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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

The Church Of Christ Is The Earthly Form Of The Kingdom Of Heaven



WHEN CHRIST HAD PROMISED to build His church He had used the terms “church” and “the kingdom of heaven” interchangeably as we observe reading from Matthew 16:18 and 19. That is to say, Scripturally, the church and the kingdom of heaven are the same institutions. The apostle Paul told

Christians who constituted the church or the kingdom of heaven, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” (Philippians 3:20, 21). The apostle also wrote the members of the church at Colosse, “He has delivered us from the power of the 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). What was the apostle saying to the Christians? He was telling them that being members of the church of Christ they were in the kingdom of the Lord. The church and the kingdom were established on the same day and in the same place. Those who were added to the church by the Lord, were also conveyed into the kingdom of the Lord at the same time and by the same process.

Before Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension in to heaven, both the church and the kingdom were spoken of as being in the future, that is, they were not yet established, they were to come in future. Speaking

of the kingdom of God, Jesus had told 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.” (Mark 9:1). Jesus was telling the apostles that God’s kingdom was to come in their lifetime, before they die. He knew Judas, who had betrayed Him, would die and Christ Himself would die before the coming of the kingdom, therefore He said, “there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” So, according to Christ, the kingdom was to come while the apostles to whom He was speaking would still be living. Similarly, Christ had told the apostle Peter, in Matthew 16:18, 19, that He would build His church on the rock, (which is Christ Himself according to 1 Corinthians 10:4), and that He would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever he would bind on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever he would loose on earth would be loosed in heaven. (Of course, this promise of binding and loosing was also made to the other apostles by Christ at another place as we read in Matthew 18:18). But in this case Christ was foretelling that Peter was going to preach the gospel first, with the other apostles, and that he would be the first one to let people know what they must do to be saved and thus enter the church or the kingdom of heaven. And this is exactly how it happened when Christ’s church or His kingdom was established in the city of Jerusalem, (Luke 24: 46-49), on the day of first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ in the year 33 A.D. In Acts chapter 2 we read, the apostle Peter, standing up with the other apostles raised his voice and began preaching the gospel of Christ, as Christ had commanded (Mark 16:15). He told them about Christ, who He is, why He came, what He did to save people from their sins, and what they had done to Him. The record says, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”” (Acts 2:37, 38). What next? It says, “Then those who gladly received his words were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” (Acts 2:41). Who were them? The apostles. Then next it says, they were “praising God and were having favor with all the people, AND THE LORD ADDED TO THE CHURCH daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47). This is how “the church” Christ had promised to build began or was established. What had the three thousand people done to become members of Christ’s church initially? After they had heard the gospel, they had believed, then they repented, that is, they left their former belief and way of living, and were baptized,

immersed in water, for the forgiveness of their sins. The apostle Peter who was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven opened the door for the entrance into the kingdom, the church.

The clear inference is, the church of Christ is the earthly form of the kingdom of heaven. When Christ had said to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5), he was stating the same truth, what Peter had said in Acts 2:38, in answering the question of the three thousand, “What shall we?” One must be born again of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. One is born of water and the Spirit when one believes the instructions of the Spirit and is baptized in water for the remission of sins. (Mark 16:16). The Holy Spirit who inspired the men of God in writing the Scriptures instructs us what we must do to be saved and thus become members of the Lord’s church and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16). Speaking to Christians at Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 12:13 the apostle said, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...” That is, by learning what the Spirit of God has said through the written word of God, we were all baptized into one body. The body, according to Ephesians 1:22,23, is the one church which Christ established.

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

REPENTANCE

J.C. Choate

THE TERM REPENTANCE MEANS to reverse oneself completely, to have a change of heart. In this case, it means to quit sinning. For sure, one could not hope to be what the Lord would have him be unless he was willing to lay down his sins and to have a change of life.



Christ put it simply, “I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3). In other words, repent or perish. Does this mean that it makes no difference with the Lord whether one repents or perishes? No, for it certainly does make a difference. Peter said, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9). The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but if he refuses to repent then he will perish. Therefore, it is up to the individual.

In speaking on Mars Hill, Paul made it clear that God would have all men to repent. He said, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17: 30). One cannot say that the Lord has not asked him to repent, for he has. He has even commanded this of us. If you have reached the age of being responsible, that is, to know right from wrong, then you are included in this admonition.

One cannot be so good that he needs not repent and one cannot become so evil that he cannot repent if he so desires. All people, regardless of what kind of life they lived, have sinned and are therefore in need of salvation. Paul declares, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) And even as a Christian, John writes, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (I John 1:8). This suggests that even the Christian is not perfect. He may make mistakes, err and sin through ignorance or weakness. In such a case, John further writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1: 9).

In this particular article we are not discussing Christians primarily but we are talking about what the sinner must do to be saved and we have found that he must repent of his sins after he has gained faith in God. In previous lessons we have seen that one must hear the truth and then he must believe the truth, and in lessons to follow it will be shown that he must confess Christ and be baptized. But right now, right in the middle of all of this, he must repent. To give an example, Peter told people on the day of Pentecost that they should do this very thing. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2: 38). To another group of people he said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3: 19). Now what do we have? We have this command being given to the people to repent. It was of God and therefore necessary to salvation.

