMENT GIVING

We are no longer under the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:24-25; Colossians 2:14), including God's law of tithing. However, to say that we are not under the Law does not mean our responsibility to give is somehow lessened or that it does not matter (Black 39). The New Testament teaches that we are to give liberally (Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:11-13). New Testament examples show that our giving can exceed 10%. Jesus set forth the poor widow as a good giver because ***“she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood”*** (Mark 12:44). Note what Jesus required of the rich young ruler before he could inherit eternal life: ***“Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”*** (Luke 18:22). The Lord approved of Zacchaeus because, among other things, he said, ***“I give half of my goods to the poor”*** (Luke 19:8). The Jerusalem church, recognizing that everything they possessed was not their own, sold their goods and ***“brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet”*** (Acts 4:32, 34-35). The churches of Macedonia gave liberally out of far greater affliction and poverty than any of us will likely experience in our lifetime (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). All these examples reflect great sacrifice on the part of the giver. Can we expect any less of our giving today?

Let us conclude by noting some principles that must govern our giving. **First**, perhaps the Lord has not set a definite percentage to our giving for the purpose of proving the sincerity of our love (2 Corinthians 8:8). How sincere does our love for God prove to be when measured by what we give? **Second**, God does not want us to give reluctantly or merely out of duty, but cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). Do we give cheerfully or “Just because I have to”? **Third**, acceptable giving requires sacrifice on the part of the giver (2 Corinthians 8:5). David exemplified this by saying he would not ***“offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing”*** (2 Samuel 24:24). Do we sacrifice or just give God the “leftovers”? **Fourth**, we are to give as God has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2). Do we increase our giving when our financial prosperity increases? **Fifth**, God requires us to give liberally (2 Corinthians 9:11, 13). Does God consider what we give now to be liberal or are we robbing Him? Giving is a serious matter, both for our soul's salvation and for the well-being of the local church! Let's give as the New Testament directs!