

THE WORDS of

Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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DAREDEVILS

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

I am sure somebody somewhere could tell the tale of a dare that went right. From what I know of dares, such a case would be the exception rather than the rule. Dares often end in regret, heartache and even horror.

A few years ago in East Providence, Rhode Island, a husband dared his wife to dangle from a rooftop five stories up. She chose to take that dare. She tied herself to him with a clothesline and climbed right over the edge of the roof. Moments later she accidentally slipped and plummeted to her death.

What makes risk-taking so attractive and irresistible? What prompts us to do something crazy just so someone else cannot accuse us of being spineless cowards (translation = wise individuals blessed with a healthy dose of common sense)?

God in His word tells us about some daredevils. No one mouthed the words "I dare you!" but it is easy to find people who took some huge gambles.

Pharaoh was a proud daredevil. If anyone had seen the awesome power of the Lord God Almighty it was Pharaoh! He saw ten stunning testimonies to the greatness and supremacy of God (chronicled in Exodus 7ff.). He had seen the wrath of God in the face of his dead boy, his firstborn. But even after that, there is Pharaoh, sending his entire army

after the Israelites into the parted waters of the Red Sea. The next scene conjures up the image of two great walls of water crashing down from both sides: "and the waters covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained" (Exod. 14:28 - NASB).

Achan was a covetous daredevil. He knew there would be consequences if anyone found out he had kept a big bar of gold, 200 shekels of silver and a beautiful Babylonian mantle from the conquest of Jericho (Josh. 7:21). They had been warned against coveting items that were under the ban (Josh. 6:18ff.). But he gambled anyway. The result? Achan was taken along with his sons, daughters, oxen, donkeys, sheep, tent and all his belongings (including the plunder he had coveted) to the Valley of Achor where they were "stoned with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones" (Josh. 7:25).

False teachers are deceptive daredevils. In 2 Peter 2 some false teachers are described as "promising . . . freedom while they themselves are full of corruption" (2:19). They promised what they could not deliver. They "despise authority" and are "daring [presumptuous - KJV], self-willed" (2:10). But those who pervert the truth of God and lead the saints astray

"like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed . . . will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong" (2:12,13a).

People still dare to defy God's word and His will. When people say, "I know the Bible teaches baptism for the remission of sins, but _____", they are rolling the dice and can expect to lose. Anyone who says "I'll give God my life tomorrow" is risking it all because God says "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2 - NKJV).

The fact that the word "devil" is at the end of "daredevil" should tell us who is interested in promoting this mentality. Christians must beware of the devilish dares that can lure the faithful off to the slaughter. We have the power to resist and overcome the tempter (Jam. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). Obeying the Lord may not be the path of least resistance, but it is the path of no regrets!

Let's say with Jeremiah, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (10:23 - KJV). May God help us follow Him closely and return swiftly with a humble heart when we get daredevil fever and dart outside His will.

WOT

CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE: HOW?

Chuck Webster, Editorial

The last two editorials addressed two aspects of church discipline (Why? and Who?) in attempts to stimulate thought and discussion on what is a widely neglected, yet biblically mandated, practice. In this series' final installment, we look at the issue practically; i.e., how should corrective church discipline be practiced in the local congregation? Perhaps a lack of knowledge in this area has prevented some otherwise faithful churches from making their obedience complete.

In considering the "process" of church discipline, it is essential that we distinguish between sins of a private nature (between individuals) and those of a public nature. Private sins must be handled according to the edicts of Matthew 18:15-17. Our concern is, however, with the treatment of public sins, whether committed publicly, or brought to the public view by the offended one's following the Lord's instructions in Matthew 18:17. With this in mind, what is the process we should follow? The Bible does not set forth in distinct language a concise outline to be heeded. It does, however, provide us with principles to help us navigate this somewhat precarious course.

Positively determine the certainty of guilt. Too often we rush to judgment and assume rumor to be fact, instead of searching for the truth. We find, however, an interesting principle in Deuteronomy 13:14: "Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you." God further commanded the Israelites that when a person was accused of "wickedness" that if they "inquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain," *then* they were to take disciplinary action (Deut. 17:2-6). Certainly God would require no less of us than that we

"inquire diligently" and see if the accusations are true or false. If false, a brother's reputation has been cleared. If true, further action must be taken.

Make every effort to restore the person. If we discover the person is indeed guilty, we should expend every effort to bring him or her back to the church. Jesus illustrated His Father's boundless love for the wayward soul in the three parables of Luke 15 (The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Boy). We must remember that the supreme goal in discipline is to *restore* sinners, not punish them. Paul admonishes us: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). If we are able to convert an erring brother, James tells us, we "save a soul from death, and . . . hide a multitude of sins" (Jam. 5:19,20). This effort should be led by the shepherds of the flock, those who will one day give an answer for our souls (Heb. 13:17). It seems best that at this point the efforts are conducted privately, perhaps only by the elders and those who are aware of the sin. Those who are "spiritual" offer many prayers on behalf of the erring soul; they also may make extensive visits, send numerous cards, and make multiple phone calls during this crucial time. During these contacts, we should make every effort to impress upon the erring one's mind all of sin's dangers, as well as all of faithful Christianity's blessings. Paul urged us to "warn them that are unruly" (1 Thess. 5:14), which certainly includes pointing out the destination to which unfaithfulness leads.

Hopefully the erring brother or sister will recognize his or her foolishness and return home, but if not, further action must be taken . . .

The whole church should attempt to restore the erring one. In keeping with the Lord's principle expressed in Matthew 18, if no repentance occurs, the matter must be taken before the entire church. The most expedient way to accomplish this is to make a public statement regarding those who are in error and who refuse to repent. The eldership (or men in leadership if no eldership exists) encourages the congregation to do all they can to restore the erring one. Most congregations set a time frame within which they hope to bring about repentance. In order for church discipline to work the way God planned it, the entire congregation must participate by lovingly exhorting and warning the erring soul. Many erring brethren will return to their Lord when they recognize how much they're loved and how deeply they've hurt the Lord and His church. But some will not, and in such cases . . .

Fellowship must be withdrawn by the church. Paul commands us to "withdraw" ourselves from an impenitent brother and "have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:6,14). He urged the Corinthians: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. . . . Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:4,5,13).

Withdrawing fellowship means, in part at least, refusing to extend fellowship to him by sitting down and eating a common meal with him (1 Cor. 5:11). He is to be treated as a "heathen and a publican" (Matt. 18:17), but not as "an enemy, but . . . as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:15). Apparently this means we

are to treat him as someone who has turned his back on God, but not harshly, remembering that he is an erring brother in Christ. He is to be marked and avoided (Rom. 6:17). We are to note (“distinguish by marking” - *Strong's*) him and have no company with him (2 Thess. 3:14). Nonetheless we must *always* stand ready to forgive him and receive him back (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

The above admonitions mean practically that we must treat the erring brother kindly, but never leave the impression with him that he is in fellowship with God. Until he repents we cannot fellowship with him again by eating with him (a symbol of fellowship). We should use every opportunity to reprove him and encourage him to repent. No longer can we engage in the kind of deep, intimate friendship that only Christians share, because we no longer have in common

the same bond with God.

Corrective church discipline should always be practiced . . .

- ▶ *Personally*: “Souls are not saved in ‘groups,’ but rather individually. Likewise church discipline must focus on individuals with names, who live at specific addresses, with very personal needs” (G.R. Holton).
- ▶ *Prayerfully*: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam. 5:16).
- ▶ *Consistently*: Discipline should be exercised toward the well-dressed liberal giver as well as the “poor man in vile raiment.” We, like God, should see only souls in need of repentance.
- ▶ *Unanimously*: The whole church

must be involved. If one segment of the congregation (e.g., the erring one’s closest friends) continues to fellowship him, God’s plan is thwarted.

- ▶ *Completely*: Like the permissive mother who is constantly warning her children but never follows through with punishment, it does little good (and actually may harm) to take the first step (warn) but never act.

God’s plan, when executed according to His principles, still works today. The pressing need is for more congregations, in keeping with the Restoration Plea, to go back to the Bible in this area and restore first century, New Testament corrective church discipline. *WOT*

DENOMINATIONALISM

Drew Kizer, Gardendale, Alabama

Denominationalism is prevalent today. It is on every street corner; it is on our televisions and in our newspapers, and it even has a great influence on politics and the social setting of our lives.

Many feel that this widespread practice is good. After all, one might say that the surge of any religious practice, regardless of its affiliation, benefits and soothes society’s aches and pains of poverty, greed, irreverence, immorality, etc. Based on this point of view, denominationalism is warranted because it benefits the common good. However, throughout the Bible, God has shown that it is not necessarily generic religion that He wants, but a strict adherence to His wishes. Thus Saul was told, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and

sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). Saul thought that as long as he was being merely religious, the specifics of his service to God were inconsequential. But he was wrong!

So what exactly is denominationalism? According to *Webster’s New World Dictionary* a denomination is, “the act of naming; a name; a class or kind . . . having a specific name or value; a religious sect.” The common religious person would use the word simply in the sense of “a religious sect,” but if one were to look deeper, he would find that the term is not quite so flattering. The word comes from the Latin *nomen*, meaning “to name or call,” and as it has just been noted, the

word is still used to describe the action of naming. This is a very important piece of information when studying how the word came to be used for religious groups. Differing groups began to be called “denominations” because they took on names that separated themselves from the whole of Christianity. Thus, a member of a denomination is not pleased to simply wear the name “Christian,” for he has been “denominated,” no longer wearing the God-given name alone, but adding to it a man-made label. To use the word in its truest sense, a denomination is not only a religious sect, but a sect which has taken on a name which distinguishes it apart from other professing Christians.

Many people, including some who are members, believe the church of

Christ is a denomination. One familiar retort uttered frequently by those who hold this view is, "The churches of Christ think they are the only ones going to heaven." Really, in essence what these objectors mean is, "The Churches of Christ think they are the only *denomination* going to heaven." There is a basic misunderstanding underlying this rebuke. The church of Christ claims not to be a sect or a denominated group, but simply the church Christ established, described in the pages of the New Testament. It is not in competition to see if it can be the best or most acceptable denomination, for it is not a denomination. It is the one body of which Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build My church (singular)" (Matt. 16:18; cf. Eph. 4:4). Would anyone deny that Christ's church will be saved? The church of Christ carries no other name but Christ's. Thus, it is the church Christ died to save, and it has not been denominated by names fashioned by men.

What is wrong with denominationalism? Consider the following.

1) *Denominational names cannot be found in Scripture.* Paul said, "All the churches of Christ greet you" (Rom. 16:16). Obviously there would be an absence of denominational parties for Paul to be able to make such an encompassing statement. Of course, other names are also used for the Lord's body in the New Testament: church of God, household of God, body of Christ, the kingdom of heaven, one body, etc. However, all names used for the church in the New Testament are blanketing, leaving no hint whatsoever of the practice of drawing lines with names of human origin.

2) *Denominationalism tears down our Lord's plea for unity.* When the Lord said, "upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18), He certainly had no legion of denominations in mind. Instead, His plan was for a body singular in purpose and mind. Thus He prayed, "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" (Jn. 17:20,21).

However, one might object saying, "We are all united under Christ despite our differences. We are all headed for the same place. We're just taking different paths." In other words, as long as we all have Christ in common, why worry about the details? Although those who make statements like these are sincere, in reality their objection will not hold. There is only one path that leads to Christ! Setting up different paths will lead to different "Christs." Christ is the head of one body (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18), and we must abide by His word. He states in that word to do one thing, to go one direction; how dare we scatter to our own ways?

The disunity of denominationalism pits one believer against another. Paul adamantly opposed such division writing, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you" (1 Cor. 1:10). Instead of fighting our true adversary, the devil, who "prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8), we fight with one another!

3) *Denominationalism is not based on the Bible.* If there is one Bible, why are there hundreds of differing denominations who claim to adhere to that single standard? Obviously, it takes a great deal of editing and revising of God's Word to support the myriad "Christian" religions that exist today. However, we are told that Scripture can equip us for "every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17) and that God has granted to us "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). Let us abolish our cleverly devised creeds and subject ourselves to the inspired word of God!

4) *Denominationalism is a source of false peace.* On the surface denominationalism is a work of beauty, a balm for the wounds of humankind, a glimmer of hope in a dark world. However, underlying this tantalizing vision are the selfish desires of men. Although some good does arise from denominations through acts of benevolence and influence on the morals of society, their differing views are not the result of one God, but the desires of different men. Yes, denominations sometimes feel right, but this emotion is not based on truth. Instead, one should strive for "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension" which is found in following Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). This is true and everlasting peace.

Psalm 127:1 reads, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Why take part in the denominational parties that stem from the creative minds of man? God has given us a beautiful and simple plan for His church, a church with no division, no confusion, no defect, no fault--an everlasting kingdom.

PREACHING TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

[Editor's note: We encourage the reader to visit Wayne Jackson's excellent web site, www.christiancourier.com, for numerous well-written, biblical articles such as the one printed below.]

"Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, that aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (1 Pet. 3:18-20).

This difficult passage begins by affirming that Christ died in order to provide the benefits of salvation to unrighteous people. The apostle states that the Lord was put to death in the flesh (His crucifixion), but that He was made alive in the spirit.

What is the meaning of this latter expression? It could mean that His spirit continued to be vitalized with life—even after the death of His body; or else it may indicate that Jesus was made alive again when His spirit re-entered His body at the time of His resurrection from the dead (cf. Rom. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16).

The apostle then says, "in which" (that is, in His spirit), Christ went and preached unto the "spirits in prison" that were disobedient in the days of Noah.

Some people believe this passage teaches that during the three days His body was in the tomb, Jesus went into the spirit-world of the imprisoned lost. At that time, according to this theory, the Lord preached the gospel to those who died lost during the time of Noah's flood.

The passage simply cannot mean this—and for the following reasons:

1. The Bible clearly teaches that following death, there comes judgment (Heb. 9:27). After one leaves this earth, there is no plan of salvation for him. The spiritual condition in which a person dies (prepared or unprepared) is that which he will possess at the time of the general resurrection (cf. Mt. 25:1-12). There is absolutely no evidence that there is a second chance for redemption following death.

2. According to Christ's instruction in the narrative regarding the rich man and Lazarus, within the spirit-world (called Hades in the American Standard Version) there is a great gulf "fixed" between the place where evil people abide and the state where good people exist (see Lk. 16:26).

The verb "fixed," in the Greek Testament, is a perfect tense form, suggesting that the gulf is forever fixed. There can never be any crossing. A.T. Robertson called it a "permanent chasm" (*Word Pictures*, II, 223). A.B. Bruce said the "location is fixed and final" (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, I, 589). It thus would hardly have accomplished anything for the Lord to have preached to those in a state of punishment, tantalizing them with the hope of salvation, when they had no chance of entering Paradise.

What, then, does 1 Peter 3:18 teach? The passage affirms that Jesus Christ, "in the [His] spirit" (not in the flesh), during the days of Noah, proclaimed God's truth to the evil, pre-flood generation? How did the Lord do that? He was operating through Noah, a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5).

Observe that in this same letter Peter stated that the "Spirit of Christ" was in the Old Testament prophets as they

declared Heaven's message (1:11). This is a key verse in explaining 1 Peter 3:18. When Christ, through Noah, preached to those evil people, they were alive and on the earth. But at the time Peter wrote his letter, they had long been dead, and their spirits were suffering in the prison of hell (known as Tartarus— see 2 Pet. 2:4, ASVfn).

In order to help clarify the meaning of this difficult verse, we might suggest the following paraphrase:

"Christ was made alive in the spirit; in which, during the days of Noah, He preached to evil people, whose spirits are now in the prison of Tartarus (punishment)."

This type of language reflects a common figure of speech found in the Bible. It is known as prolepsis. It involves bringing two time-frames together into one expression. Here is a more current example. If one were to say, "President Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky," he would be combining two time eras into one sentence. When he was born, Lincoln was not president, but he later became such. However, by this common mode of expression, one associates a current fact with an antecedent event.

So it is with reference to 1 Peter 3:18. The preaching was done by Christ through Noah in ancient times; the spirits are currently in a place of confinement.

This is a very reasonable interpretation of this verse, and it conforms to what we know of the state of the dead as elsewhere described in the Bible. No meaning can be imposed upon a difficult text which makes it conflict with other clear passages. *NOT*

THE SECRET OF CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

Barry Grider, Austin, Texas

It is estimated that on average we influence, for good or bad, some two hundred and fifty persons during our lifetime. This should be very sobering to Christians, considering we are influencing people's eternal destination. When others see us, what do they see? In Acts 4:13, the scriptures state, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." Not only had these two apostles physically accompanied the Lord, but they also behaved according to His manner. While we did not have the privilege of hearing, touching, or knowing Jesus in the flesh, is it possible for others still to say we have been with Jesus, based on our words and actions? If indeed the Lord is in control of our lives, we will have an influence for good as did Peter, John, and the rest of the apostles. How did they maintain this good influence?

First, their influence was good because of the world they left. That is the ungodly worldly system which Satan rules and which John warns us not to love. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Jesus' disciples had a profound influence because they left that world behind. What kind of men had they been? Simon Peter constantly stumbled and fell. Matthew was a hated tax collector. Simon was a zealot and such men were often known for their viciousness. James and John were ill tempered (the "sons of thunder"). Yet, they are men who had the courage to

change their lives by following Christ. Consequently, the world hated them (Lk. 21:16,17). Our Christian influence will not go unnoticed by the world we leave behind. Remember Peter's words, "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4:3,4). Though Peter once denied the Lord, he became steadfast in his conviction, and endured persecution. Instead of being conformed by the world, let us be transformed after the image of Christ (Rom. 12:1,2).

Second, the influence of Peter and John was for good because of the word they loved. They preached Christ and Him crucified (Acts 4:10-12). They were not ashamed of their message, but rather rejoiced in it. As we seek to worship God, to teach others the gospel, to live in accordance with the Lord's will, we should do so out of a deep and abiding love for the word of God. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psa. 1:1,2). Peter and John were totally consumed by God's word and so it should be with each of us.

Third, these two noble apostles had a profound influence for good because of the way they lived. Even though His disciples had been taken out of the world, Jesus knew He had to take the world out of them. He still must do so with His followers today. The world will be taken out of us if we have penitent hearts. Repentance always results in the change of one's life. While Christians are not sinless, they should sin less. Therefore, a good Christian

influence is determined by the way we live. It has been said that if some of God's children were arrested and charged with being a Christian, there may not be enough evidence to convict them.

What kind of life did Peter, John, and the rest of the apostles live? Theirs was a life of compassion. The miracles performed by Jesus and His apostles to confirm the gospel message, likewise, were performed because of their compassion. The scriptures say, "And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them and healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14). While we do not have such miraculous power today we can still show contrast with the world through our compassion for others. Peter wrote, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8).

These apostles' lives were built upon confidence. They were men of boldness (Acts 4:13). Peter and John had such confidence because they not only saw Jesus die, but knew He triumphantly arose from the dead. While some men may live for a lie, men do not die for a lie. The apostles believed in a risen, reigning Savior, and were willing to die for Him (Rev. 2:10).

These men also lived lives of communion, for the text declares, "they had been with Jesus." Our influence will shine for good when we constantly saturate our lives with prayer, Bible study, and following the good deeds of our Lord. Are you doing this in your life? When you face temptation, why not ask the simple question, "What would Jesus do?" After asking and answering such a question, be willing to follow Him. Both their friends and enemies knew Peter and John, as "they who had been with Jesus." Is this how you are known?