In every case of conversion in the book of Acts you'll find it stated either directly, or implied, that before the people were baptized they repented of their sins. So it is today that before one is baptized he must repent. Of course, one may go on and be immersed without genuinely repenting but he is only fooling himself for the Lord knows his heart and

if he doesn't repent, there is no forgiveness of sins and no salvation.

One must be so sorry for his sins that he will want to quit them and live a better life. (2 Corinthians 7: 10). But it is not enough just to be sorry about one's sins. He must actually leave them behind. Then he must replace his deeds with righteous acts, otherwise, the old sins will return. (Galatians 5: 19-24; Ephesians 4: 24-29).

Repentance alone will not save. One may quit sinning and live a good life, but unless he has obeyed the other commandments of God, he is still a sinner. Too, one may repent of his sins, complete his obedience to the Gospel, and live the Christian life for a while but then slip back into sin. What will happen to him? Unless he repents again and returns to the Lord through prayer he'll be lost as though he never repented in the first place. (2 Peter 2: 20-22).

It is easy to do right if you'll remember that by failing to do what the Lord says, you are gambling with your soul. Sin will damn you but righteousness will save you. (Romans 6: 23). Remember, too, but that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. (Galatians 6: 7-8).

THE PART OF WISDOM

John Gipson

WE LIVE IN A "KNOWLEDGE EXPLOSION" WORLD. If we don't know something ourselves, we know where we can find information about it. Of the making of books and computers there is no end. Knowledge is everywhere. A line from the prophet Daniel comes to mind, "*Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase*" (Daniel 12:4).

But, as one said, "The tree of knowledge is not that of life."

Knowledge is not happiness. Hear the preacher of old: "*...he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*"

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not opposed to knowledge. It's just that there is something else which is vital — wisdom.

Some people have remarkable Bible knowledge. They can quote book, chapter, and verse on almost any subject, but they do not know how to apply it. They are masters in theology and failures in living. They lack wisdom and understanding.

The apostle Paul desired that the Colossians be "filled" with the knowledge of God's will "*in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*" (Colossians 1:9). You couple knowledge with wisdom and understanding, and you have something. Through wisdom our knowledge of God is

translated into terms of our human situation. It's the power to put things together; to apply principles to our everyday living.

"But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living ... God understands the way to it, and he knows its place ... and he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding'" (Job 28:12-28).

Look around. We have countless knowledgeable people in our churches, businesses, schools, and in government. *Knowledge* is not lacking. *Wisdom* is.

In the Lord's church, let us not be found wanting in this attribute.

DELIVERED TO SERVE

Cecil May, Jr.

"... WE BEING DELIVERED OUT OF the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74-75).

In the Spirit, Zacharias speaks of deliverance promised by the Lord, for whom his son John, also as promised, would prepare the way. God delivers us, not to do abominations (Jeremiah 7:10), not to continue in the sin from which we have been delivered (Romans 6), but to serve Him.

We are delivered to serve God without fear: *"Our God is a consuming fire,"* and we are to serve Him *"with reverence and godly fear"* (Hebrews 12:28-29), but we do not have to "be afraid" of Him. Through Christ we may *"come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:16). Even when we were undeserving of His love, He loved us, and gave His Son for us. Now that, through His Son, we are His children, what is there good for us that He would withhold (Romans 5:8-11)? Because we know Christ has secured our acceptance, we may serve without fear.

We are delivered to serve God in holiness: We are to serve in holiness because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). Holiness has two aspects: (1) separated to God; (2) separated from sin. A lamb was sanctified (made holy) when it was chosen for sacrifice to God, but in order to be sanctified, it must have been without blemish or deformity. *"God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity'"* (2 Timothy 2:19). *"This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication"* (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

We are delivered to serve God in righteousness: There is a *“righteousness which is by faith in Jesus Christ”* (Romans 3:22), equivalent to forgiveness of sins. If we stand before the righteous God as righteous in His sight, it is not because we have not sinned, but because our sins are forgiven. From another biblical emphasis, though, righteousness is doing right. We are to serve God with right doing. God’s servant does not continue in sin. *“If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right is born of him”* (1 John 2:29). *“He who does right is righteous, even as he is righteous”* (1 John 3:7). Nor may the servants of God choose their own path of conduct. God Himself marks out the righteous path. *“All thy commandments are righteousness”* (Psalm 119:172).

We are delivered to serve God all the days of our lives: We are to serve with perseverance, holding fast our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm to the end (Hebrews 3:6). Let us watch, therefore, for we know not the hour the Lord may come (Matthew 24:42). Let us endure to the end that we may be saved (Matthew 24:13).

THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS

Avon Mafone

It is abundantly clear that Paul’s purpose in preaching centered in and derived itself from the message itself. It was Paul’s purpose to convey Christ and His cross. Since it is the “word of the cross” that saves (1 Corinthians 1:18), Paul sees himself sent “...to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void” (1 Corinthians 1:17). Christ’s cross is the “preaching” — the message that saves (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Paul’s purpose was not simply to get folks to feel good about themselves and to get on with fulfilling their human potential. Because only the Gospel can really resolve the fundamental problem of human guilt (1 Corinthians 15:3ff; Romans 4:18,25; 5:9ff), it can greatly affect the way one feels about himself, but Paul’s message concerned itself with the great spiritual realities.

Paul’s purpose in preaching was to save sinful men (Romans 1:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; 1 Corinthians 9:16,22). He was consumed with the cross. Preaching to him was not a method; it was a message! It was “Christ and Him crucified.” That great act of faith, Bible baptism, is crucial because it is “into His death” (Romans 6:3; Acts 2:38; 22:16). Whether preaching to sinners or teaching saints, Paul’s message always centered in the cross.

FAITHFULNESS

David Deffenbaugh

Faithfulness is not a word that stirs up a lot of excitement. Faithfulness is not something that starts the adrenaline to flowing. Yet, there is no more important word in our relationship with God. Something that God does demand of congregations and individuals is that they be **faithful**. Faithfulness cannot be replaced.

Faithfulness cannot be replaced by activity. Many times we measure the value of a congregation or the spirituality of a Christian simply by their activity. But, when Jesus addressed the seven churches of Asia Minor, He did not necessarily equate activity with strength or spirituality. For instance, to the church at Ephesus He said, *“I know your deeds, and your toil and your perseverance....”* But He also said there were some things He had against them, and that if they did not repent, He would remove their lampstand out of its place (Revelation 2:1-7). Their activity was not enough. The Lord demanded faithfulness.

Faithfulness cannot be replaced by **popular appeal**. The Old Testament tells of two men who preached the message of God. One had outstanding response, while the other never gained a single convert. One converted literally thousands apparently with a single sermon, while the other preached for decades without a response. The one preacher was Jonah and the other Noah. The last we hear of Jonah he was disgruntled, discouraged, and angry with God. But Noah is remembered as a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). Jonah, no doubt, had more popular appeal, but Noah is remembered for his faithfulness.

Faithfulness cannot be replaced by personal preference or initiative. When Joshua was selected by God to replace Moses as leader of the Israelites, he was instructed to *“...do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go”* (Joshua 1:7). The key to Joshua’s success as a leader would be his **faithfulness** to God.

While there are times when activity is important, when popular appeal has its place, and personal preference and initiative can prove helpful, they are no substitute for faithfulness. In all that we work for and try to be for God, may we, first and foremost, be **faithful** to Him.

Broken Vows

Hershel Dyer

A VOW, TO PUT IT VERY SIMPLY, is a solemn promise. The keeping of a vow provides the ultimate test of any person's character. Once a person has shown that he or she will not keep a vow, all reason to trust that one has been destroyed. However, trust can be restored where a penitent spirit meets with the spirit of forgiveness.

In the marriage of a man and a woman, vows are made which are of the most sacred nature. In most marriage ceremonies, especially in the western world, God is called upon to witness the utterance of the promises which are made. Thus, the person's fidelity to God, as well as to the chosen mate, is at stake. To forsake one's marital promise is not only to be unfaithful to one's husband or wife, but it is also an unfaithfulness before God. Hence, those who lightly regard their commitment made to their mate should realize that they are, at the same time, treating carelessly the trust of God in themselves. And, if God can no longer trust us, what shall we do?!

While the mention of vows is generally associated with marriage, vows are made in many other relationships of life. There are those who solemnly promise to pay back money that is loaned to them. "You'll get this back; depend on it," the borrower says. One who bears some terrible secret confides in another. The latter promises, "None will ever hear from my lips what you have told me today." A friend stands firmly by his neighbor in a time of crisis, and the latter declares, "What you have done will be rewarded; I will not forget!"

God has spoken His will regarding vows, His will for man to keep his word whenever given:

"If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth" (Numbers 30:2).

WHO'S WATCHING?

Frances Parr

A FEW YEARS AGO OUR FAMILY built a house in a rural neighborhood. One day when many workmen were busy with their jobs, our nearest neighbor, who lived a quarter mile away, came over. "I had to come and see what's going on. My binoculars aren't strong enough to make it out," he said with a smile.

You may be sure that no matter who you are, or what you are doing, someone is watching. God provided advice on how to handle ourselves so that we could influence others for good for Him.

The first incident of people-watching occurred when Satan observed Adam and Eve in the garden and waited for an opportunity to tempt them. Since that time the devil has not ceased his vigil, especially concerning people who are trying to live according to God's laws.

Satan watched the apostles. Jesus warned Peter, in Luke 22:31, that Satan had asked especially for him. He will *"sift you as wheat,"* Jesus said. The devil knew Judas well enough to know that he would betray the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver. Is there any reason to think Satan isn't still watching Christ's followers today?

Throughout the Bible are examples of God's people having been observed, with various results. In the story of Esther, Haman watched Mordecai and hated him, merely because he was a Jew. Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, so Haman schemed to kill Mordecai. The plan failed, and Haman died instead.

Daniel and his friends were seen as they disobeyed the king's decree to worship idols and prayed instead to the true God. Neither the lion's den nor the fiery furnace harmed them. In each case, because of the Hebrew children's example of trust in God, the kings became believers.

Everywhere He went, people watched Jesus. Some scrutinized His every move to try and trap Him. Most folks wanted to learn more about Him, His Father, and the message He brought. Jesus said, *"He who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). Jesus was gentle, kind, loving, and cared deeply for everyone. He promised a better life on earth and eternity in heaven for His followers.

After Jesus died, lived again, and ascended to heaven, His apostles continued telling about the wondrous thing He had done for mankind. The influence of their lives and teachings brought many to salvation.