THE WORDS OF TRUTH 1999 INDEX

- Choate, J.C.
 ▶ What It Means To Be Added To The Church (Oct.)
- Clippard, Todd
 ▶ God Will Overlook It . . . Just This Once (Sept.)
 ▶ The Salvation Army: An Unacceptable Charity (Nov.)
 ▶ "No Guilt" Preaching (Dec.)
- Colley, Glenn
 ▶ What To Preach Next Sunday (Sept.)
 ▶ Clapping In Worship (Dec.)
- Dearman, Jim
 ▶ Please Do Respond (Oct.)
- Dutton, Ray
 ▶ Orphaned By Error (Sept.)
- Eaves, Thomas F., Sr.
 ▶ Alcohol (Jan. 7)
- Finney, Charles G.
 ▶ How To Preach So As To Convert Nobody (Sept.)
- Gilpin, Eddy
 ▶ The Lodge, The Christian and the Bible-Part 1 of 3 (Jan. 21)
 ▶ The Lodge, The Christian and the Bible-Part 2 of 3 (Jan. 28)
 ▶ The Lodge, The Christian and the Bible-Part 3 of 3 (Feb. 4)
 ▶ "...To Wash Withal..." (Mar. 25)
 ▶ What Is "Calling On The Name Of The Lord"? (Apr. 1)
 ▶ The New Name (Aug.)
- Grider, Barry
 ▶ The God of Good News (Sept.)
- Haynes, James E., Jr.
 ▶ A Day Not Soon Forgotten (Apr. 8)
 ▶ The Obedient Life Of Christ (Oct.)
- Holland, Tom
 ▶ Liabilities of Liberalism (Apr. 15)
- Jackson, Jason
 ▶ The New Testament Church (Nov.)
- Jackson, Wayne
 ▶ Acts 2:38 -- Not So Tough (Aug.)
- Johnson, Roger
 ▶ Why Is It Wrong To Worry? (Feb. 11)
 ▶ What Went Wrong? (Mar. 4)
 ▶ Suffering: Mystery or Ministry? (Mar. 11)
- ▶ Saints In Wrong Places (Sept.)
- Naramore, Eva Nell B.
 ▶ The Cost To Be Lost (Apr. 15)
- Nichols, Flavil
 ▶ The Power of One (Nov.)
- Patton, Duane
 ▶ Why The Prophet Wept (Jan. 7)
- Pharr, David R.
 ▶ A Visit To Bethany (Feb. 11)
 ▶ Snake Bible--Faith Or Folly? (Mar. 11)
 ▶ The Prophecy Of Isaiah 2:2-4 (Mar. 18)
 ▶ Elizabeth, The Mother Of John The Baptist (Aug.)
 ▶ Public Reading Of Scripture (Oct.)
- Pollard, Neal
 ▶ Strong Churches (Jan. 7)
 ▶ The Suffering Of Jesus And Commitment (Dec.)
- Posey, Mark N.
 ▶ What Children Owe Their Parents (Apr. 8)
 ▶ My Daddy Is A Preacher! A Tribute to Glenn A. Posey (Nov.)
- Ramsey, Johnny
 ▶ Pressing On! (Feb. 18)
 ▶ How To Remain Faithful (Mar. 4)
 ▶ Lessons On Love (Mar. 18)
 ▶ Importance Of Loving Truth (Apr. 8)
 ▶ True Wisdom (Aug.)
 ▶ Evangelism (Oct.)
 ▶ Why Do The Wicked Prosper? (Nov.)
 ▶ No Serious Regret (Dec.)
- Sides, Levi
 ▶ "Lord. Help Us To Bring Up Our Children As Christians" (Jan. 21)
 ▶ Temptation (Feb. 4)
 ▶ Spending A Day With Jesus (Feb. 18)
 ▶ Three Reasons Why You Should Be A Christian (Mar. 4)
 ▶ Sacrifice (Mar. 11)
 ▶ The Paradox Of Our Age (Apr. 1)
 ▶ All Authority (Apr. 8)
 ▶ The Elder and Proverbs 22:6 (Apr. 15)
 ▶ When Tragedy Strikes (Nov.)
- Slimp, Clyde H.
 ▶ Would You Call A Woman A Cow? (Mar. 11)
 ▶ He Came Four More Times (Sept.)
- Sparks, Joey
 ▶ No Hands But Your Hands (Apr. 15)
- Taylor, Robert R., Jr.
 ▶ Pinning Human Origins On A Few Bones Discovered (Mar. 11)
 ▶ The Salvation Of Rahab (No. 1) (Mar. 18)
 ▶ The Salvation Of Rahab (No. 2) (Mar. 25)
 ▶ The Salvation Of Rahab (No. 3) (Apr. 1)
 ▶ The Salvation Of Rahab (No. 4) (Apr. 8)
- Thompson, Bert
 ▶ "Good-Bye, My Friend" (Dec.)
- Webster, Chuck
 ▶ The Glory of Preaching- Part 2 of 3 (Jan. 7)
 ▶ The Glory of Preaching- Part 3 of 3 (Jan. 14)
 ▶ Could Only Apostles Impart Miraculous Gifts Through The Laying On Of Hands? (Jan. 28)
 ▶ How Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart? (Feb. 11)
 ▶ The Crisis In America (Feb. 28)
 ▶ Now I Know My ABCs (Mar. 18)
 ▶ Perfect--Just Like It Is! (Feb. 25)
 ▶ Dead Or Alive? (Apr. 1)
 ▶ The (New) Words of Truth (Aug.)
 ▶ Who's To Blame? A Biblical Response To Violence In America (Aug.)
 ▶ Wanna Bet? (Sept.)
 ▶ Christians: Transformed, Not Conformed (Oct.)
 ▶ Corrective Church Discipline: Why? (Nov.)
 ▶ Corrective Church Discipline: Who? (Dec.)
- Weir, Marvin L.
 ▶ The Inspiration of the Bible (Jan. 14)
- Winkler, Mike
 ▶ Criticism -- Help or Hurt? (Jan. 14)
- Wright, Ben
 ▶ An Example For Christian Young People (Jan. 14)
 ▶ The Sin Of Pride (Feb. 11)
 ▶ What Does It Mean To Preach Jesus? (Feb. 18)
 ▶ Are You Putting god or God First? (Nov.)
- The Words of Truth 1998 Index (Feb. 25)*

RELIGIOUS SLURS

Ray Dutton, Montgomery, Alabama

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24,25).

One national radio talk show host likes to refer to those who espouse liberal views as “egg-sucking dog liberals.” It is sad that we have degenerated to such name calling in the political arena, but it is even more tragic when we find similar abusive language being thrown around by members of the Lord’s church. Certain brethren make a practice of using all sorts of insulting slurs when referring to those in error. But if it is reprehensible for a Christian to use “racial and ethnic” slurs, I suggest to you that it is even more shameful for us to refer to those lost in error with “religious” slurs.

I am not pleading for “tolerance”, because I do not believe we should tolerate sin, whether moral or doctrinal. I believe that truth is absolute and obtainable and that we must be set for a defense of the Gospel (Phil. 1:7,17). But I am pleading for us to remember who we are and Whose we are (1 Jn. 3:1). There is no value in calling people ugly names, impugning their motives, insulting their character, and in short just being plain obnoxious and rude. We are to be “gentle to all...in humility correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Tim. 2:24). Our speech does not have to be “crude” to be “sound,” but it should “always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6).

In Jude 9 we read, “Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke you!” Brother Guy N. Woods in his commentary on Jude wrote concerning this statement that “the ungodly characters, about whom he was warning his readers, spoke of angelic dignities in a fashion which even an archangel did not dare adopt in speaking to the devil” (p. 393). It seems as though many of us are willing to use “reviling accusations” against each other in a way that Michael would not even use against the devil himself.

Having had the opportunity of working beside the late, beloved brother Gus Nichols, I was able to witness first hand what it meant to be a valiant defender of the faith who could treat those in error with kindness and courtesy. Though he destroyed the arguments of false teachers, he never tried to assassinate their character, nor did he stoop to the level of using ugly epithets and religious slurs.

We are in an eternal life or death struggle against the forces of evil. “By smooth words and flattering speech” the hearts and minds of many babes in Christ are being won by false teachers among us. These individuals should be exposed (Eph. 5:11), marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17,18). However, we play right into Satan’s hand when we act just as ungodly as the false teachers we condemn.

The Words of Truth

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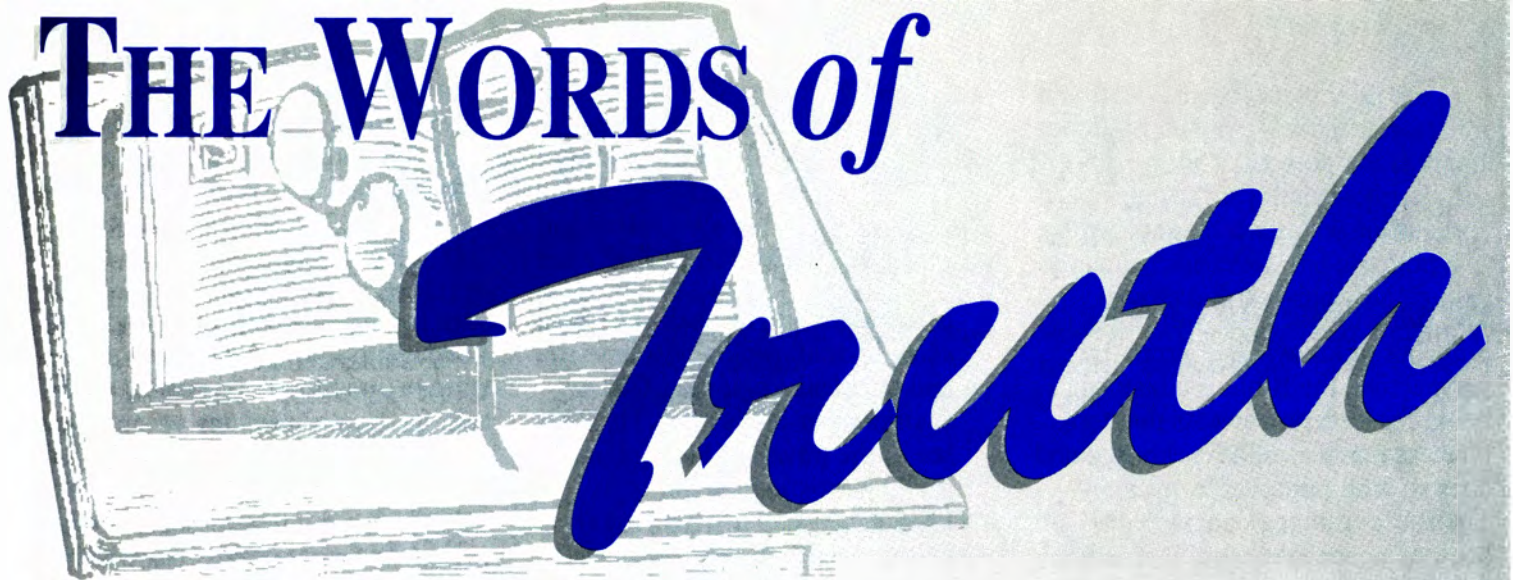
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THE WORDS of Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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THINGS DEATH DOES NOT DO

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

Luke 16 records the account of the rich man and Lazarus. It affords us a view into the realm beyond death. Properly defined, death is a separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body (Jam. 2:26). Spiritual death is the separation of man from God (Isa. 59:1,2). Death also separates the dead from the living (Lk. 16:26-31; Eccl. 9:5,6). Death does many things.

However, there are some things which death does not do. This is one of the lessons which Luke 16 provides for us.

First, death does not destroy consciousness. Both the rich man and Lazarus are dead; yet, they are very much alive. They were not "soul sleeping" as some claim to be the case after death. Other scriptures likewise reveal that death is not a cessation of consciousness. In Matthew 22:23-33 the Bible reveals that Jesus silenced the Sadducees concerning their disbelief in the resurrection. He referred to three characters from the Old Testament whose history these Sadducees knew quite well. Jesus said, "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of

Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" (Mt. 22:31,32). Knowing that the Sadducees knew that these men were long dead, Jesus then said, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (v. 32). In saying this, Jesus revealed clearly that these men were yet alive, yet conscious.

Second, death does not destroy identity. The rich man and Lazarus were not only alive, but also very much aware of being themselves. The rich man requested Abraham to "send Lazarus" that he might be comforted by him (Lk. 16:24). Obviously, then, he still recognized Lazarus. He was also well aware of his brethren which yet remained on earth (Lk. 16:27,28). Neither of these men lost his identity simply because he died.

Third, death does not destroy memory. When the rich man begged for mercy Abraham said to him, "Son, remember . . ." (Lk. 16:25). He was told to recall the destitute state of Lazarus in life and compare it with his own of bountifulness. As there was no mercy extended to Lazarus by the rich man in life, there would be no mercy

extended to the rich man now. What an awful feeling this must have been to be able to remember the many opportunities he had to assist Lazarus yet failed to do so. Many will live in eternity . . . remembering what might have been.

Fourth, death does not destroy destiny. There are only two possible places of existence after death. One involves comfort; the other involves punishment (Lk. 16:25). There is a sharp and distinct contrast between the two so that once one is an occupant of one, he can never be an occupant of the other (Lk. 16:26). This eliminates the Catholic idea of "purgatory." There is no such middle ground.

Who separated these two men in these two states? It wasn't God. It wasn't Abraham. It was the two men themselves. One, through obedience and faithfulness, obtained a reward. The other, through disobedience, received "the wages of sin." Each person will one day occupy a place in one of these two realms. Which will it be for you? The choice is yours to make.

WOT

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE

Chuck Webster, Editorial

The Bible touches many different branches of knowledge. From one perspective, the Bible is a history book, for it records events that took place as many as 6,000 years ago and does so with remarkable accuracy. The Bible could be considered a book of science, because it discusses the origin of life and matter and other topics of scientific interest. Some might think of the Bible as a book of great literature, and rightfully so. Critics have hailed certain parts of the Bible as works of art. But, though these facts are true, thinking of the Bible simply as a book of history, science, or literature woefully understates the matter. At its very essence, the Bible is a book of salvation. It has as its goal the salvation of humanity. The beginning of Genesis sets the stage by describing man's *need* for redemption. The remainder of God's word tells the *story* of redemption--God's plan for offering salvation to the world. For several thousand years, God orchestrated human events to prepare the world for Jesus to become man and offer Himself as the ransom for all.

The Bible, then, is a book about redemption. It concerns itself with the details of how man's inadequacy to pay an awesome debt led God to pay the price for him. The study of redemption, indeed, has significant implications to Christians in our age.

The Fact of Redemption

The Bible is replete with references to our redemption. In Isaiah's beautiful messianic passage, he speaks of the atoning nature of the Lamb's sacrifice:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an

offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (53:10-12).

Paul writes of Christians' having "redemption through his blood" (Eph. 1:7; cf. Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12-14), stating clearly to the Ephesian elders that Christ purchased the church "with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

The most descriptive passage, perhaps, is in Peter's writings: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18,19).

Christians were not purchased with such perishable items as silver and gold--things which would soon mean nothing to their owners. The purchase price was Christ's blood, which, Peter reminds us, is of inestimable value. The word Peter uses (*lutroo*) means "to release on receipt of ransom; to redeem, liberate by payment of ransom; to liberate; to cause to be released to one's self by payment of a ransom; to redeem; to deliver: from evils of every kind, internal and external" (*Strong's*). The

idea is that of our being held in bondage to sin, and the price of our release (the blood of a perfect man) was far greater than any we could ever pay. The One (Jesus) who could pay the price, however, willingly did so and in so doing released us from prison. We capture this idea when we sing the song:

He paid a debt He did not owe,
I owe a debt I cannot pay;
I needed someone to take my sin away.
And now I sing a brand new song--
-Amazing Grace;
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.

This redemption concept finds its way into the work of almost every New Testament writer. For samples in John's writings, see Revelation 1:5; 5:6,9,12; 7:14; 12:11; 13:8.

The Implications of Redemption

Value is determined by an object's market value. In other words, its monetary value is what someone is willing to pay to obtain it. For that reason, Peter makes it clear that the purchase price for our redemption was not gold and silver--things that would one day lose their value. The world's wealthiest man would be helpless if asked to pay this great sum. All the riches of the world would be as pocket change if compared to the price that was ultimately paid: the "precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:19).

Peter's point is obvious: we were bought with a sum the value of which is unimaginable; therefore, we need to live in constant view of our value before God. In light of this, Peter tells us to "gird up the loins of your mind be sober," as "obedient children, not

fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:13-15). In other words, live righteous lives. Do not conform yourself to the world. Be different. Peter explains the basis upon which he demands such a radical difference: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with

corruptible things, . . ." (1 Pet. 1:18). We are to be different because our purchase price has been paid in full; we are now God's purchased possession. We must live worthy of our Owner. "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).

When the lifestyle of one of God's

children is inconsistent with the morality, integrity, or faithfulness the Bible demands, his problem is that he has forgotten his purchase price. One simple thought should be sufficient: remember the cross and see God's only begotten Son dying--*that* is our value in God's eyes. Then, in Paul's words, "walk worthy" of the price (Eph. 4:1). WOT

ARE BABIES BORN IN SIN?

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

The Bible does not teach, as some allege, that babies are born in sin. The idea that we all inherit the guilt of Adam's sin and are thus born lost is a tragic and false doctrine. The New Testament offers a plan of salvation through Christ, but not a word of it applies to how babies can be saved. The reason is that babies are SAFE. They are not in sin, and do not need to be saved. Should a baby happen to die, we should have no doubt that he or she is now awaiting our arrival in glory.

The verse most commonly used in proposing that babies are born in sin (the technical term for this is "Total Hereditary Depravity") is Psalm 51:5 where we read from David, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Please observe however, that David was speaking about his mother and not himself! The one who was in sin was his mother. I heard Garland Elkins recently say on this point, "It would be like saying, 'In drunkenness did my father beat me.' The one who was drunken was not the son, but the father."

What then was the sin of David's mother? We are not told. And yet, there is an interesting possibility which will challenge the thoughts of anyone who has seriously considered this passage in Psalm 51. This begins back in Deuteronomy 23:2. "A

bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord." This statement did not mean that these generations could not be in a right relationship with God, but there was nonetheless a cloud which hung over them. They could not be viewed with the full privileges of one without this penalty. Did you know that David was in such a line of ten generations? In Genesis 38 we read about the sinful relationship between Judah and Tamar. From their fornication was produced twins, Phares and Zara. David was a direct descendant of Phares. In fact, David was the tenth generation! Here is the genealogy: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king" (Matt. 1:1-6).

It cannot be proven that this is what David had in mind when he

made his statement in Psalm 51:5, and yet it makes an interesting possibility.

What we must remember, as we study the Bible with our friends, is that babies are not born in sin. Ezekiel 18:20 teaches that we only bear the guilt of our own sins: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Note further that David did not believe that babies were born in sin. Upon hearing that Bathsheba's son had died, David said, "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." One can hardly surmise that David had reference to his baby's being in torment.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." If these little children came into this world black with sin, Jesus would not encourage us to be like them in order to enter heaven's kingdom.

Babies are not born in sin. Babies are born free from sin. WOT

JESUS TAUGHT: THERE IS NO MIDDLE

Thomas B. Warren, Arlington, Texas

(originally published in *Jesus: The Lamb Who is a Lion*, printed by National Christian Press, 1988)

Jesus is widely misunderstood. Men misunderstand as to who He is. They also misunderstand as to what He taught and as to how He taught it.

Many people hold that Jesus taught that men are free to believe and do whatever they like (no matter how contradictory of how he taught) and still be pleasing to God. Such people hold that one may commit even such crimes as murder, rape, lying, stealing, adultery, et al. and be pleasing to God even while he refuses to repent of his sins. This notion is simply false. Jesus was not a "namby-pamby" teacher. He did not equivocate. He was not ambiguous. He never said to anyone, "Believe what you wish and do what you please--I will save you by my grace without regard to what you do or do not do"!

Yet men will say, "Jesus is so good--He will never allow anyone to be lost." Jesus is good, but it is not true that He is "goody-goody" (in the sense of allowing men to run roughshod over His teachings as if He were nothing but a mere man)! There are a number of statements made by Jesus which are recorded in the Sermon on the Mount which make this point very, very clear. Among these statements is the one recorded in Matthew 7:13,14, which reads as follows: "Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate and straightened is the way that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it" (American Standard Version).

The basic aim of this article is to "take a look" at the various elements of this teaching by Jesus.

I. Jesus Decisively Taught That There Is No Middle Inviter Between Himself And Satan.

1. The Bible plainly teaches the reality of both Jesus Christ and Satan (the devil).

(1) The reality of Jesus. The gospel according to John begins with the following words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. . .

. . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14, ASV).

Thus, there can be no doubt that the Bible plainly declares the reality of Jesus, the Word who became flesh. The Word was God (timeless existence, He always was God--without beginning). He became flesh (Jesus of Nazareth, born of the virgin Mary). When the Word became flesh, while remaining God, He became what He was not before--that is, He became flesh (man, John 1:14; 1 Tim. 2:5).

(2) The reality of the devil. Matthew's record makes clear that the devil really does exist and has the power to tempt. He tempted Jesus Himself (Matt. 4:1-11). The apostle Peter warns men in the following way: "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom stand fast in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:8,9).

2. The Bible teaches that there is no middle INVITER between Christ and Satan. During the period when the Law of Moses was in force for the Jews, God inspired Moses to teach Israel that they must choose between the only two alternatives: (a) a blessing or (b) a curse. To have the blessing, one must have the approval of God. To have the approval of God, one must obey ("hearken to") the instructions which God had given to him. To fail to hearken unto those instructions was to become the recipient of the curse (punishment for sin). See Deuteronomy 11:26-28.

Actually, Jesus does not merely "invite" (although He does do this); He commands men to submit to Him in faithful obedience to His word (Matt. 11:28-30; cf.: Heb. 5:8,9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 22:16).

There is really no ultimate inviter (to a way of life) to men other than Jesus Christ and the devil. While it is true that there are thousands of people who with regularity are inviting other people to accept this or that religion, it is nevertheless the case that every human being who urges another to accept some particular uses either the doctrine of

Christ or the doctrine of the devil in extending that invitation to others.

Each human being will--even must--accept either the invitation which Jesus Christ extends to men or the invitation which the devil extends to men. It is simply the case that there is no other ultimate inviter than these two. Every man will listen to and obey either Jesus Christ or Satan (Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Pet. 5:8).

II. Jesus Decisively Taught That There Is No Middle Message Between Truth And False Doctrine.

1. There is one--and only one--body of doctrine which is true. In Ephesians 4:4-6, the apostle Paul taught that there are seven "ones"--there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one baptism, and one body. The "one faith" is the one body of doctrine which is the gospel of Christ (the law of Christ, the word of God, the doctrine of Christ; et al.). Just as there is one--and only one--God, there is only--and only one--Son of God (Jesus Christ). And, just as there is one--and only one--Son of God, so there is one--and only one--body of doctrine (the faith, the gospel) which belief of and obedience to will save a man from his sins (Rom. 1:15-17; Mk. 16:15,16; Acts 2:22-47; 3:17-23).

2. Any religious doctrine other than the faith (the gospel of Christ) is powerless to save anyone. No mere human doctrine--no matter how sincere and conscientious may be the believer of it--can save the soul of any man. Every man who fails to obey the gospel of Christ will be eternally lost (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Only those who do the will of God will be saved (Matt. 7:21-22; 24-27). No man who does not do the will of Christ has the right to call Him Lord (Lk. 6:46; cf. Acts 3:22,23).

3. There is no middle message between the gospel and false doctrine. Either one will believe and obey the gospel of Christ or else he will obey some false doctrine, be it atheistic, agnostic, or some human religious doctrine.

(1) Jesus wants every man to recognize--live by--the gospel of Christ as the one and only body of doctrine the

obedience to which will save his soul. Jesus wants every man to understand that no mere human doctrine (one which has its source from men and not from God) can save the soul of anyone.

(2) On the contrary, Satan (the devil) wants every man to reject the gospel of Christ as too narrow, too "old foggy," too restrictive, too "fun-killing," and so on and on. This is why so many people say such things as, "Every person has a right to his own belief. If I am sincere in my religion, Christ will save me no matter what I believe and do in religion." But such is simply not true (see 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Heb. 5:8,9; Rev. 2:10; Matt. 7:13-27; et al.). Satan wants men to accept and follow mere human doctrines. He wants men to think that the doctrines which have been invented and preached by various denominations are just as powerful to save as is the true gospel of Christ. He wants men to think that when men draw conclusions as to what the will of God is, God will accept what they believe and do, even if their conclusions contradict what the Bible really does teach. The devil wants all men to believe that they are simply FREE to believe and do what they themselves want to do in religion. He wants men to think that they will be judged (at the Judgment) by their own interpretations of the Bible (even if their interpretations contradict Bible teachings in regards to obligatory matters) and not what the Bible itself really does teach. That all of this is false is made clear by the following passages of Scripture: (a) Galatians 1:6-9 makes clear that NO ONE can teach another (different) gospel (from the gospel of Christ) without being anathema--God allows no one to PERVERT His word, (b) John 12:48 teaches that men will be judged by the word of God--not by some human doctrine, and (c) Revelation 22:18,19 makes clear that God will not tolerate either adding to or taking from His word.

All men are amenable to the gospel (law) of Christ (the one faith), and, thus no man can reject it with impunity.

There is no middle message between the message of Christ (the gospel) and the message of Satan (any message other than the gospel of Christ).

III. Jesus Decisively Taught That There Is No Middle Gate Between The Narrow Gate and the Wide Gate.

In the preceding material, it has been shown (a) that there is no middle inviter (of man) between Christ and Satan and (b) that there is no middle message

between the truth (the gospel) and false doctrine. This means that every man must answer (obey) the "invitation" of either Christ or Satan--there is no other inviter to respond to. It also means that every man must obey either the truth or false doctrine--there is no other message (as pertains to the soul) which man can obey.

Now, in the third place, it must be noted that there is no middle gate between the narrow gate and the wide gate.

The "narrow gate" is that by which one leaves the world and enters into Christ (into the body of Christ, the church which Jesus purchased with His own blood, Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:22,23). One is enabled to "go through" this narrow gate by--and only by--favorably responding to the one "inviter" (Jesus) by opening the one message (the gospel). The culminating act (following the hearing, learning, believing the gospel, repenting of one's sins, and confessing the name of Christ) is to be baptized. No one can accidentally enter in at the narrow gate; one must learn and obey the truth--the one and only truth which is the gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:4-6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:15-17; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; et al.). It is those--and only those--who gladly receive the word (the truth, the gospel) who can enter in at the narrow gate (Acts 2:22-47; especially 2:41; cf. John 3:3-5; Gal. 3:26,27). It is only the narrow gate which provides entrance to the "straightened way" (the living of the Christian life) which--if faithfully followed--will lead to everlasting life (Rev. 2:10).

The "wide gate" is entered when men sin (that is, by violating the word of God, 1 Jn. 3:4; Rom. 3:23; Isa. 59:1,2). Unlike the narrow gate (which requires that a man do what is specifically required by the one message of Christ), one can enter through the "wide gate" by countless ways of thinking and/or doing. Any disobedience of the word of God or any obedience of false religious doctrine will cause one to enter in at the wide gate. The wide gate provides the entrance into a life of ungodliness--it provides the entrance into "the broad way" which leads to everlasting punishment.

There is no middle gate between the narrow and the wide gate. Every man either will enter in at the narrow gate or at the wide gate.

IV. Jesus Decisively Taught That There Is No Middle Way Between The Straightened Way and The Broad Way.

1. If one has entered the narrow gate (been baptized--as a penitent believer in Christ--into Christ), then he has become a Christian (a child of God, one saved from his sins by the blood of Christ, Gal. 3:26,27; Rom. 6:3-5). This means that he then begins the walk down the "straitened way" which leads to eternal life (heaven).

On the other hand, if one has entered in at the wide gate, then he has entered into a life of sin (he has become a child of the devil, one lost in his sins, separated from God). Thus, he is then walking down the broad way which leads to everlasting punishment (hell, Matt. 25:46).

2. To walk in the straitened way involves commitment to Jesus Christ, to truth and righteousness. Jesus made clear that for any child of God to be faithful to Him (Jesus), he must "take up his cross daily" and follow after Him (Lk. 9:23). This means that, to be faithful to Jesus, one must be willing to pay any price in order to be obedient to the will of Christ (Lk. 9:24). The apostle Paul made this clear when he said (in the face of great danger to himself) that he was ready not only to go to prison but also to die in order to be faithful to Christ (Acts 21:13). Jesus clearly taught that to be faithful to Christ one must love Him (Jesus) more than one's spouse, one's parents, one's children, one's possessions, and one's own life (Lk. 14:25,26). This all means that there are simply some things which one cannot do and be pleasing to God. For example, one cannot (a) love, espouse, and follow (obey) false doctrine, (b) do that which is not authorized by the gospel (2 John 9-11), (c) be involved in the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8) and still walk in the straitened way of Matthew 7:13,14. One must espouse and obey the truth and only the truth. One must do in religion only that which is authorized by the gospel of Christ. One must be involved in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23; cf. 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

There is no middle way between the straitened way and the broad way. The broad way allows being involved in the espousal of false doctrine, doing that which is not authorized by the sacred Scriptures, being involved in the works of the flesh, being members of the "churches" (religious bodies) which were not purchased by the blood of Christ (denominations).

Every man on earth is walking either in the straitened way or the broad way. There is simply no way for a man to walk

in between the two. There is no middle way between the straitened way and the broad way.

V. Jesus Decisively Taught That There Is No Middle Destiny Between Eternal Life And Eternal Punishment.

Every man who enters in at the narrow gate and walks faithfully down the straitened way will have eternal life in heaven with God, Christ, and all the saved.

Every man who enters in at the wide gate and walks down the broad way will be cast into eternal punishment (hell) when his life is over.

Jesus taught that at the Judgment evil men “shall go away into eternal punishment” but that righteous men “shall go away into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). In Mark 9:43-48, Jesus made clear that the only two eternal destinies into which one may go are life (heaven) and hell.

A passage which marvelously sums up this matter of the possible eternal destinies of men is John 5:28,29. This passage says, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of the life;

and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation” (KJV).

There is no middle DESTINY between the destiny of eternal life and the destiny of eternal punishment.

The lesson is easily summed up in these five affirmations: (1) There is no middle INVITER between Christ and Satan, (2) there is no middle MESSAGE between the truth and false doctrine, (3) there is no middle GATE between the narrow and wide gate, (4) there is no middle WAY between the straitened way and the broad way, and (5) there is no middle DESTINY between eternal life and eternal punishment. WOT

YOUNG PEOPLE CAN BE SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Mark Lindley, Baldwin, Mississippi

Youth is a beautiful time of life. It is a time when one’s whole life lies before him—a world full of experiences and opportunities. During these early years as one looks to the future, he should realize that one of the greatest opportunities of life is to be a spiritual leader. This opportunity is not one that is available only to elders in the church, but even young people (in their own way) can be spiritual leaders. Preachers and teachers often emphasize the need for those who are older to be examples to the younger, but the youth of the church can also exert a powerful influence on others for good. The church needs strong young people!

Throughout Biblical history, there have been young people who have taken a firm stand for God. One of the greatest kings ever to rule God’s people was Josiah, who began his reign over Judah when he was eight years old (2 Chron. 34:1). At the time Josiah began his reign, God’s people had become idolatrous. But young Josiah was committed to the Lord and did not tolerate idolatry in Judah and Jerusalem. Observe what is written of him, “For in the eighth year of his reign, **while he was yet young**, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images” (2 Chron. 34:3; emphasis added). It was no accident that the Holy Spirit guided the inspired writer to record the words, “while he was yet young.” Yes, as a young man Josiah was very zealous in bringing restoration to the people of God.

He cleansed Judah of her idolatry, and “all his days” the people of Israel “departed not from following the Lord” (2 Chron. 34:33). Josiah did not reason that he was “too young” to be a spiritual leader or accomplish great things for the Lord. What a great example Josiah is for all young people today! He saw grand opportunities to serve God, seized those opportunities, and was one of the most righteous leaders in history. It is written of him, “And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and will all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him” (2 Kng. 23:25).

Timothy is also a young man who was a strong, spiritual leader. Though he was not a king like Josiah, his spiritual leadership qualities were recognized by Paul, and he became a mighty co-worker with the apostle. Not only did Paul see great potential in Timothy, but also the brethren of Lystra and Iconium saw such potential as well. Luke recorded that Timothy “was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:2). Paul expressed his confidence in Timothy in writing to the church at Philippi, “For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel” (Phil. 2:20-22). Timothy, as a young man, joined with Paul in the Lord’s work and never looked back! He

proved himself to be a true, spiritual leader.

God is not waiting for young people to be the “church of tomorrow”; rather, He wants young people to be outstanding, spiritual examples in their youth. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Young people can be great, spiritual examples by living pure, moral lives (2 Tim. 2:22); ministering to the needs of others in the church (cf. Phil. 2:20,21); taking an active role in evangelism (Mk. 16:15); standing for the truth (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3); and developing abilities in leading in worship (e.g., leading singing, praying and preaching). These are only some of the many areas in which young people can serve as spiritual leaders in the kingdom of God.

Those who are older in the faith can be great examples of spiritual leaders to the younger generation, but we should never overlook the tremendous impact young people can have in the church. We should teach our youth that they are vitally important in the Lord’s kingdom. Who knows how many young people there are within the church with the spiritual capabilities of Josiah and Timothy? There are many young people who already are accomplishing grand goals in the Lord’s church, but with our encouragement we just might find more of them. Indeed, young people can be spiritual leaders! WOT

DAVID'S THRONE

David R. Pharr, Rock Hill, South Carolina

One of the marvels of the Bible is that all parts fit perfectly into the whole. There are no loose ends. One demonstration of this is in the fulfillment of prophecies pertaining to David's Throne. The uncertainties of history seemed for centuries to overthrow the promise, but it was ultimately and fully realized in Christ. James referred to this prophecy and then gave the only possible explanation of why and how it was fulfilled: "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:15-18). Tracing these Divine assurances as they parallel what seemed to be historical roadblocks assures us of the unfailing purposes of God.

Through Nathan the prophet, the Lord promised that David's seed, one "which shall proceed out of thy bowels," would be set up as king. Further, He said, "I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:12-13). This was part of a dual prophecy which pointed immediately to Solomon, but more especially to Christ.

Later prophets understood this promise as an oath. The 89th Psalm says, "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven" (vv. 35-37; cf. vv. 3,4). Again, in Psalm 132:11, "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne."

David began to reign in about 1055 B.C. His royal line continued through Solomon and Rehoboam over the United Kingdom and after them over the Kingdom of Judah until around 595 B.C. The Davidic dynasty survived for around 460 years. This is impressive, except for the fact that it had been promised, even with an oath, that his seed would be established on his throne forever. From the Babylonian captivity to the New Testament era, almost five centuries, the seed royal appeared to be no longer royal; none sat on David's throne.

Directly related to this, there is an interesting prediction in Jeremiah 22:28-

30 concerning King Coniah (also known as Jeconiah and Jehoiachin). "No man of his seed shall prosper sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." Zedekiah was descended from David and was on the throne for a time after Coniah, as a puppet king of Nebuchadnezzar, but Coniah was the last king of the lineage appointed by Jehovah. Matthew's genealogy of Christ lists Coniah (Jechonias) "about the time they were carried away to Babylon" (Matt. 1:11,12). According to Jeremiah's plain declaration, no one descended from David through Coniah would ever prosper on the throne in Judah. This is a fatal blow to premillennialism which imagines that in the millennium Jesus, who descended through Coniah, will occupy the throne in Judea (Jerusalem).

The impoverished state of David's progeny for five centuries is the backdrop for numerous bold prophecies which uncompromisingly uphold Jehovah's promise/oath concerning David's seed. Keep in mind that these prophecies were given at a time when the house of David seemed forgotten. Amos, for one example, wrote, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is *fallen*, and close up the *breaches* thereof, and I will raise up his *ruins*, and I will build it as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11, emphases added). This is the very prophecy that James quoted and applied to Christ (Acts 15:15-18).

Isaiah foresaw the end of the Judean throne. When, therefore, he reiterated the promises concerning the royal line, he used the figure of new growth, foretelling Christ in the figure of a "shoot" (ASV), a "stem," a "Branch" out of Jesse (David's father) (Isa. 11:1,10). In the figure, we might imagine the family of Jesse (and David) as a seemingly dead stump, cut down and left to be forgotten. But a stem, a Branch, would grow up out of the stump.

Jeremiah actually lived during the time when Judah as a kingdom ceased to exist, but his prophecies do not doubt that God would "cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David." He even wrote, "For thus saith the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit upon

the throne of the house of Israel" (Jer. 33:15-18; cf. 23:5). Remember that Jeremiah knew there would never again be one of the royal line on the throne in Judah (Jer. 22:30). Yet inspiration did not hesitate to reaffirm the promise to David.

This was also the scope of the vision of Zechariah, a prophet of the post-exile period. Nothing in his historical circumstances suggested that there might ever be a return to the kind of monarchy such as had lasted from David to Coniah. Instead he saw that "the man whose name is The BRANCH" would be a king/priest, fulfilled in Christ who is King and Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Zech. 6:12,13; cf. Psa. 110:1,4; Heb. 7:1ff).

The New Testament opens with the affirmation that Christ is "the son of David" (Matt. 1:1). Mary was told that God would "give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33).

It was in Peter's Pentecost sermon that it is explained how that all of these prophecies came together in Christ. First, Peter showed how David had foretold Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:25-29; Psa. 16:9,10). Thus Peter could tie the prophecies together and reach this dramatic and indisputable conclusion: "Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ. . . " (vv. 30,31). Christ is now on David's throne, "being at the right hand of God exalted" (vv. 33-35).

Old Testament prophecies were often framed in language and figures familiar to the people of that period. It was never intended, however, that David's seed would have an everlasting throne on earth. If such had been intended, we would have to confess that the prophecies failed. But they did not fail! All are realized in the **King of kings and Lord of lords.**

WHAT IS VALUABLE?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

We often hear the proverbial statement, "The best things in life are free." Don't you believe it! Day by day men prowl through the giveaway departments of life looking for something for nothing. They are trying to find worth without work, but such cannot be found. The best things in life are not free!

What is it that you consider to be of great value in this life? Some people's values are out of harmony with the Scriptures. Who would question but that money does have value, but who would think that its value is limitless? Money can build a house, but not a home. It can provide amusement, but not happiness. Money does have value, but its value is limited.

No man is so poor as he who has only money! "There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing" (Prov. 13:7). Paul tells us that a man can have nothing, and yet possess all things (2 Cor. 6:10).

There are some things which are far more valuable than money! "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and turmoil with it" (Prov. 15:16). "Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife" (Prov. 17:1). "Better is a little with righteousness than great income with injustice" (Prov. 16:8).

Honesty and honor are more valuable than money. The Bible tells us that a poor man is better than a liar (Prov. 19:22). Some will trade integrity for income, but a man's integrity is far more precious than all the money in the world.

"A good name is to be more desired than great riches" (Prov. 22:1). It's all right to give up money to make character, but it's wrong to give up character to make money!

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:36,37). He who sins for profit, doesn't really profit from his sin!

The peace that comes to those who love the Lord cannot be weighed by man's standard of values, nor can a price tag of dollars and cents be put on the redemption of a human soul. These are things which mean so much here and so much in the hereafter!

WOT

The Words of Truth

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THE WORDS OF Truth

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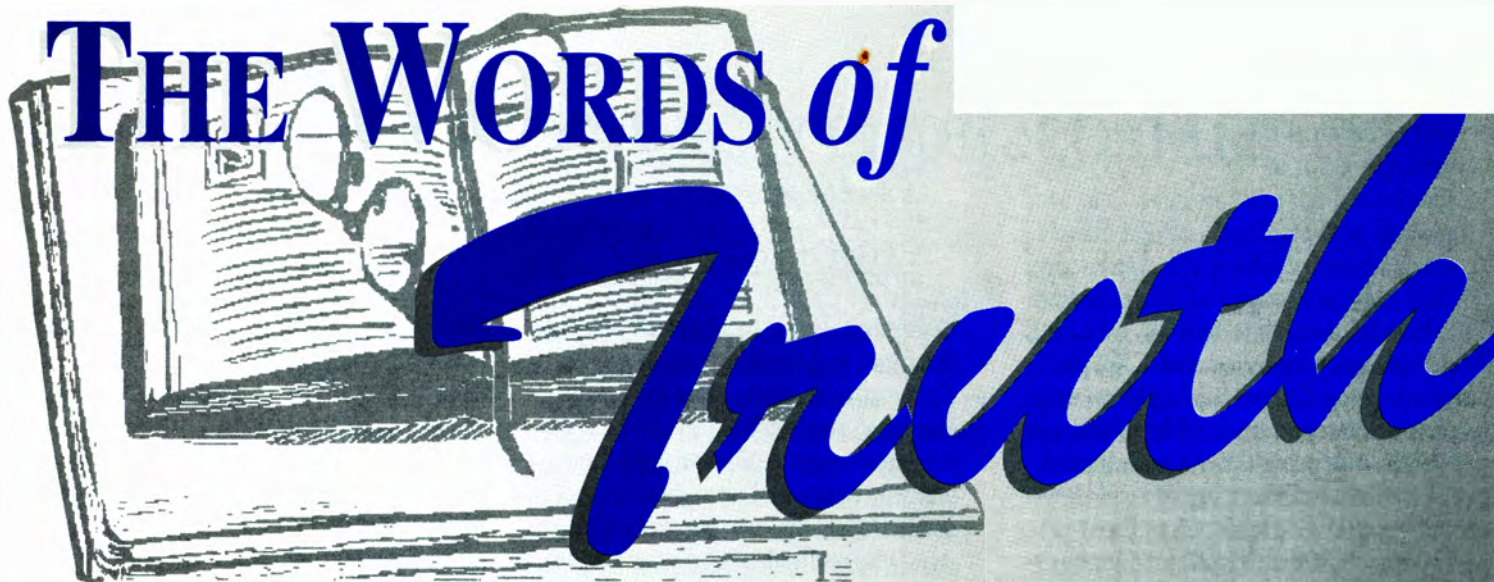
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THE WORDS of Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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GOSPEL MEETINGS ARE STILL EFFECTIVE AND STILL COMMANDED BY GOD

Barry Grider, Austin, Texas

Some say the age of the gospel meeting is over. Well, someone needs to pinch me, because I thought we were still living in the Christian dispensation. To my knowledge, Christ has not yet come to reward the faithful and judge the wicked. If that is true, the age of the gospel meeting is not over. Jesus Christ commanded, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). As long as the world stands the gospel must be preached, for it is the means whereby the lost become saved (Rom. 1:16). Whenever or wherever the gospel is preached, a gospel meeting takes place. What are the benefits of a gospel meeting?

Refreshment. The faithful child of God loves to worship his heavenly Father, hear the word proclaimed, and fellowship with his brethren. A gospel meeting provides us with these opportunities. David wrote, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for thee, O God" (Psa. 42:1; NASV). A Christian cannot imagine forsaking such opportunities for blessings.

Revival. While denominations may experience revival, they do not have gospel meetings, because they are in religious error. On the contrary, a true gospel meeting will always have revival. The weary, lethargic, discouraged child of God needs to be revived. The psalmist declared, "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Psa. 85:6). A gospel meeting will help revive our souls and so with the songwriter we can proclaim, "Hallelujah, thine the glory, revive us again."

Resurrection. Some congregations and many individuals need more than revival--they need resurrection. Those who need resurrection are those who are dead. In Revelation 3:1, Jesus spoke to the congregation at Sardis and exclaimed, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." A gospel meeting can aid in breathing renewed spiritual life into a congregation or individual who is spiritually dead.

Restoration. Some brethren need to be

restored or brought back into fellowship with God and their brethren. Like the prodigal son (Luke 15) they have wandered away from their heavenly Father. A gospel meeting is a good time to remember such individuals and pray that the gospel message will once more touch their hearts and that "chords that were broken, will vibrate once more." During a gospel meeting, we should seek to restore the erring (Jam. 5:20). **Redemption.** Since the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16), a gospel meeting will present God's plan for man's redemption. It gives Christians an opportunity to invite their friends and neighbors to come so that they might have an opportunity to hear the message of the cross and salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

A gospel meeting helps meet the most vital needs of a person. It helps to address spiritual maladies and gives the proper prescription to cure them. Let us resolve to do our part to encourage the success of our gospel meeting. What a blessing it will be!

WOT

IMPOSSIBILITY OF APOSTASY?

A STUDY OF 2 PETER 2:20-22

Chuck Webster, Editorial

The form of election taught by Augustine and expanded and popularized by Calvin has led to many gross misunderstandings of scripture, not the least of which is the widespread, yet hotly debated, doctrine of eternal security (otherwise known as “Final perseverance of the saints” or “Once saved, always saved”). If the fundamental teaching of Calvinism is true, i.e., all are born totally depraved and God’s sovereignty is manifested by His arbitrarily and unconditionally electing some for salvation and the rest for condemnation, then the other tenets must likewise be true: Jesus must have died only for the elect, these elect will not be able to resist the Spirit’s call, and naturally *all* of the elect will finally persevere. According to this theology, if one is of the elect chosen before the foundation of the world, he *must* be saved; it is inconceivable that one whom God chose should be lost. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* puts it concisely:

They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither usually nor finally fall away from the state of grace: but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

Some have said that a page of the Bible can scarcely be found that does not refute this doctrine; it is certainly true that every book overturns it (some of the more notable passages are Matt. 13; Gal. 5:4; and Heb. 6:4-6). No biblical passage, however, is any clearer than 2 Peter 2:20-22, where Peter unreservedly states that a child of God can fall from grace:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the

beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

In this text we see three facts which, when taken together, indisputably sound the death knell for this doctrine.