Jesus expected Christians to be watched. In His "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5, He says, *"You are the light of the world."* The purpose of the Christian light is not only to be seen, but to be examined. *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven,"* He said.

Peter gives advice to a wife with an unbelieving husband in 1 Peter 3:1. She may be able to convince her husband to become a Christian by nothing more than being one herself. Because of her godly example, he may possibly be won without a word from her.

Today we hear a lot about role models. For the past several years, parents have been led to believe that being friends to their children is better than being disciplinarians. This "best pal" method of parenting is

now being questioned. Parents are again realizing the great need to be good examples for their children.

Paul praised the example of Timothy's mother and grandmother. He said in 2 Timothy 1:5, "*I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*"

Even though parents may make mistakes bringing up their children, they can still be powerful influences. The sins of King David are recorded in the Old Testament for all to see; however, the fact that he always followed the true God is remembered. His son Solomon and his descendant Jehoshaphat are commended because they followed his example. 1 Kings 9:4 and 2 Chronicles 17:3 attest to this fact.

While Jesus is the perfect role model for Christians, we all are inspired by others. By the same token, we ourselves are examples. Whether this example is inspirational or discouraging is worth careful soul-searching.

Recently I sent a note to a friend, telling her how observing her devotion and hard work for the Lord had inspired me. She was very surprised, and replied that she didn't see how she could be an inspiration to anyone. All the time she had been watching me!

"... *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so you will not be dependent on anybody*" (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12).

DO YOU KNOW ONESIPHORUS?

Leon Barnes

ONESIPHORUS IS A STRANGE NAME. I have met many people with names I had never heard of before, but this is not one of them. But he is a man you need to get to know. Paul wrote about him to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:16-18. He said, "*The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me, and found me—the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.*"

If you were reading the Who's Who of first century Christians, this might well be the total entry about Onesiphorus. But what a great example. Not much is known of him. But these things are worthy of imitation by all of us.

He stood by Paul, God's man, when others were going the other way. He was there often to refresh Paul. I don't know how he did it. I can imagine him bringing to the prison clean clothes and fresh food. But I can also imagine them sitting together and talking about good things and even laughing about some of the things they had seen.

Onesiphorus didn't seem to notice, or at least not to care about, the chain Paul wore. Obviously some were ashamed of it. Some brethren had stayed away, perhaps saying, "I just can't stand the sight of that chain." But he came. He showed compassion and love when others found it easier to pray from afar.

There are many like Onesiphorus in the church today. The world as a whole seldom knows them. They just serve where others stay away. God will indeed grant them mercy in the judgment. Are you one? You can be!

UNWITTING TOOLS OF A DEMOLITION EXPERT

Garell L. Forehand

THE SWEETLY SMILING MOTHER gave her two little children big hugs, kissed each of them lovingly on the cheek, and then tucked them snugly into their beds for the night. She put out their light, and walked back into the front of the hut, happy for the feelings of joy and contentment that she shared with her husband. She loved her family. Two weeks later her husband and children were dead. Little had she known that her very contact with them was their affliction. She was a carrier of the plague. Unknowingly, she brought the black death to the ones she loved.

How tragic! And how pitiful the woman became upon discovering her part in the destruction of her family! She remained emotionally wracked with pain the rest of her life. Yet, her responsibility for the deaths could not really be construed as accountability, regardless of her anguished conscience. No sin attached to her actions.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for some in the church today. Many brothers and sisters, because of choices they make in words and deeds, are not only responsible for much death and destruction, but will also be held accountable by their Lord for that crime. They may not even realize their part in the demolition process — they seldom do—but they still lead to the spiritual demise of many. They are unwittingly working for an evil cause they do not recognize.

Satan is constantly seeking ways to destroy the faithful (1 Peter 5:8). He delights in the aid inadvertently offered him for that purpose by the Lord's own people. The Bible often warns us to guard ourselves

against destroying those about us. Paul wrote, *“Let us not... provoking one another”* (Galatians 5:26). The word “provoke” in this passage means “to stir up what is evil in another.” God tells us that He literally hates the one *“who sows discord among brethren”* (Proverbs 6:16,19). Solomon wrote, *“A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends”* (Proverbs 16:28). The description of a carrier is vivid: *“Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body. Fervent lips with a wicked heart are like earthenware covered with silver dross”* (Proverbs 26:20-23).

The activity of Christians is to be supportive of God’s desire. He pronounces a great blessing upon *“the peacemakers”* (Matthew 5:9). The Lord calls us to *“consider one another in order to stir up love and good works”* (Hebrews 10:24). A concern for the safety of others is to be our aim. *“All things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify (build up). Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being”* (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).

We should each take a close, detailed look at ourselves. How are we speaking and acting? Are we honoring God through the building up of spiritual strength in others? Or are we the unwitting tools of a demolition expert?

DANGEROUS THINKING

Perry N. Hall

PAUL THOUGHT HE WAS DOING God’s will when he was rejecting Christ, persecuting Christians, and making havoc of the church (Acts 26:9; 1 Timothy 1:13). There are many today who shut out the light of God and think “within themselves,” and reach the same conclusions Paul did.