Furthermore, since Calvinism cannot stand without the validity of each of its tenets, the entire system falls.

Those under consideration once were faithful children of God. In the context Peter is discussing false teachers, but he is clearly describing teachers within the church: “. . . there shall be false teachers among you” (2:1); “they feast *with* you” (2:13); they “have *forsaken* the right way, and are gone astray” (2:15) (all emp. added). But the undeniable evidence is that Peter describes them as people who “have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2:20). The word translated “escaped” is used only three times in the New Testament and each time by Peter in this book to refer to Christians. He is writing to those who “have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (1:1), and have “*escaped* the corruption that is in the world through lust” (1:4). He refers to Christians also as those who “were clean *escaped* from them who live in error” (2:18). Both of these are clear references to Christians. Peter’s statement in verse 20 also obviously refers to believers. The statement is almost identical to his reference to the believers in his greeting: these false teachers had “*escaped* the pollutions of the world.” In describing the

“knowledge” through which these people had escaped the world, Peter uses a pivotal Greek word. Zodhiates writes about this word: “It is more intensive than *gnosis*, . . . because it expresses a more thorough participation in the acquiring of knowledge on the part of the learner. In the New Testament, it often refers to knowledge which very powerfully influences the form of religious life, a knowledge laying claim to personal involvement” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, p. 624). It appears that Peter through inspiration anticipated that some would teach the impossibility of apostasy and intentionally used incontrovertible language. He is clearly referring to people who were God’s children. **Children of God who were once faithful can lose their souls.** Peter writes that it is possible for these Christians once again to be “entangled” in the pollutions of the world and “overcome” (2:20). The word translated “overcome” means “to be defeated by or to succumb to a person or thing” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 349). Guy N. Woods made this comment: “The word ‘entangled’ suggests the figure of fishes entrapped in a net. Though these men boasted of their freedom, they were, in reality, like fish entangled in a net, the helpless captives of their own enticements, entrapped by the very bait which they dangled before others” (*Commentary on 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude*, p. 177). The language Peter uses here is similar to that used by the Hebrew writer, who refers to the possibility of apostasy of “those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost And have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:4,5). In easily discernible language Peter is describing the

possibility of one of God's children going back into the world.

If a child of God is overcome by the world, the end is worse than the beginning. Calvinists assert that it is possible to lose the joy of one's salvation, but not the salvation itself. If that were true, then why would Peter write that the "latter end is worse with them than the beginning"? According to their teaching, if a believer fell away from the joy of his salvation, at least he would one day be saved in heaven. Not so, according to Peter: "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they

have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2:21). The axiom, "with greater knowledge comes greater responsibility," finds its origin in scripture (cf. Lk. 12:47,48). Those who became Christians and then fell back into the world will be beaten with "many stripes." Peter closes his discussion with a vivid illustration about animals which were the most repulsive to people in his day (cf. Matt. 7:6). He obviously wanted to impress upon the minds of his readers God's abhorrence of apostasy.

If the Calvinistic notion of eternal

security is false, and it is possible for one of God's "elect" to fall away and lose his salvation, then the underlying premise is likewise false: God has *not* unconditionally predetermined certain individuals to be part of the elect and the rest to be lost. Calvinism, then, crumbles. As Peter clearly shows, it is possible for a child of God to go back into the world. God has not predetermined *individuals* to be saved, but rather He has predetermined the *class*; i.e, all faithful members of His church will one day be saved. Man's free will remains. WOT

FUTURE REFLECTIONS

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

Nostradamus made ominous prophecies about July 1999, but the month came and went just like the prognosticator. Life continues despite dire predictions about 2000 arriving to find a computerized world (it got here without a glitch). Many other proofs could be offered which would only underscore man's inability to forecast the future.

However, Christians are blessed with clear information about the future. As we consider future reflections, two facts are striking and relevant: 1) We are closer than we have ever been and 2) It is later than it has ever been.

First of all, as Christians we are closer than we have ever been! The cosmic countdown marches on, and only the Father knows how close we are to our reward. Every step into another day is a step closer to the realization of our salvation. Romans 13:11 says, "And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed" (NASB).

Knowing it is nearer should make our light clearer. The verses that follow urge us: "The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing

and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:12-14). Donning the armor of light means refraining from the sinful deeds of darkness.

We are steadily moving toward a divine appointment. As we look into our future, we must remember we may be planning a house we will never finish. We may be making plans to take a trip we will never take because the Lord has other "travel plans" arranged for us.

We are closer than we have ever been to our heavenly home. For now we eagerly wait and anticipate, but the day is coming when we will celebrate. We are closer than we have ever been in our lives to that moment of discovery, when we know for the first time and forever the truth behind the lyrics, "Heaven will surely be worth it all."

But secondly, it is later than it has ever been. We have less time to accomplish our mission. Jesus was painfully aware of the brevity of life, saying to his disciples in John 9:4,5: "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. While I

am in the world, I am the Light of the world." It was true for Jesus and it is true for us: the time to shine is right now while we are still in this world.

People have less time to make their hearts right with the Lord. I used to visit a certain man in an attempt to help him see the urgency of submitting to Christ. He would always say he was going to obey the gospel someday, but he just wasn't ready yet. Then one day, still in his forties, he died. A relative of his told me he had been looking forward to the release of the new version of Zelda, a video game. He had been counting the days until it came out, and died two weeks before it was released to the stores. He was dying to play a video game but he failed to get ready for dying. Even though we cannot reach everyone we must still teach everyone we possibly can that time is running out.

Let us remind our brethren to be faithful and courageous, for we are closer than we have ever been. And let us present to a lost world the plea of the crucified Carpenter who wants to build something beautiful out of the broken lives of sinners. Knowing it is later than it has ever been, we can help turn the tide of tomorrow's tears into the joy of sweet forgiveness. WOT

JESUS AND FREEDOM

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

The beauty spot of the book of Galatians is 2:20, wherein Paul makes it clear that the crucified Savior is the heart and core of his sojourn upon the earth. Christ's living in me was the theme song of that wonderful Christian's life. So should our emphasis be!

Into the heart of Jesus,
Deeper and deeper I go
Longing to know the reason
Why He should love me so.

In the third section of Colossians we read of the Christ-centered life that demands the best of us:

- (a) Those raised with the Redeemer seek things above.
- (b) They set their affections on heavenly matters.
- (c) They cease living in worldly pursuits.
- (d) They do all to the glory of God.
- (e) They bend to the authority of Christ.
- (f) They do not desire popularity on earth.
- (g) They fill their lives with spiritual beauty.

In view of the certified gospel of chapter one and the crucified life of chapter two, it is easy to see that the third stanza of Galatians speaks of the coveted relationship! From Genesis 22:18 onward all Jews desired to be Abraham's seed. However, by the first century Judaism had perverted this beautiful promise. They claimed to be Abraham's seed through whom the Gentiles had to pass in order to be redeemed. Judaizers boldly bound the Law of Moses, begun at Sinai, upon the Gentiles. The discussion of Acts 15 dealt with this biased viewpoint and made it clear that all men stood on level ground at the foot of the Cross. In Acts 10:34,35 and Romans 10:12 we are clearly taught that before God there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. Truly, anyone, in any nation, that obeys the Lord and works righteousness is acceptable unto heaven! In the brilliant finish of Galatians, chapter three, we

learn these graphic points:

- (1) Through the system of faith, the gospel, we become children of God.
 - (2) When baptized into Christ we are "clothed upon" with Jesus.
 - (3) There is no respect of persons in the Lord.
 - (4) If we belong to Christ we are Abraham's seed.
 - (5) This makes us heirs of God!
- Christ, not the Jewish nation, was Abraham's seed. This clear statement in 3:16 forever ruined the prejudicial view of Judaism and made access to Christianity personal and individual. It was no longer inherited by physical birth but by the new birth of John 3:5. One of the best Bible arguments on this distinction between old and new covenants is Hebrews 8:6-13. Paul's inspired writing in chapter three of Galatians was devastating material that crushed Judaism.

Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

In the fourth chapter of this noble treatise, we have perhaps the grandest of all Bible allegories. Two mountains, two women, two sons, and two covenants dominate this terrific section of Holy Scripture. There will never be a deeper, richer, fuller--yes, more descriptive analysis of Judaism and Christianity than these marvelous 31 verses. This section is similar to Romans 9-11 in its depth and purpose. Many of the Jews misunderstood the proper relationship to Abraham. It was not enough to be tied to that notable patriarch only in a fleshly, physical sense. Abraham not only was attached to Sarah and Isaac but also to Hagar and Ishmael. The former arrangement was a spiritual matter that providentially had to do with seed that would result in a Savior. However, the second arrangement dealt with physical matters that resulted in Hagar and Ishmael being cast out as bondslaves

rather than heirs! Later, as Judaism waned and Christianity came upon the scene, there would be a decline in the importance of the arrangement that emanated from Sinai and the exceeding glory that would be attached to Jerusalem, Pentecost, and the gospel era.

Paul was not their enemy for telling them the truth (4:16) because the fulness of time that caused God to send His son (4:4) had come and Judaism had been superseded and replaced by the more excellent glory of the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:6-16). The law God gave through angels to Moses (3:19; Psa. 68:17) could not favorably compare to the covenant sealed by the blood of Christ (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 13:20). This also was a death-blow to Judaism and one of Galatians' most pertinent points. Moses' law did its work in checking sin until the system of faith, authored by Christ, arrived (Gal. 3:24), but under the banner of the Lord--the gospel--both Jew and Gentile must answer today! As the eloquent and piercing fifth chapter opens we see the buoyant liberty Christianity brings. It must not be used as a cloak for sin (5:13) but it does make us free indeed (Jn. 8:36). Yes, free to do the will of the Lord as we crucify our own desires and daily take up our cross to follow the Redeemer. In this notable section of Galatians we have a vivid contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit set forth in verses 19-24. There is to be a vast chasm between the camp of the saints and the den of iniquity. We cannot allow sin in our lives and the devil's dainties to be our provisions. We must take a definite stand for purity, integrity, and righteousness as we live soberly and godly in this present world (Tit. 2:12).

Sin hath no more its cruel dominion,
Walking in newness of life I am free
True freedom can only come from Christ!

THE KINGDOM MUST BE FIRST

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

In the middle of the greatest sermon ever preached, Jesus commanded, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). It was then, and is now, one of the most neglected commands disregarded by an overwhelming majority who seek something else first (Phil. 2:21; 1 Cor. 1:22). But, the Kingdom of Christ is of primary importance.

Jesus emphasizes the Kingdom's importance particularly in Matthew 13, where He utters several parables about it. In the midst of this teaching He explains to His disciples the meaning of one of them (36-43). In it, He clearly delineates all the components of the parable of the tares. Set in opposition to each other are the wheat and the tares. With the rest of the New Testament, this parable emphasizes that there is but one institution which is eternally important so there is only one place it can occupy in the hearts of any who desire to be pleasing to God. As Jesus said, the Kingdom must be first.

It must be first because of what it is. Around 600 B.C., an eighteen-year-old young man of royal descent found himself in Babylonian Captivity with other princes. In addition to other divinely-ordained insights, Daniel "even understood all kinds of visions and dreams" (Dan. 1:17). In chapter two, Daniel prophesies the rise and fall of four empires-- Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome. In the time of the fourth kingdom would arise another Kingdom, one which would never be destroyed but would itself endure forever (Dan. 2:44). Daniel describes an indestructible, irreplaceable, invincible, infinite institution!

But what is the Kingdom to which Daniel refers? It is discussed in Matthew 16:13-19, where Jesus speaks of the church and the Kingdom as being synonymous. Getting into the Kingdom requires the same things as getting into

the church. As only those in the church will be saved, so it will be with those in the Kingdom. Therefore, the Kingdom is the blood-bought institution of Christ (Acts 20:28), the precious body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23), the very family of God (1 Tim. 5:1,2), and the only vine producing the right kind of fruit (Jn. 15:1-4).

Because the church is a Kingdom, it has a specific King (Christ), territory (the church), citizens (Christians), and laws (doctrine of Christ). The Kingdom is no ordinary or earthly-devised institution! When a Christian's actions say that he can take or leave the church, that he does not want to be involved, that he does not want to follow Christ and His rules, he says he does not care about or realize what the kingdom is. **It must be first because of Whose it is.** The Kingdom belongs to Christ (Acts 20:28), and it is a divine and heavenly Kingdom (Jn. 18:36). It exists in this world, but its authority is in Heaven. For that reason it should be first in the Christian's life.

If a stranger gives you a list of instructions to follow, you would probably pay very little attention. It might mean more if a neighbor or friend gave you that list of things to do. If it was your spouse, you would heed it even more. The *consequences* would increase if under threat of penalty, a policeman or government official gave out the list of things to follow. But the list of instructions Christians have for their responsibilities in the Kingdom was not given by a stranger, a friend, a loved one, or even an earthly authority. The Kingdom belongs to Christ--the one who saves man by His precious blood, who loves him with His penetrating love, and leads him with His perfect Word. Since it belongs to Christ, the Kingdom must be first! **It must be first because of why it exists.** Consider the reasons for its existence:

God created the Kingdom as a safe

haven for all who wish to avoid perishing (Jn. 3:5). The only good seeds in the field of the world are the children of the kingdom. One not in the Kingdom is a worthless, harmful weed. God created the Kingdom to benefit the individual who wants personal salvation.

God created the Kingdom as a life-saving station. The children of the Kingdom are to broadcast the good seed sown by Christ. One saved from sin cannot selfishly keep that to himself. Jesus needs laborers in His harvest (Lk. 10:2). He commands all His children to teach the world (Mk. 16:15).

God created the Kingdom as a hospital for the hurting (Jam. 1:27; Gal. 6:10). The primary purpose of the church is *not* to be a social service agency, but we are to be benevolent and help as many needy people as we can. We can then use such opportunities to introduce the gospel to these people in need. Jesus often healed the sick and fed the hungry before He taught them the gospel. Why would He change His approach in His Kingdom? He thus warns that seeing without helping the needy is a practical demonstration of "faith without works" (Jam. 2:14-18).

God created the Kingdom as a way to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21). When the church, with its members, follows the laws and fulfills the purposes of the Kingdom, He is glorified. Basically, the Kingdom exists to meet physical needs, to save souls, and to build up the saved. When we fail to engage ourselves in these areas of responsibility, we are not putting the Kingdom first. The areas of responsibility outlined by the Lord are not like a buffet bar from which churches can pick the one or two that suit them. Likewise, an individual in a church striving to do all its God-given work may not personally be contributing to the work. Just being in a congregation that is working will not automatically punch one's ticket to

heaven. If the individual is not producing fruit, he will be cut off the vine (Jn. 15:2); if he is not laboring in the vineyard, he cannot inherit eternal life (Matt. 21:31). If an individual or church loses sight of the mission, he or it must repent or completely disassociate from Christ (Rev. 3:14-19). **It must be first because of where it is going.** Paul indicates that it is going to be turned by Christ over to God in "the end" (1 Cor. 15:24). While one lives, he must work for the King. Every faithful Christian says with Christ, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (Jn. 9:4). Every person on earth is given one life, one set of talents and opportunities. Once life is over for a person, the time for labor is past. But there will come a

resurrection morning (Jn. 5:28,29). Then, all will stand before the King (Matt. 25:31-34). 1 Corinthians 15 reveals that the Kingdom will be delivered to God, but not all in the Kingdom will be saved. The weeds will be separated from the wheat. Earlier in Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of a man who sowed good seed in his field only to have enemies sabotage his efforts by planting weeds among the wheat. It is said that a certain weed known as darnell grass looked just like wheat until it was full-grown. By then, when it stood tall, its weight caused the wheat to wilt over. You could only tell the two apart by their fruit. That is what Jesus warned (Matt. 7:16).

The angels will gather the tares out of the Kingdom and they shall be burned with everlasting fire. The

righteous shall shine forth as the sun--i.e., they shall be granted eternal life. The Kingdom cannot be moved (Heb. 12:28). It will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). The book of Revelation promises that they that overcome can come over. Because only the faithful in the Kingdom shall triumph, it must be first with every Christian!

The Kingdom must be put first because of what it is, Whose it is, why it is, and where it is going. Therefore, if one is not in the kingdom, he is not in the right place. He is not serving the right Master. He is not living for the right reasons. And, he is not going in the right direction. How tragic that one would fail to gain entrance into the Kingdom when the King Himself wants all to become citizens in it (2 Pet. 3:9)!

WOT

WORD OF GOD LIKE SEED

Mark N. Posey, Decatur, Alabama

In Luke 8:4-15 Jesus relates the parable of the sower and the seed. The sower spreads seed on different types of soil (i.e., wayside, stony, thorny, and good), each representing a type of human heart (i.e., wayside = hard heart, stony = shallow heart, thorny = crowded heart, and good = fertile heart). He likens the seed to the Word of God (Lk. 8:11). We know that seeds bring forth after their own kind (Gen. 1:11,12). Apple seeds produce apples and bean seeds produce beans. Never have apple seeds produced beans or bean seeds apples. It is the same with God's seed; it brings forth after its own kind. So, when the Word of God is sown in a fertile heart (Jam. 1:21) the result will be Christianity--not denominationalism, Protestantism, universalism or any other "ism"--only Christianity. Neither will the Word of God produce different kinds of Christians--one believing this and another believing that. Therefore, God's Word will produce in the twenty-first century the same thing it produced in the first--New Testament Christianity

in its purest form.

The Greek word *typos* is rendered in our English Bibles "pattern, form or example." It is found in Romans 6:17,18 by the word "form." Paul refers to a particular plan or pattern that must be obeyed to be made free from sin. He instructs Timothy to "hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me" (2 Tim. 1:13). This pattern is like a mold and each time the image is the same. Therefore, patterns produce identity. This identity is so clear, distinct, and discernible that it differentiates the product from anything in existence.

This pattern principle is the plea of all New Testament Christians. We plead for the scriptures as the final and authoritative rule in religion. We are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). We are to recognize the scriptures as the complete and authoritative word of God (2 Tim. 3:16,17). We are to conform to the teachings and authority of the scriptures (2 Pet. 1:20,21). Our plea is to lay aside

all human traditions and go back to the Bible for all religious direction (Tit. 2:11,12). We plead for a restoration of the New Testament system in every essential aspect. Our plea is to return to the Word of God in all essential matters, such as: the plan of salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16), the plan for worship (Acts 20:7; 2:42), the plan for church organization (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13), the plan for Christian purity (Gal. 5:22,23; 2 Pet. 1:5-8). BUT, we must realize that every restoration must be on an individual basis--it must begin with *me* (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:16; Rev. 2:4-6). Often we fail to realize that it is just as sinful to bind laws which God has not bound as it is to neglect the laws which God has bound upon us. So let's always remember: "We must speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; and in all things, love." The plea and purpose of Christ and His church are so right, they cannot be wrong!

WOT

GOD'S GRACE

Bobby Liddell, Memphis, Tennessee

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:4-10).

Grace, in the New Testament, is a translation of the Greek word *charis*, meaning, "...that kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their offences, and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ..." (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 666). *Charis* (in its various forms) has been translated by such words as: "grace" (Eph. 3:8); "favor" (Luke 2:52); "liberality" (1 Cor. 16:3); "thanksgiving" (2 Cor. 9:12); and, "thanks" (2 Cor. 9:15). We commonly refer to grace as favor; especially, as "unmerited favor of God."

Grace has been called "the Divine side of salvation." When man's transgression of God's law brought sin into the world and brought upon man the consequences of sin (Rom. 5:12), God promised to make possible a way of return. Undeserving man was in desperate need, and could not be reconciled to God otherwise; thus, God's grace was/is absolutely necessary. Therefore, God, in His great love, purposed to do for man what man could not do (Gen. 3:15). However, God did not, and He does not, do for

man what man can (and must) do for himself (cf. Acts 2:40). Obedient faith, a God ordained prerequisite to salvation, in response to the Gospel ("the faith" of Eph. 2:4-10; cf. Gal. 3:26,27; 6:2) accomplishes that (Heb. 5:8,9; 11:6; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 1:5). Salvation is by faith, but not by faith alone (Jam. 2:24).

Grace is God's response to the insufficiency of sinful man. Men, without God, are corrupt, lost, undone, helpless, hopeless, dead in sin, and woefully unable to find the way by themselves (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12), or to pay for themselves the price of redemption. Though the wisdom of man and the resources of man are insufficient to provide a way of salvation, God's grace is sufficient. Through His grace, He teaches man to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly (Tit. 2:11,12). Salvation by grace is God's answer to man's otherwise insurmountable problem, but salvation is not by grace alone: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8; cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:1,2).

Grace is a consequence of God's supreme love and marvelous mercy (defined as "grace in action") as these Divine characteristics relate to man's salvation through the gift of God's Son. God offers salvation, not because of obligation due to man's worth, nor because of man's meritorious works, but because of His abundant grace--His "unmerited favor." Truly, grace is abundant, yet it is neither appreciated nor appropriated by one who sees no need for obedient faith in Christ in order to obtain redemption through His precious blood (Rom. 5:1,2; Rev. 1:5; Eph. 1:7), which saving blood is first contacted when one is baptized to receive remission of sins (Rom. 6:3,4;

Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

Thereafter, Christian living is an expression of thanksgiving for God's grace, and an earnest determination to follow God's directions as given through His inspired Word (Tit. 2:11,12), which is "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24), "the word of his grace" (v. 32). Our gratitude for His saving grace should also be manifested in our love for the souls of the lost who so urgently need to hear the good news about Jesus and His grace (Rom. 10:13-17; Mark 16:15). Thus, we seek to explain to all who are traveling the broad way to destruction (Matt. 7:13,14), the blessings offered by God's unmerited favor, to encourage all who will to listen to His life-giving message, and to entreat every soul to become partakers of the great salvation made possible through God's grace.

God's grace teaches godly living in this present world, which is altogether essential in order for us to exert proper influence as God's children, and to be effective in evangelism. Engaging in these undertakings which are of immense and eternal consequence, we thank God for His amazing grace and delight in our salvation by it. While we rejoice, let us also remember as God has favored us, so He also has provided us with opportunities and open doors to the very hearts and souls of men and women. What a wonderful blessing to be able to show to others how Christ lives in us and how His Gospel has changed our lives! Working together with brothers and sisters in Christ, loving one another in fellowship and brotherhood, and faithfully serving the great God of heaven and earth, we can accomplish His will for His people. In so doing, we glorify His name and bring lost sheep into the safe fold of our loving Savior--that they too may know the blessings of God's grace. *WOT*

SEEKING THE LOST

Mike Winkler, Gallatin, Tennessee

Christians are commanded to, "Go preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15) and "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). The question we must each ask ourselves--individually and collectively--is, "Are we obeying the Lord's command?" Tragically, we must confess we are not in compliance as we should be. Accordingly, we would like to make several suggestions that will help us fulfill the Lord's command.

Suggestion #1--Understand that those outside the church are lost. Inspiration speaks of those outside the church as being "dead" in their sins and consequently without hope (Eph. 2:1,12). However, Paul speaks of being "alive" when one is "in Christ" (Eph. 2:5), and this is realized only when one submits to and obeys God's plan for salvation (Gal. 3:27).

Suggestion #2--Realize that, as Christians, we are at war. Again, inspiration speaks of our "struggle," the "war against our soul" and the "weapons of our warfare" (Eph. 6:11,12; 1 Pet. 2:11; 2 Cor. 10:3,4). Christians are not living during "peaceful" times; but rather we are daily fighting the adversary (1 Pet. 5:8).

Suggestion #3--Realize that saving souls is a lifestyle, not an assignment. The early church grew through evangelism as a result of their influence or the daily lifestyles of the members (Acts 2:47; 4:13). Peter reminded his readers repeatedly of the evangelistic power of their daily lives (1 Pet. 2:11,12; 3:1,2).

Suggestion #4--Stay focused on the harvest. The challenge is not and never has been the "harvest," but rather the work force (Jn. 4:35; Lk. 10:2). Let each of us determine to be gleaners of the harvest and not spectators.

Remember: "Fruit bearing" proves our discipleship (Jn. 15:8).

WOT

The Words of Truth

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THE WORDS OF Truth

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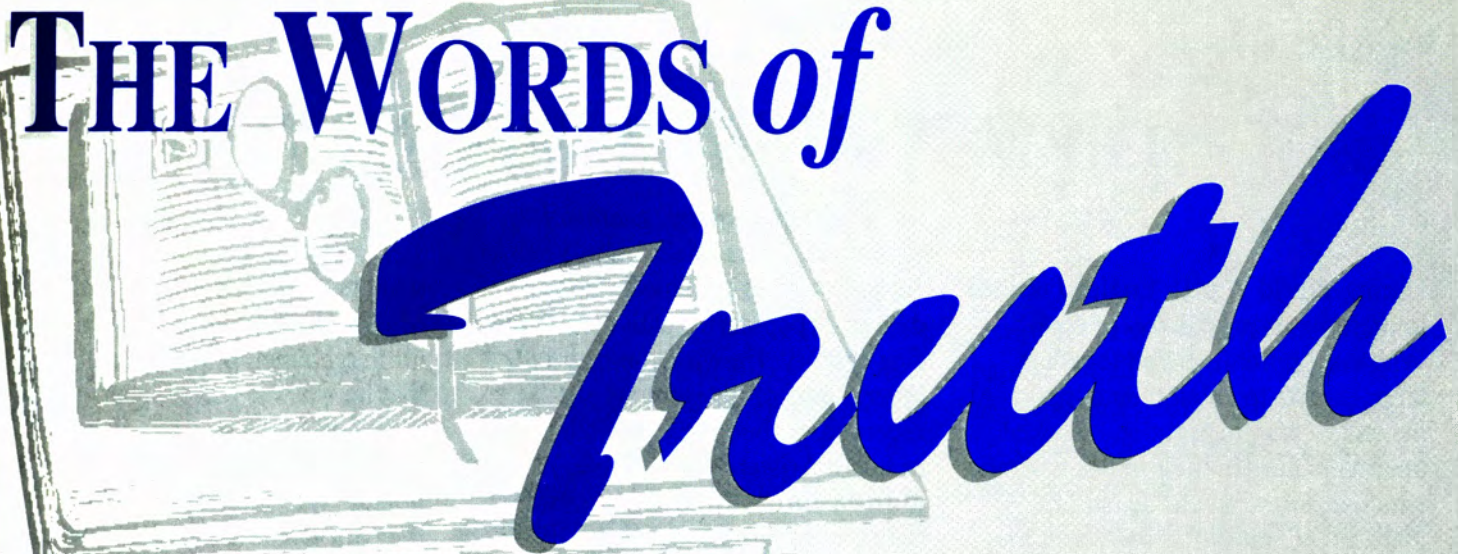
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THE WORDS of Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIAN LIVING

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

There is no way to answer the riddle of our earthly sojourn apart from Christianity. We have all wondered, at times, as to *why* we are here and *where* we are going. James tells us that our life is but "a vapor that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away" (Jam. 4:14). Peter informs us that those who would love life and see good days must "refrain their tongues from evil" (1 Pet. 3:10). Paul clearly stated: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). The real purpose of living is to live for Jesus. Our Savior beautifully expressed this thought in John 10:10: "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." The word "purpose" suggests dedication, decision, conviction, and planning. The religion of our Redeemer provides all of these items; it gives

substance to living. Just as Daniel "purposed in his heart not to defile himself" (Dan. 1:8), so does Christianity cause us to cleave to the Lord "with purpose of heart" (Acts 11:23). A statement from Moses is appropriate at this point in our discussion: "It is your life to set your heart upon all my law and to teach your children to observe all my commandments" (Deut. 32:46). We shall not take out of this life any of our accumulated wealth or fame but only the influence of a righteous life. When we stand before our Maker in the last day it will be of the highest import *how* we lived while upon the earth. If *you* are not a Christian you lack real incentive for living! "But they that would be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts,

which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. 6:9). Christianity alone gives one true purpose in life. What a friend we have in Jesus! He is indeed "all the world to me!" We have a personal, powerful, and precious Savior. Paul expressed our exact sentiments in 2 Timothy 1:12: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." If Christ lives within us (Gal. 2:20) we have the exuberant hope of glory (Col. 1:27). The very One who bore our sins in His own body upon the cross is vitally interested in our every need. In times of sorrow, illness, and bereavement, and disappointment, He is our constant Shepherd. Are you a Christian?

WOT

DOWN AND DIRTY CHRISTIANITY

Chuck Webster, Editorial

During World War II, England needed to increase its production of coal. Winston Churchill called together labor leaders to enlist their support. At the end of his presentation he asked them to picture in their minds a parade which he knew would be held in Piccadilly Circus after the war. First, he said, would come the sailors who had kept the vital sea lanes open. Then would come the soldiers who had come home from Dunkirk and then gone on to defeat Rommel in Africa. Then would come the pilots who had driven the Luftwaffe from the sky. Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. Someone would cry from the crowd, "And where were you during the critical days of our struggle?" And from ten thousand throats would come the answer, "We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal" (McCullough). Not all the jobs in a war are prominent and glamorous--someone must be behind the scenes digging the coal so that the war can continue. Incidentally, the same is true with the spiritual war being fought today . . . Not every position in the church is a glamorous and notable one. But in our fight against evil, success greatly depends on the behind-the-scenes workers--those who have their "faces to the coal." These "down and dirty Christians" play a vital role in helping the church accomplish its mission.

Take Aristarchus, for example. Maybe public speaking was not his strong suit. Perhaps he didn't have the leadership qualities about him that made people follow him. It could be that he had not been given the opportunity to be well-educated like some. Whatever the reason,

Aristarchus never gained a great degree of popularity with men in the first century. He wrote no inspired letter. None of his sermons are recorded. Nobody at Corinth boasted of being Aristarchus' disciple. A lot of things are *not* said about him. But notice what *is* said: Evidently, Aristarchus was a man who was willing to give his life to spreading the gospel. Although he is mentioned only *five* times in the entire New Testament, every allusion is in reference to his being with Paul on missionary journeys or something associated with them (Acts 20:4; 27:2). Not only was he living for Christ, but apparently he was also ready to die for Him. He was with Paul at Ephesus when Demetrius stirred up the crowd into an emotional frenzy (Acts 19:23ff.). Notice who was grabbed: "And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and *Aristarchus*, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre" (v.29). Although released from this confinement, Aristarchus was later imprisoned again--this time in Rome with Paul. From that prison Paul writes "Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, . . ." (Col. 4:10). According to tradition Aristarchus was martyred by Nero several years later. The final reference is brief but revealing. Paul, in the closing words of his letter to Philemon, sends greetings from several there with him in Rome (Phile. 23,24). Among them is Aristarchus, whom Paul calls his "fellowlabourer" (v.24). Not Paul's tag-along. Not a nuisance. Not a preacher-in-training. But a *fellow* worker. He was a man who was doing

what he could for the cause of Christ. Maybe he was the baggage-handler. Or maybe the book-keeper. It could be that he was the travel agent, making sure Paul had a way of getting to the next town. Maybe he took care of the horses. We cannot be sure what he did. But whatever it was, he was considered a *fellow worker*. And he did it to be popular with Christ--not man.

What the church needs are more Aristarchuses! The early church was not built up primarily by the Pauls and Peters. It was the coal-miners--the Aristarchuses, the Epaphrodituses, the Aquilas, and the Priscillas--who were responsible for the majority of the amazing growth of the first-century church. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

Are you willing to get dirty for the cause of Christ? Elders, deacons, missionaries, Christian-college-professors, and preachers are not the only ones who are to be working in the kingdom. In fact, a strong case could be made that they are not the ones who are *primarily* responsible for getting the most done. If the church grows, it is going to be those who put their "faces to the coal"--those who are willing to work behind the scenes writing the notes, cooking the meals, visiting the visitors, knocking the doors, making the calls conducting the home Bible studies, teaching the kids' Bible classes, calling the wayward, and encouraging the discouraged. *Those* are the people who will be at the front of the parade when the war is over. So . . . what about you? Are you willing to work behind the scenes to help win the war?

OTHERWISE A GOOD TEACHER

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

Over the last three months it has been my privilege to teach a class on the parables of Jesus to a group of fifth and sixth grade home-schoolers. There are two things which make this a most interesting time for me: first, all the kids come from denominational churches of one kind or another, and second, the class is held each Tuesday morning in an enormous Baptist church building. It is not connected to the Baptist church except for the use of their building.

All the teachers who participate in classes for the home-schooled children are given evaluation sheets at the end of the term which are submitted by parents of the students. At the bottom of mine were these words: “(He) believes baptism is essential to salvation. Our student caught this right off. He is a very good teacher otherwise.”

Yes, I did teach them about baptism, and yes, I made sure they understood that it was essential. Truth be told, those kids learned about the one church taught in the New Testament, about the importance of worshiping in spirit and in truth, and about what constitutes true repentance. After all, many of Christ’s parables are kingdom parables, and so I spent a great amount of time teaching them about Christ’s church, the kingdom. I cannot say how much of the teaching affected their lives, yet I found that parent’s observation interesting. The student “caught” where I had violated the norm. I am not offended by this; in fact, I am happy to know that the students were

listening.

Baptism is so crucial. One cannot have remission of sins without it (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit tied it forever to salvation (1 Pet. 3:21). It is in baptism that we reach out and touch the cross (Rom. 6:1-6). It is interesting to think of what the devil has done to baptism--the final step to entering the kingdom, the church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). That Germantown church is huge, and the building looks like an airport or a shopping mall. They are extremely active. But they will refuse from now until the trumpet blows to baptize anyone for the remission of sins. If the leadership ever insisted on preaching the truth about baptism from that pulpit that church building would soon be an empty cave. Their members and preachers are insulted by those who even suggest that baptism could have anything to do with one’s salvation. According to this evaluation form, I taught baptism was essential to salvation . . . and I was a good teacher otherwise.

I am in good company. Following such reasoning . . .
. . . the apostle Paul taught that one’s sins are washed away at the point of baptism (Acts 22:16). He was a good teacher otherwise.
. . . the apostle Peter taught that baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, and that it saves us (Acts 2:38, 1 Pet. 3:21). He was a good teacher otherwise.
. . . our Lord Jesus gave the Great Commission and said, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every

creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). Our Lord was a good teacher otherwise.

The point is that the devil has made churches which are big and active and which speak much of Jesus from their pulpits, but deny that very thing which puts a man into a saved condition and adds him to the church. Think of that!

There are those among us today who wish to change the church of Christ into a denomination. To do so they must change our appreciation for the essential nature of baptism, for only then can we unite with denominational churches fully as they wish. Please don’t give in to the change agents. They have split churches all across the land with their denominational injections. They have divided children from their parents and Christians from their God. They have robbed many churches of Christ of their distinctive, Biblically correct doctrines.

There is a battle for truth which must be won. We must not lose. We win with every person we can teach and baptize in exactly the same way, and for exactly the same reason the people were baptized in the New Testament. For only then will they be members of the same body as those church members of the New Testament. Only then will they be members of the church of which Jesus spoke when He said, “On this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Be a good teacher . . . otherwise. *WOT*

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF DRESS

[Part One]

Jason R. Roberts, Memphis, Tennessee

It seems that as the temperatures start to rise, our standards of dress begin to fall within the church. It is therefore not uncommon to see members of the Lord's church, who profess to be Christians, dressed like the world—even for worship services. During this time of the year, one does not have to go out into the public or turn on the television for very long before he is confronted with immodestly attired women and men. Many families will soon take their summer vacations and some automatically assume that it is permissible for them to take a vacation from their Christianity. Parents who would never allow their sons and daughters to view, in their homes, the salacious literature depicting nude men and women will take those same children to the beach where they will see men and women in scantily clad bathing suits—leaving very little to their imaginations. The father who would never allow his teenage son to view the “Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue” in his house is the same father who will take his son to the beach where he can view a live motion version of the same. The mother who would never allow her teenage daughter to wear her bathing suit to the mall or to the supermarket is the same mother who will take her daughter to the beach and allow her to parade herself in the same bathing suit in front of men. **And we are told that because everyone else at the beach is attired in the same fashion, it is considered perfectly normal!**

Those who are repulsed by immodesty and have the fortitude to speak out against it, are often accused of being “out of touch with the times,” having a dirty mind, or both. Christians who love the Lord and who desire to please Him will not be intimidated by

such false accusations, but will unashamedly *expose* the indecent *exposure* with which they are confronted (Eph. 5:11).

CLOTHING AND CHARACTER

The type of clothing one wears certainly says something about the character one possesses. When the Proverbs writer listed the deceitful tactics of the strange woman, among other things, he said, “And, behold, there met him a woman with the *attire of an harlot*, and subtle of heart” (Prov. 7:10, emp. added). Note carefully the words “attire” (clothing) and “harlot” (character). It is evident that the clothing one wears, whether he admits it or not, says something about his character. If this is not the case, then why do we sometimes hear people say when they see a woman who is scantily dressed, “She is dressed like a prostitute”? This is not to suggest that every woman who dresses immodestly does so for the express purpose of seducing men. However, we are fooling ourselves if we think that clothing and sexuality are not linked together. Just about every clothing commercial shown today depicts a sexually suggestive innuendo or a scenario to advance the sale of their merchandise. Why? Because the clothing industry is keenly aware that there is a corresponding link between clothing and sexuality. The multimillion dollars they spend annually on these ungodly commercials is a mere fraction when one considers the money spent by the consumers whose eyes view them. They know that sex sells, and what better way is there for them to sell their merchandise than by *dressing it up*, glamorizing it with a fine touch of sex appeal? The truth of the matter is ladies have a great appeal to men by just being themselves. In a

world of lasciviousness, a modestly dressed woman becomes the rare jewel. A man could have his pick of worldly women. A modest Christian woman is worth more than all of them put together.

MARY QUAINT — “THE MOTHER OF THE MINISKIRT”

Mary Quaint, who is known for designing the miniskirt, was interviewed in 1967 by *Newsweek* magazine. In the course of the interview, she said that the primary reason for designing the miniskirt was for girls who did not want to wait until dark to seduce a man into bed.

Am I the only woman who has ever wanted to go to bed with a man in the afternoon? Any law-abiding female, it used to be thought, waits until dark. Well, there are lots of girls who don't want to wait. Miniskirts are symbolic of them (*Newsweek*, November 13, 1967).

Again, we hasten to say that this does not suggest that every girl who wears a miniskirt does so for the express purpose of fulfilling Ms. Quaint's statement. However, it does not take a Solomon to figure that the majority of “ladies” who wear miniskirts do so for the purpose of getting men to notice what they are wearing, or should we say what they are not wearing. This reminds me of a little boy who was lost. He was asked why did not hold on to his mother's skirt. He replied, “I couldn't reach it.”

Ms. Quaint was later interviewed by *McCalls* magazine, in which she defined the purpose of today's fashion: I mean today's woman is proud of her body. She knows about dieting. She doesn't need clothes with a built-in shape. She is the

shape. And so she wants clothes that just sort of flow over her. She dresses to say I enjoy my body, I am sexy, I like men, I enjoy life. Her clothing is worn for decoration, provocation, and look at me. A lot of look-at-me-about-it (*McCalls*, March 1970).

COME AND ENJOY THE SCENERY

The late brother Thomas F. Eaves Sr., in his excellent tract, *The Christian And Modest Clothing*, reproduced the below advertisement from a dance held at a denominational church in Memphis, Tennessee.

Super Star Productions Presents
A HOT PANTS DANCE

Friday - Dec. 3
9 to 1

At the Second Presbyterian Church
Gym

Poplar at Goodlet

Featuring - **POST**

ALL GIRLS wearing HOT PANTS get
in

at ½ price

\$1.50 - regular

.75 - HOT PANTS

COME AND ENJOY THE SCENERY

Brother Eaves went on to say, "This statement ('come and enjoy the scenery') explodes the often used justifications for immodest apparel, 'I wear this type of apparel for comfort, or to keep cool'" (p.7).

SOME REVEALING INCONSISTENCIES

There are several thoughts which need to be addressed regarding the glaring inconsistencies found within the minds of those who seemingly see nothing wrong with the wearing of immodest apparel. (1) If a woman wears her undergarments to the mailbox, she is considered to be inappropriately attired. However, the same woman, by today's standards, is considered modest if she adds a little color to those same undergarments and wears them to the

beach. Since when did the presence of sand, sun, and water automatically make this permissible? God's laws regarding modest apparel are not cultural. They are universal. The beach or public swimming pool does not license the Christian to dress immodestly, just because our culture considers it to be the norm. When culture sets the standard for what is right and wrong, then when the culture changes so do the standards. If the public beach is not a sexual pressure cooker, having the capacity to ignite lust in the hearts of those who go there, then why do thousands of college age students flock there for "Spring Break" each year? Do you suppose they go there for the purpose of just relaxing and enjoying a little sand, sun, and surf? Furthermore, what would happen if the beaches decided for next year's "Spring Break" they would limit all of the women to one side of the beach (out of view of any men) and all of the men to the other side? How many would still go? Louis Rushmore expressed it ever so accurately:

Watching a woman bathe has been known to arouse unlawful lusts in a man. King David saw Bathsheba washing, lusted after her, committed adultery with her, fathered a child, murdered her husband, and brought much misery upon himself and the nation (2 Samuel 11:2-5). Is it advisable for women, especially those professing godliness, to bathe in the presence of men, whether it be sunbathing or swimming? (*Modesty: Biblical Investigation, Contemporary Application*, article taken from Internet).

(2) If a woman answered the door in her slip, she would be embarrassed. However, the same woman could answer the door in a bathing suit (which reveals far more) and this is considered acceptable by society's standards. (3) If a man were to walk through the mall wearing just his

swimming suit, he would be dressed immodestly and would immediately be asked to leave. However, the same man has the prerogative, with our culture's stamp of approval, to wear the same thing at the public swimming pool and beach. And we are told that this is supposed to be acceptable in the eyes of God.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

First, is there an elder, deacon, preacher, or member of the Lord's church who would be willing to write an article for the church bulletin attempting to justify the practice of mixed undressing? Second, if the modern day swimsuit is not immodest, then what would have to be done to it to make it immodest? Third, if it is permissible to parade oneself in a bathing suit in the presence of those of the opposite sex at the beach, would it be equally permissible for the local church, after their Sunday morning worship service, to bring in some truck loads of sand, a large pool, and have a "FUN IN THE SUN DAY"? Each member could then bring his or her bathing suit, and everyone could enjoy some good "fleshly fellowship" together. What makes it wrong for us to do this on the church grounds but right at the public swimming pool or beach?

What we do in moderation, the next generation will do in excess. For example, thirty years ago (in the United States) public schools had dress codes. Girls wore dresses and the boys wore dress pants and dress shirts. Today the standards are gone and practically anything goes. Therefore, the church must keep her standards high for the next generation. Older women should set a godly example for the younger women: a 24-hour example; not just a 9-to-5 or Sunday morning example (Tit. 2:3-5).

Lord willing, next month, we will address how elders, preachers, parents, and members should approach the issue of modest apparel.

THE INMATES ARE RUNNING THE ASYLUM

Ben Wright, Jasper, Alabama

Paul told the Corinthians that “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33). This was in reference to how the Corinthian Christians were acting in the worship assembly. That principle can be applied to everything in God’s creation. He has planned and set a pattern for how everything is supposed to run. Sadly, man has not always followed that plan.