There are many others who put themselves in this class of thinkers when they think that all that is necessary to be a Christian is to live a moral life, go by their own conscience, and “join the church of their choice.” The way a man thinks is often his greatest hindrance. The Lord has said, *“My thoughts are not your thoughts...”*

Neither is sincerity a substitute for doing God’s will. The way a person feels is no evidence of acceptance with God. Paul felt fine when he was helping to murder Christian men and women. Thinking he was right never made anybody right. We must be guided only by God’s Word. We must obey only God’s will. We must think only the thoughts of God. Only then will we be safe from dangerous thinking.

ARE WE WISER THAN GOD?

Tom L. Childers

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY the father in the parable gave his son his portion of goods and allowed him to leave, when he probably knew all the time that he was going to waste it?

The father in this parable represents God, and God respects the free will of all human beings. He tries to guide and teach and warn and beg and plead with people to do what is right, but the final decision is left up to the individual.

In the same way parents must respect the free will of their children. During their formative years, parents should teach, set the proper example, warn, beg, threaten, discipline, and nurture their children in the way of righteousness. However, there comes a time that the child, like a young bird, is allowed to leave the nest, and responsibility is now accepted by the child.

This period of time is not easy. Some parents, as well as some children, want to postpone the pain and responsibility as long as possible. Some never make this decision, and their lives are miserable. Why? The Bible says: *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”* (Genesis 2:24).

God never intended that parents should be responsible for and make the decisions for their children forever. Parents who continue to “baby” their children do them a great injustice. They do not allow them to learn to make their own decisions. And if a child never learns responsibility, he or she will not be able to survive in society.

Sure, parents are wiser and usually know what is best for the child—much better than the child does. In the same way, God is much, much wiser than we are, but He still gives us the precious privilege of freedom of choice.

One of the major moral and social problems that is facing us today is getting people to accept responsibility. Some will not work. Some will not support their families. Some are not faithful to their families. Too many live off their parents. Sometimes it is the fault of a lazy and shiftless adult child, but more often it is a parent that will not allow their child to grow up, and the child has not been taught or made to accept responsibility for his or her actions. The parents keep supporting the adult child, and the child keeps holding out the hand and letting the parents pay the rent, buy the groceries, and clothe the child. So, what

we have is frustrated parents and even more frustrated young people.

The message of the father of the parable of the prodigal son is this:

1. I am your father and I love you, but I cannot make you do what is right.
2. Here is your money; you are now responsible for it; I will no longer dictate to you what you can or cannot do with it.
3. If you make poor choices, you will have to suffer the consequences. I am here to help you, but I will not keep sending money to support your hog pen habit. Forgiveness and help are available only when you accept responsibility for your actions.

If we really love our adult children, we will respect their freedom of choice, even if that choice is a poor one, and one that breaks our hearts.

THE SONS OF ELI

Max Patterson

ELI WAS THE FOURTEENTH OF FIFTEEN JUDGES. The second and third chapters of 1 Samuel reveal to us the nature of the sons of Eli. These sons are said to be “*sons of Belial*” (worthlessness). There are at least three reasons stated as to why these sons were worthless, the result of which made their works contemptible.

First, the sons of Eli knew not the Lord (2:12). One can hardly know the Lord and follow after His ways without the will to do so (John 7:17). It is parents’ responsibility to instill this will to know (Proverbs 22:6). If one does not know the truth, how can he be made free? (See John 8:31,32.) Eli’s sons committed grievous sins because they did not know the Lord.

Second, the sons of Eli treated the Lord’s sacrifice with contempt (2:13-17). Others in the Bible also took lightly the worship of God: Cain, in Genesis 4, and Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10. When one does not know God or His will, he often “*does what is right in his own eyes*” (Judges 17:6).

Third, the sons of Eli were immoral (2:22). Evidently they knew nothing of self-control. They gave in to lusts, and indulged in vices. Some believe these sons participated in the gross immorality connected with idol worship. Evidently these sons completely forgot about the ten commandments. Our world today is being influenced by immorality on television and in the movies, pornography in our reading materials, our music, and the deification of our bodies, along with the making of pleasure our highest priority. Paul taught, “*Be not deceived: Evil*

companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

There is a reason for the vile actions of these sons. "... *His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*" (3:13). It is the parents' awesome responsibility to raise the children, and among other things, that means restraining them. They cannot do and cannot have everything they desire. When we fail to raise our children in the discipline of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4), we are honoring our sons above God (2:29), and that means unfaithfulness to God.

There is an urgent need in our day for parental restraint. There is a strong tendency to do evil (Jeremiah 17:9), and this is aided by so many examples of evil in our world, and by so many temptations. Parental restraint is imperative. It is our duty, not only to the children, but to God. Consider Deuteronomy 6:3-9; 21:18-21; Proverbs 19:18; 23:13,14; 29:15,16; 22:6; Ephesians 6:4. To omit parental restraint is ruinous: to children, to parents, and to the nation (compare 1 Samuel 4:11,18,22).

Let parents exercise due restraint over children, and let children submit and give due respect to their parents. When parents raise their children "*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,*" these same parents will have children who "*honor their father and their mother.*"

Some Help For Parents

Joe Rowe

IT IS NOT EASY TO INSTILL in our children's hearts God's Word, a little every day, until their characters are formed into Christ's image, but, with God's help, parents must find a way to do it.