One area in which God’s pattern is not always being followed is in the home. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23). From this verse, one can see that the husband is the head of the house and then the wife, with the children being under the parents. That is why, just a few verses later, Paul says by inspiration, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). In a parallel passage in Colossians, these commands are preceded by: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). It is God’s will that the home follow this pattern: the father, the mother, then the children.

However, in many homes this pattern is reversed, with the children ruling over the house. Sadly, this can be said of numerous Christian homes.

Parents are allowing the children to make decisions, or they are making decisions based on how the children’s social status can be enhanced. The Bible plainly teaches that the parent should make the decision and the child should obey it. Unfortunately, in many places the “inmates are running the asylum.” Parents must have the courage to tell their children “no” and mean it. Parents must restrain their children.

Eli is an example of a parent who did not restrain his children. In 1 Samuel 2, Eli’s sons are seen forcing the children of Israel to give to them of their sacrifices in ways that were unlawful. This caused many Israelites to forsake God’s command to offer sacrifices. Also, they committed fornication with lewd women. Eli rebuked them but did nothing else to them. They did not heed their father’s rebuke; therefore God told Eli he was going to remove him from the priesthood. Because of this, in a dream, God told Samuel that he was going to be priest over Israel. Notice the reason God told Samuel that He was going to remove Eli from the priesthood: “For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Sam. 3:13; emp. added). Because Eli did not restrain his sons,

God held him accountable. If God held the parent accountable in Eli’s day, surely He will do the same today.

Someone might say, “Well, going to a dance is nowhere near as bad as committing fornication.” In the world’s eyes, that would be correct. However, a sin is a sin. Children are generally going to do what their parents let them do. If parents would have the internal fortitude to tell their children “no” and give them a scriptural reason, then children will usually understand. They may not like it at first, but in the long run, they will appreciate their parents much more for doing what is right.

Also, just because every other teenager is going mixed swimming, or to dances, or dressing immodestly, or whatever the case may be, does not mean that parents must let their children do it. Christians are getting so caught up in what the world thinks that they are letting their children commit sin and not thinking anything about it. Jesus told us to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). Nowhere did He tell us to seek first the world’s approval.

My wife and I are expecting our first child. It is my prayer that we will not have blinders on when it comes to our child. Sadly, many Christians need to take their blinders off before it is too late. WOT

LOVE ABOUNDING

David W. Hester, Morris, Alabama

Paul had less criticism of the brethren in Philippi than any other congregation, but he urged them to grow in love. In Phil. 1:9, he wrote, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more . . .” He also wanted them to abound “in

knowledge and in all judgment.” Paul wished for them an intelligent love. This can only be accomplished by growth in knowledge: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Hence, Paul wanted their love

to be intelligent, by being able to discern between things worthy and unworthy of their love. We must be able to do the same.

God’s Word tells us what we are not to love. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the

world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn. 1:15). By way of contrast, Paul writes, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1,2). Thus, we must be able to discern between worldly things and heavenly things.

The things he allows judge a person's character. What a person thinks, talks about, and indulges in are things in which he is interested. Paul tells us in Philippians 1 that we must "approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 1:10). Our love for heavenly things enables us to approve those things that are excellent. What are some objects of the Christian's love?

The supreme object of our love is God. Matthew 22:37 says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." We find it easy to love those who love us; for this reason, we should love God supremely. He gave us our being, supplied our every need, and gave His Son to die on the cross for our sins! We should find it easy to love Him! "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). The test of our love is obedience to His will. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3). God's requirements of us are not unreasonable. We get our greatest thrills, and highest enjoyment, when we do things for someone we love. How much more so with God?

We must also love Jesus. He demands more love than any other person. He said in Matthew 10:37, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than

me is not worthy of me." It is inconsistent to say we love Jesus and at the same time refuse to follow His teaching. Christ said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). Not part of them; not all of them part of the time; but, faithful and constant! How interesting it is that many are touting "WWJD"--"What Would Jesus Do?"--while at the same time refusing to do what He has said!

Closely following this is our love for the church. Jesus loved it enough that he gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). We should love it enough to give ourselves in service. If we love the church, we will accept responsibilities in work and worship. Love will cause one to teach a class, lead a prayer, wait on the Lord's table, and a number of other things. If we love the church, we will give our money to assist in carrying the Gospel to the world. If we love the church, we won't live in a way to bring reproach upon it; for when we do that, we are also crucifying afresh Jesus! We won't bash the church in any way, or persecute those who are trying to faithfully proclaim the truth.

We must also love the truth. In 2 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul said people who do not love the truth will be lost. We must be like the noble Bereans of Acts 17, who checked up on inspired men! If we love the truth, we will accept it regardless of the source, and defend it at all cost (Jude 3). Paul told Titus in Titus 1:9-11 that the mouths of false teachers must be stopped. If we love the truth today, we will accept this dictum. We need to be like Stephen in Acts 6:9-10, who was able to defend the truth against those who attempted to dispute it. Paul did the same in Acts 19:8: for three months he "spake boldly . . . disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God."

In connection, we must love one

another. "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1). "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). Everyone has faults, and sometimes brethren have faults we do not approve of. However, we must love them in spite of their faults. If God had refused to love us until we were worthy, we would yet be without hope. We need to love the brethren regardless of what they may say or do. When Jesus died on the cross, He prayed for those who crucified Him! Praying for people will cause us to love them more.

Finally, we must love the lost. The love of God for the lost sent His Son into the world. The love of Christ for the lost made Him willing to die for us. The only way we can show our appreciation for this love is by being involved in some way in assisting the spreading of the Gospel. If I love the lost, and have the ability to preach, I need to preach the Gospel. If I love the lost, yet cannot preach, I need to give of my means to help send preachers overseas and support my local preacher. If I love the lost, I will take every opportunity at least to invite them to come hear the Gospel preached. Too many members of the church are not willing to love the lost to this extent. This is one of the reasons the church is not growing as it once did! Paul's love for the lost caused him to "have great heaviness and continual sorrow" (Rom. 9:2). Do we? His love for the lost made Him willing to suffer all things (2 Tim. 2:10). We should be just as willing.

Focusing our love on the right objects will not only help us grow; it will also help the church to grow. Do you love the Lord? Then, show it by how you live each day of your life.

WHAT ARE YOU BUILDING ON???

Jason Moon, Lewisburg, Tennessee

Standing at the foot of the Washington Monument as it towered 555 feet over the city of Washington, the tour guide revealed a fascinating bit of information. When George Washington originally selected the present site of the federal city that is now known as Washington, D.C., he selected the swampy shores of the Potomac River. Imagine that . . . the city of Washington was originally built on a swamp. Not until one of Abraham Lincoln's children died from an infectious disease from the murky waters of the Potomac and the subsequent rerouting of the river by levees did Washington take on a more solid foundation.

Think about the importance of a proper foundation. How blessed we are to realize that our Christian establishment is built on a solid foundation. Our obedience to the words of Christ is compared to a man who "built his house on the rock" (Matt. 7:24,25). The church, which Jesus promised and purchased, was built upon the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13-19). Our hope of eternal life (1 Pet. 1:3) is based upon the rock that was rolled away (Matt. 28:2).

Paul said it best, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11; NKJV). He is the "chief cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). He is a "living stone" (1 Pet. 2:4). What are you building on? *WOT*

The Words of Truth

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THE WORDS of

Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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NEVER BE DISMAYED

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

Psalm 43 is unsung but potent. Lost in the maze of better-known literature it is nonetheless powerful, beautiful, and enthralling. One reads and ponders its brilliant message with profit and soul-searching introspection. Its theme reminds us of a great gospel hymn: "Though so helpless I cannot see, What the future may hold for me; Jesus knows and my guide will be, I'll never forsake my Lord."

In this little psalm we learn valuable truths that lift us up to higher ground. We are made aware that God will judge us and not men. What a blessing that is when we consider the perfection of our Maker and the frail nature of our fellows. We also have One to plead our cause. Job longed for such a helper (Job 9:33), but Christians have Christ as our sinless advocate (1 Jn. 2:1). "In the hour of trial, Jesus plead for me, Lest by base denial, I depart from Thee."

The Savior ever lives to make

intercession on our behalf (Heb. 7:25), and that gives us boldness to seek help in every time of need. Even though ungodly nations and deceitful, unjust men abound, the God of heaven is our strength (Prov. 14:34; Rom. 13:1).

The psalmist refers to those who weep because evil men oppress them. Paul reminded Timothy that godliness will result in persecution at the hands of Satan's friends. The light and truth of spirituality expose the shame and darkness of sinful libertines who do not have the courage and conviction it takes to occupy the lofty ground of Jehovah's holy hill. But, children of the Father above must rise above the fear and worry of those who know not the joys of the gospel system. Someone very astutely observed: "The very word 'worry' comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word which means 'to choke.' Do you know that when you are worrying you are actually

choking yourself to death?"

The Savior provides for devoted followers hope, health, and exceeding joy. Optimism will guide, rule, and sustain our pilgrimage here below. While children of God are overwhelmed with the exciting prospect of walking hand in hand with our Maker the pessimist resents the fact that the world was made without seeking his advice! There is no need to be dismayed when we seek shelter at God's altar. His sublime and divine presence grants rich and vibrant hues to the mural of our lives. A wonderful gospel song challenges our attention: "In the shadow of His wings, there is joy, glad joy; There is joy to tell the story, Joy exceeding full of glory, In the shadow of His wings."

Let us keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21) and never be dismayed. Psalm 43 is comforting indeed to the faithful pilgrims pressing on to higher ground! *WOT*

BALANCE

Chuck Webster, Editorial

From the anti-cooperation movement of the mid-1900s to the change movement of today, the Lord's church has often been ravaged by extremism. In fact, as often noted, extremism breeds extremism. Reacting to a lack of balance by some, others allow the pendulum to swing to the other extreme, creating an equally dangerous approach to brethren and to scripture. In light of these facts, is it possible to avoid being entrapped by this snare, i.e., is it possible to be balanced? A related question is, what is balance, and how do we achieve it? We begin first with a negative depiction.

Balance does not mean presenting both truth and error. A preacher who presents an erroneous sermon one Sunday on the nature of the church, and then follows it the next Sunday with a powerful sermon on the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins is *not* a balanced preacher. In the same way, a lectureship director who invites both faithful and unfaithful speakers has not pleased the Lord.

Balance does not mean refusing to take a stand on matters of faith. Some have equated balance with presenting all sides to an issue without coming to a conclusion. For example, a preacher who presents several views on marriage, divorce, and remarriage and then encourages his hearers to reach their own conclusion has not fulfilled his God-given responsibility to preach "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Some are so afraid of being labeled "negative" that they avoid taking a strong stance on any subject, particularly one that is somewhat controversial.

Balance does not mean simply the absence of error. As someone said long ago, it is possible for a preacher never to preach one iota of error and still lose his soul because he refused to preach the whole truth. He may have preached the truth on good topics such as grace, love, and relationships, but did he do so to the neglect of other needy topics like law, obedience, and God's justice?

So . . . what is balance? There appear to be five characteristics, particularly as it

relates to preaching:

Balance includes emphasizing all aspects of God. God's holiness and justice need to be emphasized in today's world; too many people have been told of His love, but never of His demand for holy living. But would it be right to emphasize only God's demand for obedience? On the other hand, our dark world clearly needs to be infused with God's eternal love. But would it be proper to emphasize only His love? Where, then, is the balance? The facts are clear: *every* attribute of God is infinite, and *every* attribute needs to be taught. Any preaching plan that is careful to emphasize the exacting nature of God but fails to stress His love, mercy, and grace fails miserably, with the converse being true as well.

Balance includes a healthy proportion of positive and negative preaching. Dwelling on subjects such as hell, lethargy, and lukewarmness, some preachers seem always to emphasize what is wrong, and never what is right. Some, on the other hand, avoid what might be considered negative preaching and therefore avoid subjects that "step on toes." Is either extreme pleasing to God? All congregations (and preachers too!) are imperfect and therefore occasionally need to be rebuked and reproved (2 Tim. 4:2). But the same verse also instructs preachers to "exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Congregations that are fed a steady diet of negative preaching lose their zest for Christianity and become stagnant. Many of us preachers would do well to look for good that people are doing and praise them! Congregations that are encouraged and exhorted by their preachers are much more likely to listen when reproved.

Other preachers, however, avoid the "negative" extreme but unfortunately allow themselves to be caught in another trap. Motivated perhaps by a desire for numbers or a fear of criticism, these preachers avoid subjects that emphasize sins which people frequently commit. They also avoid controversial and "doctrinal" subjects such as baptism, instrumental music, the change movement, or marriage-divorce-and-

remarriage. The sad result is a congregation surrounded by pitfalls and temptations which it is ill-prepared to handle. True, the congregation knows very well how to handle discouragement, but can it recognize a false teacher? The members know about the sacrifice of Christ but have never been challenged to sacrifice all for Him. They know about the sin of legalism, but not the sin of lethargy.

Balanced preaching, then, must emphasize both the good *and* the bad. It must encourage *and* reprove. It must inspire *and* warn. The result will be a healthy, well-rounded congregation that is both encouraged by the blessings of Christianity and informed about the dangers facing it.

A balanced preacher refuses to bind his opinion. One must never compromise any of the many black-and-white issues in scripture. To do so is to reap condemnation from the Lord. However, there are countless issues on which scripture does not clearly speak, and it is these areas in which we must be extremely careful. Emotions, feelings, and opinions must never be placed on a level that is on par with God's revealed will. The preacher who preaches on the all-sufficiency of scripture, but then binds his opinion on others, is terribly inconsistent.

A balanced preacher presents God's truth motivated by love and with a loving spirit. As Earl Edwards encouraged preaching students, "When you preach on hell, don't act like you want them to go there" ("Expository Preaching," FHU, 1992). Jesus' hearers, though many refused His message, never doubted His sincerity. The same Lord who castigated hypocrisy (Matt. 23) also held little babies in His lap (Mk. 10:13) and healed the sick (Matt. 4:24). He never minced words when presenting difficult truths, but His motivation was always love, demonstrated so clearly when He wept over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37) and most vividly when He gave His life for His murderers. And so it is with preachers today. The old axiom "They don't care how much you know till they know how much you care" is

still true. Times will arise when difficult sermons must be delivered with zeal and passion, but hearers need to know that the messenger loves them. They know he preaches out of love for their souls, not out of a vindictive and vengeful spirit. His manner of presentation is both passionate (for the truth) and loving (for the hearers). He uses the pulpit to further the Lord's cause, not a personal agenda.

A balanced preacher does not harbor a critical, fault-finding spirit. Some preachers, though sound doctrinally, spew forth such venom from their preaching and through their pens that the cause for which they fight is actually harmed. To them a brotherhood school never does any good. The faithfulness of anyone who disagrees with them on one of the brotherhood fringe issues is questionable. The future holds little hope for the Lord's church.

Is the forecast this gloomy? Have all

knees bowed to Baal? Can one actually combat error without a malicious attitude? Make no mistake about it: error must never be condoned or overlooked. False teachers must be exposed using plain speech (Paul did - e.g., 1 Tim. 1:20). Nevertheless it *is* possible to be sound in the faith and stand for the truth lovingly. It *is* possible to point out erroneous viewpoints without one's writing or speaking being dominated solely by mockery and contempt. Such attitudes, it seems, may please a certain segment of the brotherhood (who already agree with the view presented) but rarely convert a sincere seeker of truth. Paul certainly used sarcasm on occasion (cf. 2 Cor. 11), but one would be hard-pressed to argue that it was his primary method of confronting error. A plain and clear presentation of the truth and a powerful refutation of error does not need to be dripping with sarcasm to be effective. Let us all stand for truth, refute error, and

expose false teachers, but let us do so with a view toward converting them from the error of their ways and turning back to the truth those who are being swayed by erroneous teaching. The Lord's church is too precious, and souls are too priceless to do otherwise.

What does it mean to be balanced? Simply put, it means preaching the whole counsel of God with a loving spirit. It means being motivated by a love for the church and for the lost. It means being balanced in the presentation of the truth. It means taking every opportunity to extend God's grace to a world that so desperately needs to be saved from sin. In short, it means having the mind of Christ, who loved the lost enough to give up the glory of heaven for the life of a servant, then die the death of a common thief so that we could be saved (Phil. 2:5-8). WOT

THE RUPTURE OF THE RAPTURE

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

You've seen the slogans on bumper stickers: "In case of the rapture this vehicle will be unmanned. . . . The rapture: the only way to fly." The concept of the rapture has been on the lips and in the thoughts of many people as we have entered this new millennium. Proponents of the dispensational view have boldly and widely preached. It. Many have come to accept it as being true. Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, described the scene associated with the rapture in these words: "There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we've got an invasion from outer space." Richard DeHaan, another proponent of the rapture, described it as a bewildering scene of people who suddenly disappeared without warning. He said these individuals were snatched (or raptured) by Jesus from earth into heaven.

Dr. Robert Strong provides a concise statement of the rapture doctrine: "By the rapture is meant the sudden and possibly secret coming of Christ in the air to snatch away from the earth the resurrected bodies of those who had died in faith, and with them the living saints."

It is believed that the saints will be raptured for seven years while sinners on earth experience a period of tribulation after which Jesus will come with His raptured saints and establish an earthly kingdom over which He will reign for one thousand years. There are several reasons why the doctrine known as the rapture should be rejected.

The Bible does not teach that Christ's second coming will be in secret. The secret coming of Christ is a major tenet of rapture proponents. The Bible declares that when Jesus comes again "every eye shall see Him" (Rev. 1:7). Rather than a secretive event, His second coming is described as a "Revelation" and an appearing (2 Thess. 1:7; Heb. 9:28). **The Bible teaches that Christ's return will be accompanied by audible phenomena.** The trumpet of God shall sound (1 Cor. 15:52), the voice of Jesus will be heard, along with the voice of the archangel (1 Thess. 4:16), and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise (2 Pet. 3:10).

The Bible teaches that Christ's return will initiate the general resurrection in which *all* who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth (Jn. 5:28,29). His coming will be marked by the

resurrection of *both* the Christian and the non-Christian at the same time (Acts 24:15). Rapture advocates proclaim that the resurrection of the just and unjust will be separated by a period of seven years.

The Bible teaches that the preaching of the gospel will continue until the end of time (Matt. 28:19,20). This could not occur if the rapture doctrine is true.

At Christ's return the earth and everything in it will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10). There will be no earth for a so-called tribulation period to occur. Neither will there be an earth left upon which Jesus could reign for a thousand years.

At Christ's return the Judgment will occur (Matt. 25:31-33). Everyone will be changed from possessing mortality to immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-53). Both the living and dead saints and sinners will be rewarded according to their deeds (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 2:6). The non-Christian will be consigned to hell while the child of God will be welcomed into heaven (Matt. 25:34, 41).

The doctrine of the rapture is the result of man's vivid imagination. There is simply no biblical support for the teaching known as the rapture. WOT

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF DRESS

[Part Two]

Jason R. Roberts, Memphis, Tennessee

Last month, we carefully examined a serious and sensitive subject—modest apparel. Realizing the gravity of this issue, this article will also be written with careful forethought, inviting the honest Bible student to maintain an open heart and an open Bible (Acts 17:11). It is the purpose of this article to examine the attitude that shepherds, preachers, parents, and members of the local congregation should manifest when approaching this vital Bible subject.

CONCERNED SHEPHERDS

God, in His infinite wisdom, has given elders the serious task of shepherding the local flock which is among them (1 Pet. 5:2). This peculiar responsibility which elders have is not to be treated lightly, but approached with the sobering reminder that each one of the souls entrusted to their care is worth infinitely more than the whole world (Matt. 16:26). When elders stand before God on that great and final day, before the precious souls over whom they watched (or were supposed to have watched) ever reach the hands of God, those souls will first pass through the hands of those elders. Every elder and every person who aspires to become an elder needs to realize the seriousness of the above statement. How many elders can presently say and will be able to say on the day of judgment that they “are pure from the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26)?

In what ways should elders demonstrate their concern as it relates to the issue of modest apparel. First, shepherds need to be concerned enough to request the local preacher to preach on modest apparel. One of the weighty responsibilities that elders have is to make sure their sheep are being fed a proper diet of God’s Word

(1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). Since the issue of modest apparel is part of God’s Word, it becomes a necessary part of the sheep’s diet. When sheep are not being fed a proper diet they will soon lose their direction. Sheep that lose their direction soon become delinquent. And sheep that become delinquent jeopardize their eternal destiny! All of this can be safeguarded when elders become gravely concerned about making sure the local preacher preaches the whole “counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Second, shepherds need to state clearly where they stand on the issue of modest apparel. This can be done in a number of ways. One, when the local preacher finishes his sermon on the issue, an elder, representing the eldership, should support the preacher from the pulpit by making some public remarks regarding his sermon. There is no greater feeling than for a preacher to have an elder speak to the congregation immediately following a sensitive sermon of this type--voicing the eldership’s approval to the things he preached. The first time I preached on the issue of modest apparel, an elder did this very thing. I felt as if a tremendous burden had been relieved as a result. Thank God for elders who back their preachers! Two, shepherds can clearly state where they stand, and what they expect of the local congregation regarding modesty by writing an article for their bulletin. By doing so, no one in the congregation can say that they were not aware of how their shepherds feel about the subject. Some members are just unaware of where their elders stand on this issue. Elders need to have the courage to inform the sheep about what God’s Word expects of them. Contrary to what some believe, elders have just as much authority to set a

dress policy for worship as they do in scheduling what time the saints are going to meet for worship. You show me a congregation where the elders do not take a stand on modest apparel and I will show you a congregation where people will be wearing some of the most ungodly things imaginable to worship.

Third, shepherds need to be concerned enough to confront the sheep who are dressed immodestly. This should not have to be done if the preacher is getting his message across. Unfortunately, some sheep tend to be stubborn at times and will persist in their rebellion regardless of what the preacher says. At this point, as difficult as it is, there needs to be loving confrontation given from the elders (Gal. 6:1,2). Those who love the Lord and love their shepherds will have no problem with their confronting them regarding these matters. Those who despise authority will get angry and probably leave. Let them go. Their rebellious attitude is not needed at the local congregation, lest it filter into the hearts of others.