- *It isn't easy to take the time from the busy life we all live to pray together that God will have His way with each member of the family.* Parents who love their family will schedule some time for it. It isn't easy to take every family decision to the throne of God in prayer for guidance that His will be done through us, but Christians will be sure it is done.
- *It isn't easy, when all around us homes are being disrupted by disloyalty, disunity, and divorce, to develop an ever-increasing bond of love and loyalty under God's uniting presence,* but parents must be certain that It is done. It isn't easy, when the world beckons from many corners to many kinds of low living, to courageously say, "In our home we will choose the Lord's way," but remember, only the Lord's way leads to Heaven.
- *It isn't easy for us to create togetherness in the home, at work, at play, and in worship, and in every activity to know love and joy*

abounding, but the rewards exceed the effort required to do it!

- *It Isn't easy to set aside a time each day in which all members of the family are called together for family worship* (read Scriptures, sing, and pray), but it is part of the training which is required to form the image of Christ in your child's character.

Parents have the first and primary responsibility in the teaching and training of their children. The responsibility is awesome! Most everyone can use (and should welcome) all available help, but parents often overlook some priceless help which is available.

As parents are prayerfully using all their skills in teaching and training of the children, their efforts can be doubled by making sure the child participates in any available Bible class and other youth activities which are made possible in the Lord's church. The parents' teaching will be established and strengthened when the children hear the Bible teacher repeat the things which are taught at home.

Parents, please think seriously and prayerfully, because we are teaching and training our children to prepare for an eternal life!

LET DOWN YOUR NETS

Tim Nichols

IN THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF Luke we read a challenging account of the testing of Peter's faith. Peter was likely exhausted as he washed his nets upon the shore after an entire night of fishing without success. Jesus came along and invited Peter to get back into the boat with Him and thrust it out a little from the land so He could teach the people assembled on the shore. After teaching the people, Jesus turned to Peter and said, *"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught."* Peter hesitated. He, an experienced fisherman, had been working hard at his trade all night without taking a single fish. After pointing this out to our Lord, he finally complied for the same reason that all men of faith have been moved to act: the Lord had said to do it. *"And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net."*

The result was amazing! They caught so many fish that their net started breaking. They called to their partners in another boat for help and pulled in so many fish that, when both boats were filled, they began to sink! Peter was so astonished that he fell at Jesus' feet and confessed that he was unworthy to be in His presence. Jesus simply replied, *"Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."* After getting their catch to

the shore, Peter and his partners *“forsook all and followed him.”*

Although Peter vacillated and acted on impulse on several occasions in his life following this event, he was able to draw upon the lesson he had learned in the boat when he later went fishing for men. Luke records Peter’s sermon (Acts 2) to the multitudes assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost. God had, in effect, told Peter and the other apostles to let down the gospel net. Peter could have argued that this was not the most reasonable time and place. After all, this was the place where Jesus had recently been condemned to death, and these were the very people who had crucified our Lord with wicked hands! Not very good prospects? But under God’s instructions he let down the gospel net, and it was filled with about three thousand souls.

In Acts 10 we read the account of Peter being directed to let down the gospel net among the Gentiles. He was shown in a symbolic vision that it was time to begin doing so. He let it down and it was filled with the household of the devout Cornelius. The gospel net that Peter let down nearly two thousand years ago is just as strong as ever (Romans 1:16). In his later years a gray-haired and seasoned Peter wrote these words: *“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you”* (1 Peter 1:24,25).

The net, the ancient Gospel, ought to be what is in your hand. Let it down! When? *“In season and out of season”* (2 Timothy 4:2). Where? To whom? *“To every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people”* (Revelation 14:6). Faithless men will object. They will tell you that the ancient Gospel will not work in the modern world. They will say that there are too many cultural barriers between modern man and the ancient Gospel. They will encourage you to modify the net. But the ancient Gospel was made in heaven. It endures forever. Our Lord simply requires you to let it down and to leave the results to Him. At His word, what will you do?

HOW TO LIVE HAPPILY

Bobby Dockery

I RAN ACROSS THESE SUGGESTIONS for finding happiness in an article in my files:

1. **Live the spiritual life.** Keep your priorities in proper order. Recognize that “things” do not lead to happiness and that living by the pleasure principle is self-defeating.

2. **Live one day at a time.** Thank God for the joys and opportunities of each day. There are trials in each day but God will supply strength for those trials. Also, remember that most of our fears never materialize.
3. **Do not violate your conscience.** The way to lay down our burden of guilt is to accept the grace of God and daily depend on the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Keep your account current with the Father concerning your guilt and lie down at night in the rest of forgiveness.
4. **Purge your life of past failures, guilts and disappointments.** God has forgiven you if you have become His child.

EVANGELISM

GOSPEL Or Gimmicks?

Clarence DeLoach, Jr.

THAT THE CHURCH DEPICTED upon the pages of the New Testament was evangelistic is evident even to the casual reader. The thrust of the lives and work of the early Christians changed cities, nations, and the world. In just a short time after the church began, Luke reports they filled Jerusalem with their teaching. A few years later they had the reputation of *“turning the world upside down”* (Acts 17:6). Their evangelistic fervor is not defined so much by collective action, but in individual and personal terms.

In this article, our purpose is not to describe a **program of evangelism**, but advance the **principles** that emerge as one carefully looks at the evangelism set out in the book of Acts.