CONVICTED PREACHERS

Preachers who are more concerned about pleasing the masses than they are about pleasing God are abusing the sacred privilege of preaching the gospel (Gal. 1:10). In so doing, they render themselves ineffective servants in the eyes of God. Many preachers will preach the truth regarding Acts 2:38, but will neglect the same truth regarding 1 Timothy 2:9. Is there any difference in the Lord’s mandate for one to be baptized for the remission of his sins, and the Lord’s mandate for one to dress modestly (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:3)? Preachers need to be convicted about preaching not what is

popular to man, but rather what is pleasing to God. Why then is there a lack of conviction in the minds of some preachers regarding these matters? Anytime an issue is neglected by a preacher, whether it is from the pen or the pulpit, you can be sure that the underlying cause is fear. . . . the fear of what others are going to say or do. When God called and commissioned the mighty prophet Ezekiel to speak to the rebellious children of Israel, He said, "And thou son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shall speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious" (Ezek. 2:6,7). After preaching the truth on modest apparel, the preacher may be the subject of Sunday's lunch conversation among some of the disgruntled members. But if the conversation in heaven between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is pleasing, then this is all that matters. Furthermore, the preacher may receive a bad look from or simply be ignored by a member who would normally shake his hand and tell him what a great sermon that was. But if the God of heaven looks favorably upon the message, then again this is what really matters. The Bible says that evil doers hate the light (Jn. 3:19). It was true then. It is still true today. When the light of the gospel is shone lovingly and firmly upon those who are in sin, sometimes it will invoke a negative reaction from the hearer.

Preachers who are not convicted to herald the totality of God's inspired Word will be tragically convicted in their sins by God on the day of judgment and will have an eternity of regret for so doing.

CONTROLLING PARENTS

Parents have been given the tremendous responsibility in rearing their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). To a large measure, the eternal destiny of their children is in their hands. They can be either a force for good or a force for evil when it comes to the issue of modest apparel. God declared that He was going to bring judgment to the house of Eli because he restrained not his sons. Consequently, his sons were vile (wicked) (1 Sam. 3:12,13). The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, commended Lois and Eunice for translating their faith to Timothy, and for making sure that he knew the holy scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Parents have the choice of being like Eli, and thereby refuse to control what their children will wear, or they can be like Lois and Eunice and teach them from their childhood the sacred principles of decency and modesty. If a mother and father allow their daughter to wear skimpy outfits when she is little, then she will think nothing of wearing the same when she matures into her teenage years. Incidentally, the time to be training our sons and daughters regarding what the Bible says about modest apparel is not when they become teenagers.

Fathers need to shoulder their responsibilities in being the spiritual leader in their homes. Mothers need to set a godly example of propriety and modesty before their children because, "As is the mother, so is her daughter" (Ezek. 16:44). Both mom and dad need to have the parental backbone to tell their children that they are not going to dress in a way that is unbecoming of a child of God.

CAUTIOUS MEMBERS

Individual members of the local congregation need to be extremely

cautious in how they approach the issue of modest apparel. They need to avoid the extreme of setting their own standard as to what is modest and what is not. Additionally, they need to avoid the sin of looking disdainfully at someone who attends the worship service who may be immodestly attired. Why? First, this may be the first time that individual has visited the church of Christ and he or she may know nothing about the issue of modest apparel. You can be sure that it will be the last time he or she visits our services if some judgmental, Pharisaical member is assigned as a door-greeter for that month! Second, the clothing that individual is wearing may be the best that he or she has. James addressed the serious nature of this matter when he discussed the two men who came to the assembly dressed differently. One man was dressed in fine apparel and apparently was wealthy. The other was dressed in tattered rags and was no doubt poor. You can almost see and hear some of the members immediately approaching and saying to the man dressed in fine apparel, "Welcome to the Church of Christ, We're so glad you are here today. Sit over with us. How about leading our opening prayer for us? What are you doing for lunch?" The man who is dressed poorly is neglected and becomes the subject of someone's conversation until the service begins. After all, what can that person offer us here at this church? For those of us who do not think that there will be souls lost over this sin, we need to read carefully James 3, specifically verses nine and ten! Some of our brethren who are guilty of the above-mentioned sin are at the building every time the doors are opened. They are some of the hardest working members of the church, but they are going to miss heaven if they do not repent of this sin.

God is serious about the issue of modest apparel. May we, in view of eternity, address it with the same degree of seriousness.

“THE CROSS SORT OF GETS IN THE WAY”

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

Some time ago, during a segment of “Good Morning America,” Peter Jennings was interviewed by Charles Gibson concerning a documentary special of which Jennings was to be the host. The documentary was entitled “In the Name of God” and was concerned with the changing atmosphere of religion in America. During the interview Jennings made mention of a few of the highlights from this upcoming documentary. He mentioned one particular religious group which had thousands of members and a large physical plant. Housed within the buildings were not only the “sanctuary,” but also a café, a large athletic area (for aerobics, etc.), a gift shop, a book store, and other “departments.” Jennings stated that he himself was accustomed to a small church environment in which things were relatively “calm” and “traditional.” He stated that when he entered the setting of this rather large congregation he did not even “see a cross anywhere.” He stated that “the pastor” felt that “the cross sort of gets in the way.”

Jennings went on to explain that in the “contemporary setting . . . old fashioned ideas and procedures would not suffice.” As “modern religion” is in competition with athletic events, television, and other matters, it (“modern religion”) must do all that it can to be attractive and avoid being “boring,” according to Jennings’ conclusion. Certainly “modern religion” is doing all that it can to take Jennings’ advice.

Later that same night the program itself (“In the Name of God”) was aired. During that program, a number of “contemporary” ideas were

presented. Everything from modern music, to dance, to drama, to “faith healing,” to “holy laughter,” to athletic events, to football-parties-instead-of-worship was presented as being the new rage among “religionists” in America. As I watched it all with great, yet saddened interest, I could not help but think of Mr. Jennings’ earlier statement from that morning--“The cross sort of gets in the way.”

Certainly when it comes to the whims and fancies of men “the cross sort of gets in the way.” It becomes a barrier to mankind’s attempts to satisfy his own desires yet maintain a reasonable portion of “God” in his life. Whenever man attempts to so serve both God and man, “the cross sort of gets in the way” (Matt. 6:24). What, then, is man’s reaction to such an “obstacle”? Why, just remove it, of course. This is *precisely* what he does whenever he casts aside God’s mandates for worship and instills his own (Matt. 15:9).

Ever since its use was made prominent by our Savior, the cross has been viewed by the majority as that which “sorts of gets in the way.” Thus, man has made changes in the plan of God to accommodate himself. He “enjoys” certain things, or “feels” that they are right. Hence, since he so thinks and the Bible stands contrary to such thinking and “the cross sort of gets in the way,” he simply throws the Bible aside and removes the cross.

In actuality, the cross should “get in our way.” It should serve as a daily reminder of what the Lord did for us. Whenever we are tempted to turn

from His will, the cross should “get in the way.” Whenever temptation comes our way and worldly desires seem so enticing (Heb. 11:25), the cross should “get in our way.” Paul stated, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Is it not passing strange that a “religion” which professes to be “Christian” would have the idea that “the cross sort of gets in the way”? What a contradiction! The cross is at the center, is the foundation, and is the “heart and soul” of Christianity. Yet, many, many religious groups have their bases somewhere other than the Bible. They are founded on the shifting sands of human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18-21). To such individuals, “the preaching of the cross is foolishness.” Or, in the words of Mr. Jennings, it is “old-fashioned” and “will not suffice.” God’s word “destroys” such “wisdom” and “brings to nothing” such “understanding.” And, in the end, such groups shall be “rooted up” (Matt. 15:13). On that great and final day, those who have so violated God’s principles and substituted His word for that which is a little less “boring” shall doubtless attempt to enter the portals of heaven (Matt. 7:21-23). But, alas, they shall not be able; for its way shall be blocked. And, throughout the endless ages of eternity shall they proclaim that they almost made it. But, “the cross sort of got in the way.”

DID THE PROPHETS NEED WIGGLE-ROOM?

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

A *New York Times* article began “As a seer to kings, Mmatsepo has had her hits and misses. She told the previous king of Lesotho, Moshoeshoe II, that he was in danger, she said, but she could not foresee that his driver would go over a cliff on Jan. 15, 1996” (7/22/99). As I perused the article, this statement struck me: “Such seers . . . are not expected to be infallible. Just as the Oracle of Delphi gave herself wiggle-room by speaking in parables, Mmatsepo does not pretend that the ancestors reveal everything.”

Wiggle-room is the rage of our age. Would-be-prophets leave themselves an escape hatch in case they need to abandon their own assertions. Take a carefully worded promise and twist it, turn it, bend it but don't break it! Claim that what you meant *then* is what you are saying *now*. Insult the intelligence of your followers by suggesting that they have misunderstood your clear predictions.

No true prophecy of God has ever failed. God even gave his people a fail-safe test to help them determine which prophets had really received a divinely inspired message: “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:21-22, NASB).

Did the prophets of God leave

themselves wiggle-room just in case their prophecies failed? Jonah 3:4 records, “Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’” That is specific. The people understood it and they responded accordingly. Jonah would have been acting unfaithfully if he had “watered-down” or tampered with the message.

What about Elisha in 2 Kings 7:1? He said, “Listen to the word of the Lord; thus says the Lord, ‘Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.’” There is no wiggle-room in that pronouncement. It was met with incredulity (2 Kgs. 7:2). But it came to pass exactly as it had been declared!

It is often amusing to consider the predictions people have made in the past. The article “Cloudy Days in Tomorrowland” in *Newsweek* (1/27/97) listed several quotes that brought a smile to my face. In 1899, Charles H. Duell, the U. S. commissioner of patents, stated unequivocally: “Everything that can be invented has been invented.” Forecasting the development of computer technology, *Popular Mechanics* reported in 1949 that “Computers in the future may . . . perhaps only weigh 1.5 tons.” Decca Records stated in 1962, “We don't like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out.” The group they were rejecting was *The Beatles!* Wouldn't it be wonderful if all

flawed predictions were this harmless?

When it comes to religious faith, it is not the case that forecasting the future is a benign practice. Horrible consequences often accompany false prophecies. In Kampala, Uganda, more than 500 charred bodies were discovered in the aftermath of a church fire (*Log Cabin Democrat*, 3/20/00). The blaze was believed to have been a mass suicide spurred on by cataclysmic predictions. One of the leaders of the religious group had said the world would end on December 31, 1999. When his prophecy failed, he moved the date up to December 31, 2000. Believing that the end of the world was coming, the followers were willing to submit to suicide. One can only wonder why the failure of the first prophecy didn't give them pause. Regarding predictions that the world will end, Jesus still speaks clearly: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Matt. 24:36).

So-called prophets are making their predictions, but only the word of God will stand. It should give us great confidence in the Scriptures as we find one fulfilled prophecy after another in our Bibles. The source of the prophecy makes all the difference. Concerning God's prophets Peter wrote confidently: “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:21).

WOT

EVERY

Mike Benson, Cookeville, Tennessee

Question: "Why do members of the church of Christ eat the Lord's Supper every Sunday? Please explain."

1. The apostles of Christ were guided into ALL TRUTH. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth. . . ." (Jn. 16:13a; cf. Matt. 10:19,20).

2. They ate the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10)--EACH first day of the week. Consider:

- ▶ The disciples were commanded to observe the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28; Lk. 22:17-19).
- ▶ Christians were commanded to assemble every Sunday (1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 10:25).
- ▶ One of the purposes of their assemblies was to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20,33) and therefore to remember His death (1 Cor. 11:24-26).
- ▶ The first century church observed the Lord's Supper according to the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). NOTE: The Greek article (*the*) preceding "bread" is not present in the English, but is present in the Greek text. The article indicates that a special (unleavened) bread is under consideration (1 Cor. 10:16).
- ▶ The apostolic practice was the first day of the week ("Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread . . ." (Acts 20:7), the same day of Christ's resurrection (Lk. 24:1-3, 21,46).

3. Members of the church of Christ are only trying to follow the New Testament PATTERN set forth in Scripture. Since there is not a week that passes that does not have a first day, Christians partake of the Lord's Supper on the weekly occasion, according to the apostolic example, and in so doing, remember the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf. *WOT*

The Words of Truth

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THE WORDS of Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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MORAL ABSOLUTES

Mike Benson, Cookeville, Tennessee

Modern relativistic thinking suggests that we have no rule or standard by which we can distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, moral and immoral. Hilary Putnam--a Harvard University professor--sums it up when he declares that moral/ethical judgments are "something that we ultimately judge by the 'seat of the pants'" (Alan Crippen II, ed., "The Train Wreck of Truth and Knowledge," *Reclaiming the Culture*, p. 59). "We must come to see that there is no possibility of a 'foundation' for ethics . . ." (Ibid), he asserts. Is the professor correct--are morals and ethics based upon our own subjective opinions? Are there no moral absolutes?

Consider for a moment the repercussions of Mr. Putnam's philosophical extreme. (Note: the following excerpts are somewhat explicit):

The pro-life groups are right about one thing: the location of the baby inside or outside the womb cannot make such a crucial moral difference. We cannot coherently hold that it is all right to kill a fetus a week before birth, but as soon as the baby is born everything must be done to keep it alive. The solution, however, is not to accept the pro-life view that the fetus is a human being with the same moral status as yours or mine. The solution is the very opposite: to abandon the idea that all human life is of equal

worth" (Watkins, "Death What a Beautiful Choice," *The New Absolutes*, p. 85).

A principal at an elementary school in New Hampshire invited a homosexual men's chorus to give a concert to the kids. The choral members "changed the words of familiar children's songs to sing about boys loving boys and girls loving girls ("Mister Sandman, bring me a dream/Make him the cutest that I've ever seen"). During their concert they asked the children to raise their hands if they have two mommies or two daddies living with them." When parents heard about the concert after the fact, they confronted the principal, but she wrote them off, saying that the concert was "part of a multicultural emphasis at school" ("Dial Deviant for Normal," *The New Absolutes*, p. 145).

Dr. John Money is professor emeritus of medical psychology and pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University and an influential voice in sex research. In an interview with *Paidika*, a magazine that advocates civil rights for pedophiles, Dr. Money said: "If I were to see the case of a boy aged ten or eleven who's intensely . . . attracted toward a man in his twenties or thirties, if the relationship is totally mutual, and the bonding is

genuinely totally mutual, then I would not call it pathological in any way." Money believes that pedophilia is an orientation which cannot be changed or permanently suppressed (Ibid, p. 148).

Observations:

- 1. If there are no moral absolutes, then man becomes not the discoverer of truth--but the determiner of truth** (Prov. 21:2; Jud. 17:6). Contrast this with the revelation of Scripture: "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23).
- 2. Moral relativism is patently false.** Truth is *absolute--fixed* (Rom. 2:8; Jn. 18:37), it is *attainable* (Jn. 8:32), it is *understandable* (Eph. 5:17; 2 Pet. 3:16), it is *identifiable* (Jn. 17:17; 14:6; 16:13; 1 Jn. 4:6), and it is *consistent* (Tit. 1:2).
- 3. If we have no objective criteria or standard by which to distinguish between right and wrong, then it is impossible to identify certain behavior as "sinful."** Again, contrast this with Paul's rebuke of governor Felix: "Now as he reasoned about righteousness (i.e., "morality"--Moffit), self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you'" (Acts 24:25). WOT

WHEN PEOPLE BELIEVE . . .

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Most of us who are involved in working with the church often wring our hands and ask, “How can we get more people involved in the work of the church? What program can we start . . . what sermon can we preach . . . what seminar can we conduct that will motivate people to get busy for the Lord?” Certainly every faithful elder, preacher, and concerned Christian, after becoming frustrated by the apathy that sometimes prevails in our churches, has asked similar questions. So, is there a cure-all work program of some sort? Can a weekend workshop do the trick? Though programs and workshops certainly have their places in church work, they alone cannot work wonders. What, then, is the solution? Here’s one (three-fold) opinion:

Believe.

Do church leaders believe in the Lord’s church? For the most part, congregations are going to model the attitude and work ethic of their leaders. Because inspiration begins at the top, church leaders must model for the congregation a strong conviction in the efficacy of the local church. Sometimes it seems, however, that we have become so caught up in the day-to-day activities of the church that we have forgotten that the reason we’re here is to save the world (Lk. 19:10; Eph. 1:22,23). Too often we preachers concern ourselves with meeting certain demands--lectureship manuscripts, preachers’ breakfasts, phone calls, web site management, etc.--that we have little time to take care of our primary work: preaching the gospel and

evangelizing the lost. When this happens, church work has become a *job* instead of a passion. Many elderships spend so much time discussing building maintenance, handling financial matters, and having “business meetings” that they have little time for their primary work: shepherding souls and leading the church toward what it ought to be.

We hear the “bad” news--church membership is declining, churches are closing their doors, growth occurs only when we follow the “Community Church” trend (we’re told) . . .--and we sometimes forget that God’s plan works! Consider the impact that the Jerusalem Church of Christ had on its community (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:13,14). God’s word “sounded out . . . not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place” from the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:8). What if the Antioch church had been too busy paying the bills to send Barnabas and Paul to evangelize the world (Acts 13:1-4)?

When we hold hands with God, pattern ourselves after His word, and trust in Him, the Lord’s church can again transform the world. But it begins with faith in the heart of every church leader!

Dream.

Belief stimulates vision. Every CEO knows that if he fails to formulate a vision for his company’s future ten, twenty, or thirty years from now, the competition will pass him by. When Disney World was completed, someone said, “I wish Walt could’ve seen this.” Someone responded, “He

did. That’s why it’s here.”

The Bible often speaks of the importance of vision. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18). “And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it” (Hab. 2:2). Accordingly, many of the Bible’s great characters were visionaries. Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). Joshua and Caleb said “We can take this land” (Num. 13:30). Caleb, when eighty years old, said “Give me this mountain” (Josh. 14:12). Paul said, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13,14). Jesus, with the greatest vision of all, dreamed of a mustard seed kingdom that would bless the world (Mt. 13:31,32). To use Joel’s words out of context, what the church desperately needs today are old men who “dream dreams” and young men who “see visions” (Joel 2:28).

Where are our dreamers and visionaries today? We often speak of the challenges facing the church, but who will tell of the opportunities? Imagine the impact it would have if we all set the following vision before the congregations we serve (from Mac Layton):

- ▶ The vision of involving every member in service to Christ with his/her talents in addition to faithful worship.

- ▶ The vision of a glorious Bible school program where all members are so excited they can't wait to get there.
- ▶ The vision of a youth ministry which seeks to build our youth into the image of Christ and involve every young Christian in service to the Lord.
- ▶ The vision of an outreach ministry that will carry the message of Christ to every lost soul of our community.
- ▶ The vision of a world mission program with the addition of missionaries each year.
- ▶ The vision of a great heart of compassion for the poor, widows, orphans, and hurting people.
- ▶ The vision of a great hand of outreach to those with special needs such as the aged, singles, etc.
- ▶ The vision of a great ministry for building good homes and good marriages, helping parents in their purpose of rearing good Christian children.
- ▶ The vision of fellowship that gives every Christian a sense of belonging and friendship (*How to Build a Great Church*, p. 107).

Challenge.

Robert Woodruff, the president of Coca-Cola from 1923 to 1955, cast the following vision for the company. Right after World War II he said, "In my lifetime I want everyone in the world to have tasted Coke." Could this challenge to his people be the reason why more people know the name "Coke" than the name "Jesus"?

In order to get people to work for anything, we must convince them that what they're working for is a worthwhile cause. As far as church work is concerned, we can motivate people in various ways. We can

attempt to shame people into getting busy (and lethargy is certainly shameful). Or we can use the "fire and brimstone" approach (Jesus sometimes did - Mt. 25:30). Some work programs use rewards as a motivational tool. But the greatest method is simple: we must convince Christians that the purpose of the church of Christ is valid and worthwhile. After we, as church leaders, believe in the Cause and have established goals and dreams for our respective congregations, we must communicate those goals to the people. The reason the Jews were able to accomplish the enormous feat of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls in fifty-two days was that Nehemiah effectively communicated his dream to them: "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me." Then notice their response: "And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (Neh. 2:18). What retrieved the apostles from their fishing boats to a life of sacrifice? What kept them inspired when their backs and bodies were torn apart by whips and stones? What motivated them to give their lives for their message? The answer is, of course, that they believed in what they were doing.

If we as church leaders can effectively convince the people that being active in the work of the church is making a difference in the world, then the biggest part of our work is done. If the people in our pews believe that the Lord's work is more important than their recreational and monetary pursuits, then Satan will be powerless to stop us. When people believe . . . there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

Sometimes the reason people are inactive is not that they are apathetic or uninterested; they have simply never been asked. Assuming the people do

not want to work, we throw up our hands in dismay and decry their apathy. The truth, however, may be that we have never laid before the people a vision and a challenge concerning the Lord's work. Many of our members would gladly accept responsibility if we delegated to them worthwhile tasks.

When young Fred Smith was a student at Yale University, he developed an idea for an innovative air-freight company and submitted it in a paper for class. The professor was less than impressed; the paper Smith submitted earned him a 'C.' Thirty years later, FedEx is the world's largest express transportation company, with 128,000 employees and more than \$7 billion in capital. This short-sighted professor failed to take a few things into consideration. One is Smith's persistence--he simply refuses to give up. Another is his resourcefulness---when plan 'A' doesn't work, there is always plan 'B' to put in motion. Most important, however, is Smith's ability to recruit others to his vision. People want to be part of what he is involved in--even to the point of sacrifice. In the early days, for example, his pilots often refueled company jets with their own money. Sometimes they sat on paychecks for months to help keep the company afloat.