PRINCIPLES OF EVANGELISM

1. First, they saw evangelism, not as an option, but as their reason for being. It was not merely a function, but a fellowship. They were committed to it, and even when persecution arose and they were scattered, *“they went everywhere preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4). When threatenings came, their prayer was, *“grant unto thy servants, that with boldness they may speak thy word”* (Acts 4:29-31). The body was one, and each was committed to filling his function in that body (Ephesians 4:16). We will never restore the evangelism they practiced until we see what they saw and become what they were.

2. Second, the church existed because of a distinctive message — and for that message. It was a unique message, namely *“God hath made Him both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36). They continued in that

teaching (Acts 2:42), ceasing not to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:42). Philip understood that to preach Christ entailed preaching His kingdom, name, and commandments (Acts 8:5,12). Later, Philip is designated “*the evangelist*” (Acts 21). He clearly shows the key to effective evangelism in Acts 8:26-39. There was an **open mouth** (Philip’s); an **open book** (the Bible), and an **open heart** (the eunuch’s).

3. Third, there was a spirit of joy and excitement in sharing their faith. Theirs was a caring, loving faith to be shared; not a selfish faith to be kept. They were privileged to participate in the spiritual body of Christ and to communicate the message of grace by life and lip. Paul expressed that spirit when he addressed the Thessalonians whom he had taught. He said, “*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*” (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

4. Fourth, they began where they were. Jesus had said, “*and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). The strategy for outreach followed that procedure in Acts. The Gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, and ultimately to Rome. They began at home, but they did not remain there.

Because of the nature of that message, their daily emphasis was upon teaching. There was a compulsion to “*speak the things we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20). Daily they taught and preached Jesus (Acts 5:42). The Word was taught to individuals, cities, and nations (Acts 18:11). They sincerely believed that the power to save resided in the message, not the messenger. However, they understood that the manner in which the message was received depended greatly upon the adornment of it as seen in those who brought it. For that reason Paul urged the Colossians, “*walk in wisdom toward those who are without ... let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt*” (Colossians 4:5,6).

Godly living is essential to evangelism, but it is not enough — there must be bold confrontation. Unbelief must be challenged, man’s need explained, and the answer communicated.

A church can get caught up in many things that are good, yet totally lose sight of her very reason for being. It appears from a study of Acts that certain regions were targeted from which the message could radiate more effectively in an area. Ephesus became a hub from which the Gospel spread throughout Asia. The church at Colossae resulted from Paul’s work at Ephesus. Epaphras came under Paul’s influence, then went home to Colossae to plant the church.

5. Fifth, they practiced follow-up and confirmation. Paul’s practice was to follow-up on the works he had begun. Following his first extended preaching tour, he returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to “*confirm the souls of the disciples and exhort them to continue in the faith*” (Acts

14:22). Later, he went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches (Acts 15:41). No campaign at home or abroad is any better than its follow-up.

6. Sixth, they began where the people were and painstakingly brought them to Christ. The assembly on Pentecost were Jews who believed in God, while the audience in Athens were Gentiles who were idolatrous. The message had a different beginning point in both sermons, but the conclusion was the same: man's (both Jew and Gentile) need for Christ.

7. Seventh, there was no feeling of competition among preachers or congregations. Every gift was ministered as a steward of the grace of God. The ultimate objective was to glorify God through Jesus Christ (see 1 Peter 4:10,11). Paul was not jealous of Apollos' oratory or Barnabas' generous spirit. They possessed a servant's heart!

Ours is a team. We have things in common: Faith, salvation, and message. We are brethren. Let us rejoice when another does well, and weep when one falls. We are complimenters, not competitors. Let us lovingly watch for each other's souls and uphold each other's work.

SHORT-CUTS AND GIMMICKRY

There are no short-cuts to effective evangelism. Though God has given His people a great amount of flexibility in doing His work, sometimes some are tempted to resort to clever gimmicks. A gimmick has been defined as "anything artful or tricky; any cunning or secretive device." It is beneath the dignity of the cause we represent to use tricky, cunning, or secretive means to communicate Christ.

Any **manipulative program** with an ulterior motive would appear to be a gimmick. The entertainment syndrome, which seeks to *win* people by that means, will find that even more clever tactics will have to be used to *keep* them.

To build a work around a **charismatic person** is gimmickry. The only church fit to exist is the one built upon Christ and by Him. God does not depend upon the genius of men, the charisma of preachers, the affluence of its members, or the spaciousness of our facilities to build the church itself. It is the commitment of the company of believers called out by God that counts. We are privileged to be "*workers together with Him*" (1 Corinthians 3:9).

SUMMARY

Evangelism is not just an isolated work, but the sum of what the church is about. It is not just a night of calling, but the daily penetration of Christians in their community.

The task of leadership is not to promote programs, but to equip the saints for ministry. When such occurs, evangelism results.

Evangelism has no locked-in method. We may easily retard the progress of the Gospel by insisting on old, worn-out, traditional methods. The Gospel is for all, and it never changes. It transcends culture. Our methods, while people-oriented, must adapt to changing times. God is counting on us to use our heads and hearts to effectively communicate His unchanging message to a changing world.

The First Thing He Did Was To Find His Brother

Harvey Porter

JOHN'S GOSPEL TELLS OF JOHN the Baptist saying to his disciples as he saw Jesus passing by, "*Look, the Lamb of God!*" Two of them immediately followed Jesus. In fact, they spent the day with Him. John then recorded, "*Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)*" (John 1:35-41).

Jesus did not say, "Go find your brother and bring him to Me." The initiative was Andrew's. He was confident that he had found the Messiah, and he loved his brother, Simon Peter, and wanted him to be with Jesus.

This realization of what Jesus can do for the human family prompts us to bring souls to Him. If we truly believe that He is the Savior of the whole world and that everyone is lost without Him, we bring souls to Him. Actually, we must include another ingredient here. Andrew loved his brother, and when he himself found the Savior he immediately thought about his own brother. Love crosses all boundaries. It is not timid or shy. It does the impossible. We muster courage to talk to others about their soul. The realization that all are lost without the Savior pushes us to do what we would not do under ordinary circumstances.

It is interesting that Andrew did not ask Jesus to go and talk to his brother. I wonder if Andrew thought that Peter knew him best and would trust what he had to say. I wonder if he thought that Peter might refuse to listen to an absolute stranger, even if the stranger were Jesus Himself. So, he took no chances on Peter refusing to come to Jesus. He did the job himself. Love works that way.

Most of the Lord's people today never bring anyone to Christ. We console ourselves by saying, "I'm just not cut out for that!" "I don't know what to say!" We fear rejection, or we fear that we will offend a friend. We should, however, think of what is at stake. If Jesus is the Savior of the world, and man is lost without Him, then those who are not brought to Jesus will be eternally lost. Isn't it worth taking the risk of losing a

friend to do the greatest thing we can do for a human? It is indeed worth taking the chance upon losing a friend in view of eternity and the Lord's charge to us all to "*Go ye therefore and make disciples....*"

Some of the greatest soul winners I have known did not have a great education, did not stand before a Bible class and teach each Sunday, did not use good grammar, could not answer all the Bible questions someone could ask, but they loved Jesus and their lost friends, and they did their best to bring the two together.

How much did Andrew know after having been with Jesus just a few hours? He had been a disciple of John, and now he had changed suddenly on the same day to following an unknown. Peter could have asked a lot of questions that Andrew would have had a hard time answering. Maybe he did! But one thing we know—Andrew thought first about his own brother and went immediately to bring him to Jesus. We know he loved Peter. We know he believed in Jesus, even after only a few hours with Him. (Some of us have been in the church most of our lives and have never tried to bring one to Him.)

The early church caught the idea of soul winning. All of Jerusalem knew about Jesus and the church. They were persecuted by the authorities, but they continued. Luke wrote, "*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*"

What a Savior! What a Gospel! What a challenge!

SEEING VISIONS, DREAMING DREAMS

David Chadwell

THE EVENTS OF ACTS CHAPTER 2 were astounding. Those dedicated to restoring first century Christianity have long understood the pivotal position of Acts 2. Those events mark the actual beginning of the Christian age. Those people were the first to receive the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. They are the beginning of the first congregation. They mark the birth of Christian worship and Christian fellowship. Dawn rose on the new day of the Christian age in Acts 2.

Those first converts did not realize they were leading the way in a *new spiritual age*. They understood Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ sent from God. They realized they had crucified God's own Son. They knew they direly needed forgiveness. Yet, they did not see that their conversions marked the birth of a *new spiritual movement*.

Since no one attempted to preach to the Gentiles until Acts 10, obviously they did not see themselves as the beginning of a *new*

worldwide movement. Evidence strongly suggests that they saw themselves as devout, spiritual-minded reformers of Judaism. They were bringing new life to Judaism, not salvation to mankind.

Peter used Joel's prophecy to explain the day's significance. It was time for the young men to see visions, for old men to dream dreams.

There is tremendous opportunity before us as God's people. Many are disgusted with today's godless immorality and squabbling churches, but they have no idea of where to turn.

We have never taught in an age like this. The majority of people have never been a student in a Bible class. They have never read a Bible. Numbers of churches today do not teach Bible classes and do not encourage Bible study. Our world has never been as illiterate in Bible knowledge as it is today.

The good news about the crucified, resurrected Jesus is a powerful, relevant message for these people. Our Christ-given mission is to share that good news. In this drastically different age, the New Testament message must not change, but our methods have to change. Once again, we desperately need young men with vision, and old men with dreams.

A GOD WHO LAUGHS

Olden Cook

In the second Psalm, David describes godless kings who plot against the Lord and His people. They feel so proud, so powerful. But then, David continues, "*He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision*" (Psalm 2:4). W.S. Pulmer, a scholar who has researched the Roman emperors who brought horrible persecution on the early church, has reported that of thirty such officials, "*one became deranged after some atrocious cruelty, one was slain by his own son, one was blinded, one was drowned, one was strangled, one died in miserable captivity, two committed suicide, five were assassinated, five others died excruciating deaths by torture, and eight died in battle.*"

"*Of these eight who died in battle, one was Julian the Apostate. In the days of his prosperity he is said to have pointed his dagger to heaven, defying the Son of God, whom he called "The Galilean". But when he was wounded in battle and realized he was dying, he exclaimed, "Thou has conquered, O Thou Galilean!"*"

God's laughter at those who rebel and plot against Him is no laughing matter! It would be well for all to say with David, "*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the very way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him*" (Psalm 2:12). What we do with Christ now determines what God will do with us later!

*God rules as Sovereign on His throne, He judges great and small;
And all who would defy His will, Beneath His rod shall fall.*