Our work is infinitely greater than express transportation . . . but do we have that kind of persistence and vision? When we do, and we're able to communicate them to the people, the prospects for the success of the church will be incredible. WOT

Note: the impetus and some of the thoughts for this article came from "There Must be Great Vision" in *How to Build a Great Church*, by Mac Layton, pp. 99-110.

THAT BOY IS NO HUSBAND

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

While holding a gospel meeting in another state recently, I was asked by the local preacher to meet with him and a woman who had asked to talk with us. She felt helpless and really needed advice. This tenderhearted forty-something Christian mother's eyes welled up with tears as she began, "My fifteen-year-old daughter is pregnant. . . ." Their hearts are broken, and their daughter is facing decisions no one should ever have to make. Now, that baby is pure and sweet and an heritage of the Lord (Psa. 127). Nevertheless, for this family, today's heartaches and problems are real.

Go back to the days before the fornication was committed--before the unhappy decisions were made leading up to this pregnancy out of wedlock. Perhaps this girl, as most, reasoned this way: "We love each other so much. He loves me just like he is my husband." No doubt he told her he loved her and she believed it was so. But words sometimes have different meanings, and here is one great example of that sort of confusion. Truth be told, his love consisted of 95% lust and 5% true affection. Boys and girls this age would say I was wrong and figure I didn't know what I was talking about. But the evidence speaks too loudly for me to be wrong. Read on.

Consider the difference between the way a real husband loves his wife and the way that eighteen-year-old boy loved his fifteen-year-old girlfriend. In Ephesians 5 we read the description of a husband's love for his wife. Here is real love:

1. He loves her enough to die for her. Therefore, he loves her enough to live for her. He always wants what is best for her. He would never intentionally hurt her. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25).
2. He loves her as his own body. Just as we naturally avoid things which would harm our bodies, such as drinking poison or jumping out of an

airplane without a parachute, a man protects his wife from anything which could harm her. He does not want her hurt. He would suffer himself before he would let her be hurt, even to the point of dying for her if a circumstance required. "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh . . ." (Eph. 5:28,29).

3. He provides her with the things which will help her live long and happy in this life. He loves her with a love that totally desires her best interest. As the Bible says, he "nourishes and cherishes" her. "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5:29).

Now, contrast that husband's love with the love of this eighteen-year-old boy who chose to commit fornication with his girlfriend--a girlfriend who is now expecting her first child. Girls, wake up to the truth. Perhaps this girl thought, "He loves me like I was his wife." No he doesn't. Think of the risk that boyfriend was willing to put that girl in in order to satisfy his physical desires for a short time. He led that girl into a pit of physical and emotional serpents and ignored the danger to her to get what he wanted. Could she walk through that pit and not be bitten?

1. He ignored the emotional guilt she would experience. Sex is not trivial and it isn't something you can forget. Women (and many men) who committed fornication in their dating years, who are now 35, look back on their teen years with deep regret for sexual sins. Did this girl's boyfriend think or care about that? What about later when she is middle-aged and is trying to encourage her teenage daughter or son to remain pure? Did he care that this event would probably roll a wave of guilt over her again and again through her life?

2. He was not concerned about how she would feel when she had to look

into the eyes of her Mom and Dad when they learned of her sin. Oh how could you erase that memory of the pain in their eyes when they learned the truth? But he didn't think of that when he sought to satisfy his selfish desires. The potential emotional pain she could suffer meant nothing to him. All that mattered was the moment and what he wanted. He didn't protect her from the pain of guilt. He produced it.

3. He did not love her children. In fact, he had contempt for them. He knew that she was able to bear children, and that she would probably bear children sometime. To have his desires momentarily fulfilled he was willing to risk that she will conceive her first child by him, and that such a baby would one day learn that he was conceived out of wedlock, perhaps suffer the poverty of a single parent house, probably one day be the oldest child in a home where he is a step-child of his dad and a half-brother to the other children. Many babies in America are being raised by grandmothers because their daughters misunderstood the word "love," and committed sin with a boyfriend. Who would be so heartless about your future children to do such a thing? Why doesn't he love children more than that? Why doesn't he love your children more than that?

4. He has ignored the gut-wrenching remorse she will feel now that she is pregnant and must face people she respects--her grandparents, her preacher and elders, her Bible-class teacher, her old boyfriends, the kids in the church's youth group. Why should he care? All he knew was that he wanted her so much, and that's all that mattered. The rest didn't matter enough to change his mind. He loves somebody, but it wasn't her. It was himself.

Take another look at that boyfriend. He may be handsome, sweet, and the envy of all the other girls, but he is no husband. Don't let him treat you like you are his wife.

IT IS BETTER

Scott McCown, Parrish, Alabama

We all enjoy a good hamburger--some fast food burgers are better than others, but a hamburger hot off a grill in your own back yard is better than a fast food burger. And as good as that is, steak is even better. Homemade ice cream is better than store bought, and grouper is better than triggerfish.

There are some things in life that are just simply better than other things. We each have our own lists of favorite hotels, cars, and sports teams. And as sure as you buy a new top-of-the-line computer, a better one comes out the next day. There is always something better. God understands this and tells us about some "better things" . . .

"Then Samuel said: 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams'" (1 Sam. 15:22; NKJV). Saul went to battle and took spoils of war though God had forbidden it on that occasion. When Samuel heard the animals and inquired about the noise, Saul claimed the people wanted them so that they might offer them to God. But it was not an offering God wanted. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice."

Jesus made a similar statement in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." Doing God's will is imperative. Could God be looking at our worship and asking us, "why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"? Worship is important, do not misunderstand. But God desires more than lip service. God desires our obedience to Him in all areas of life.

We need to grasp the truth of Proverbs 15:16, "Better a little with the fear of the Lord, Than great treasure with trouble." Our focus tends to be on what we can see--money, possessions, recognition, the things we think will add up to make us happy.

There is a story about a wealthy businessman hurrying past the shores of a fishing village on his way to an important meeting. Seeing some local fishermen in hammocks along the shore, he stopped. Irritated at their laziness he scolds them, "Why have you stopped when there is plenty of day left, to catch more fish. If you catch more fish you could sell and make money. You could use the money to buy more boats, with which you could catch more fish and make even more money so you can be happy." The fishermen looked at each other and then at the stranger and replied, "We are already happy."

What matters is the "fear of the Lord," not how many boats you have, or how many people work for you. If you fear (respect) God you will understand to obey is better than sacrifice.

"But I have all these debts!" Listen again to the wise man: "**Better not to vow than to vow and not pay**" (Eccl. 5:5). A debt is a vow. If you have to struggle to meet a debt, then you may have vowed more than you can afford. It is better to do without and not promise to pay than to vow and not pay.

Our society is built on the concept of indebtedness. "No payments until the year 2001" is a familiar slogan. A major problem with debts (vows) is that delaying payment feeds inflated retail prices. The manufacturers borrow to build the products and turn

their cost over to the retailers, the retailers borrow to get the stock, so they charge the consumer extra, so the consumer borrows to purchase the merchandise. Consumers then need higher wages, so the manufactures add cost to the product. It is a seemingly endless cycle. Retailers know we are more likely to delay payment so it does not seem to hurt as much. Satan works the same way with sin. If he can delay the consequences then we are more likely to get involved in sinful behavior.

A second problem is that many have a problem keeping vows. Not just financial vows, but legal promises. Even marriage vows are taken lightly. If we truly understand that to obey is better than sacrifice, we will keep our vows, and if our focus is on fearing God and not accumulating things, we will not vow more than we can afford, and keep the vows we make.

Bad credit and breaking promises can ruin your name. The wise man says, "**A good name is better than precious ointment**" (Eccl. 7:1). "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Prov. 22:1). Most of our parents tried to instill within us that our family name means something. They used phrases like, "There is a history of good people in your family, and it needs to stay that way."

But more important than our family name is another name we wear. As children of God we carry about the name of Christ; everywhere we go we reflect Christ. A few years ago a young mother expressed concern over identifying her membership with the local congregation. She had worked as a waitress in town for a year before moving. She expressed that some of the rudest people she served were

active members in the local congregation. How does the waitress that served *you* at dinner see Christ? What about the cashier at the store, or the teller at the bank--what is their concept of a Christian? What about the receptionist at the doctor's office--does she see Christ in you when the appointments are backed up and you have to wait longer than you planned to? A good influence for the name of Christ is better than getting your way.

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

mire.”

Peter is not talking about half-hearted Christians. He is talking about those who left the world, people who were grounded and rooted in faith. He has in mind those who may even have been leaders, those who knew heaven was theirs, but pulled away from God. Peter is speaking of those who understand what could have been theirs but will find themselves in torment and in hell. Like the Ephesians they “left their first love.” They once knew the treasures of a relationship with God, but became involved in the world again. This does not have to be adultery, or drunkenness; it can be gossip, jealousy, slander, faultfinding, or simply not obeying God.

Peter says that returning to the ways of the world from the ways of God is like “A dog returning to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.” This is an ugly, disgusting, and offensive picture. Returning to the world is not a sweet aroma sent up to God.

The last passage about better things is a quote from Paul, **“For to me, to**

live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:21-23).

Paul is talking about dying or staying to help the Philippian brethren and decides that it is more needful to stay. But in writing he shares a truth about life after death--“it is better to live a life that puts you with Christ in heaven after Judgment.” He implies that living with Christ is better than living without Christ.

Are we living with Christ? Can we say death is better than life knowing at death we will go to be with Christ? John says, “These things I have written to you, . . . that you may know that you have eternal life, . . .” (1 Jn. 5:13). We can have that confidence. Why settle for ground beef when you can have filet mignon? Why settle for the treasures of earth when you can have eternal treasure in heaven? *WO*

“HOW CAN I JOIN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?”

Jason Jackson, Stockton, California

The question has been asked many times, “What do I have to do to join the church of Christ?” The inquiry is genuine and appreciated. It is encouraging to know a person is concerned for spiritual things, seeing the value of being associated with other spiritual people.

In responding to this question, it is imperative that we consider such words as “join” and “church,” and how these popular concepts actually relate to the New Testament teaching concerning salvation and the church. This will assist in one's understanding of this important and sincere question.

The word “church” means “called out.” The word actually signified any gathering of people together for a specific purpose. It was used among the Greeks to designate a body of citizens who assembled for civil matters (Acts 19:39). The term was used of Israel, the “church” or “congregation of people” in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). In the New Testament, the most prominent use is with reference to those whom God has “called out” of the world. The “called out people” constitute the church. They are designated the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

A further study of the church of Christ (i.e., the group of individuals who belong to Christ) will reveal that these people did not “join” the church through self-devised means. Rather, Christ set the terms of entrance into the church. He died, purchasing the church with his blood (Acts 20:28). Accordingly, he laid down the terms of admittance.

Investigation of the New Testament teaching on the church will also reveal that a person who is saved is, by that very fact, in the church. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23; 1:22,23). The church is composed of

those who have been saved. The saved make up the church; the church is the saved.

If we can simply learn from the New Testament what a person needs to do in order to be saved (i.e., have the forgiveness of sins), we simultaneously learn the terms of admittance into Christ's church.

The New Testament teaches that a person must have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Jn. 3:16; 20:30,31). This means that one must believe that Jesus has one and the same nature with God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. The "Word" (i.e., heaven's communicator), who was with God in the beginning and was God Himself as to His nature, became flesh and lived upon this earth (Jn. 1:1,14; cf. Mt. 16:16-18; Jn. 17:5; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:5-8).

The Scriptures also teach that one must repent of sins (Lk. 13:3). Repentance means a change of mind. A change of one's mind, attitude, and conduct about sin is obligatory (Acts 17:30; cf. Rom. 8:13; 2 Cor. 7:10).

A person who believes and repents of sin should confess that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 10:9,10; Matt. 16:16).

Having acknowledged a conviction concerning Jesus Christ, and his substitutionary death on the cross for humanity's sins, one is a proper candidate for baptism. Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Baptism is the time at which one's past sins are forgiven through the redemptive blood of Christ (1 Pet. 3:21). Therefore, a believer is "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

We learn from the New Testament that "joining" the church is not what one decides for himself/herself. That is not to say that we do not have any initiative in the matter. However, when we believe, repent, confess, and are baptized for the forgiveness of our sins, it is the Lord who adds us to the church

(Acts 2:47).

Understanding these fundamental New Testament principles, let's consider some specific situations wherein we might have a great opportunity to teach someone the biblical means of "joining the church," or actually, being added by the Lord to the church, the saved body (Eph. 5:23).

Hypothetical #1: A person attends the services. He enjoys the singing, the sermons, and many are friendly to him, making him feel welcome. He may decide, "I have found my 'church-home' that I have been looking for."

This person might be rebuffed, if he was not immediately accepted into the fellowship of the church. However, we must remember that neither church members, preachers, nor elders can lay down requirements, nor eliminate requirements, for being a member of the Lord's church. We can only follow the Scriptures. Even though this person may be a "good, moral individual," though he may be a generous and prayerful person, and though he may consider himself a religious individual, he must still accept the Lord's terms for salvation and entrance into the church.

Like Cornelius of Acts 10, one must hear the gospel and obey it (Acts 11:14). One cannot simply come in and "join" the congregation. An individual can enjoy the fellowship of the congregation only when he comes into fellowship with Christ by obeying the gospel, just as it is revealed in the New Testament.

Hypothetical #2: An individual is invited to the services of the Lord's church. She appreciates the biblical emphasis of the service. This person has "gone to church" for years. In fact, she "accepted Jesus as her personal Savior." She even found a nice church "to join," and was eventually baptized. Surely, if anyone could be identified with the congregation, should she so choose, would it not be this person?

Considering this case, and applying the New Testament--not our feelings, or any other subjective standard--we would kindly, and tactfully need to point out the following biblical truths. First, a person cannot accept the Lord into his heart, and on that basis alone, be saved. The Bible teaches otherwise (Mk. 16:16). Second, merely going into a baptistry and being baptized by a "pastor" or "clergyman," does not constitute New Testament baptism.

Paul met a group of twelve men in Ephesus in Acts 19. They had been baptized. They had, in fact, been baptized for the remission of sins, unlike denominational baptisms. Additionally, the baptism was one that was authorized by God (i.e., the baptism of John). Yet, because that preparatory era had passed, and their knowledge was incomplete, they had to submit to baptism in the name of Jesus, for the remission of sins again.

It took great courage on the part of those twelve men to accept this command. They had been sincere, and no doubt believed that they had fully obeyed heaven's requirements for salvation. When they learned better, they simply submitted to it. They did not reject it, neither did they try to transfer their current knowledge back to their previous baptism. They just did it, in humility, accepting the Lord's plan of salvation.

Such situations are real, and very delicate. We should utilize these circumstances as open doors for teaching the New Testament on salvation and the church. If a person desires to be a part of the Lord's church (i.e., a genuine Christian who has no additional names or man-made entanglements), he must submit to the Lord's plan of salvation, and Christ will add such a one to His church. When, therefore, an individual comes into real fellowship with God, he/she can be in fellowship with the people of God (1 Jn. 1:3).

SOME IMPORTANT FIRST THINGS

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

There is a certain excitement about "first things." Most of us find it easy to remember our first day at school, and our parents probably remember the first time we walked and the first time we talked! Can you remember the first time you led a soul to Christ . . . or taught a Bible class? There are some things that should come first by virtue of our deliberate choice. One of the important lessons we have to learn is that of discrimination. So many things clamor for priority, and we need to know how to assess their value so that we do not give first place to secondary things. Much of our trouble arises when we reverse the order and "major in minors and minor in majors." Where are we to find guidance to help us make proper evaluations? As usual, the Word of God is our all-sufficient guide. In Matthew we discover the record of our Lord's five-fold law of priorities.

First your brother, then your gift (Mt. 5:23,24). The devil loves to sow seeds of discord in the ranks of the redeemed. God's work is often paralyzed and His servants are frequently powerless because of an unwillingness to seek and secure proper reconciliation with a brother. No Christian can be right with God if he is consciously wrong with his brother. If the tides of God's blessings are dammed up in your life, is it because you need to "first be reconciled . . .?"

First the spiritual, then the temporal (Mt. 6:33). God knows all about our temporal needs and is willing to supply them according to His riches in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil. 4:19).

First judge yourself, then your brother (Mt. 7:3). How blind we often are to our own faults, and how quickly we observe the faults and failings of others! In solemn words the Searcher of hearts urges us to use our critical faculty very carefully. How much more profitable to mend and restore than to criticize (cf. Gal. 6:1).

First what Christ wants, then what you want (Mt. 8:21,22). "Me first!" How terrible, and yet how frequently we act in this way . . . a self-centered person going his own way instead of the Lord's way.

First the inside, then the outside (Mt. 23:25-28). The Christian life is not just an outwardly reformed life; it is primarily an inwardly cleansed life. When the inward cleansing is thorough, the outward transformation is soon evident. God does not want outward profession merely, but first He wants inward possession.

WOT

The Words of Truth

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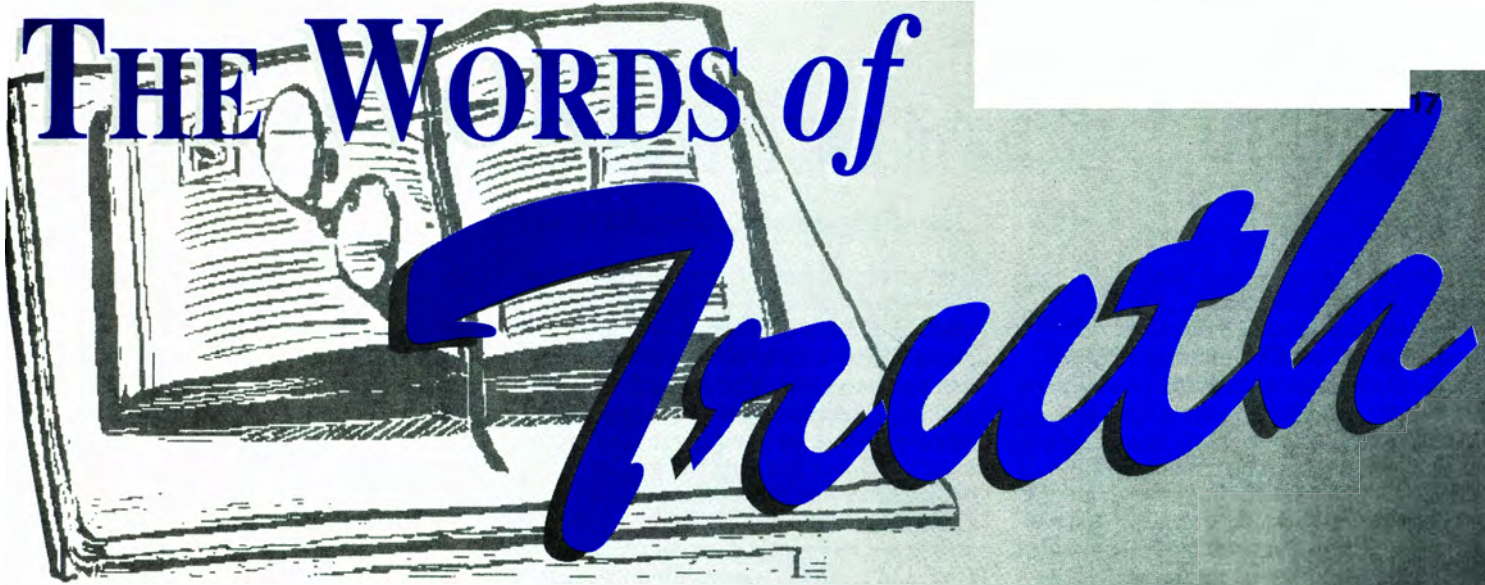
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25)

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“I WILL IF YOU WILL”

THE PERILS OF SUMMER CAMP BAPTISM

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

I wish to begin this article with sincere rejoicing over every Christian who reads this and who was baptized while attending a summer camp run by faithful church members. The following concerns are not intended to minimize the seriousness or validity of your baptism. The angels in heaven rejoice over your decision to live for Christ, and I thank God for you.

It is my concern that camp teachers/leaders face a great temptation to become overzealous to baptize as many children in their week of camp as they can. Yet consider that camp baptisms are in some ways very dangerous and could cause problems for years to come. If you have ever spent a week in such a camp you know how wonderful and challenging it can be. Physically it is exhausting. A combination of heat, exercise, extreme fun, and often a woeful lack of sleep will wear you out. As children, my sisters and I would fall asleep as soon as we got in the car for the trip home at the end of camp. Arriving home we'd go straight to bed to sleep for several hours. A child who has been thus exhausted may come down the aisle to be baptized for many wrong reasons, which seem right at the time, and not even realize it. Furthermore, preachers who bear down with emotional sermons of sin and damnation are using poor judgment. What will that child think of that decision a week

later after the “camp sedative” has worn off? Aren't we setting them up for looking back at their baptism with a little confusion about what really happened and if they were really ready to obey? These baptisms may be great creators of situations in which people worry for years about the validity of what they did, and who will ultimately be baptized again to clear the doubt.

Perhaps an illustration will help. A few years ago, in a camp in which my wife and I were teachers and counselors, I happened to pass a group of six or seven girls, each about twelve years old. It was Thursday night--the last night of camp. The next day this wonderful week would be over and everyone would exchange addresses and promises to write. It was about midnight, and as I passed by the girls I learned they were discussing baptism. One girl, sobbing, turned to the other weeping child and said, “Well, I will if you will.” Now that frightens and grieves me. Such an atmosphere has a high probability of conversions that don't represent a serious decision to live for Christ the rest of one's life. I'm not saying that such baptisms cannot be right. I am simply saying that such an atmosphere narrows the probability.

Baptism, the most important decision of one's life, should be made with determined resolve and a clear head, not when you're

ten, your best friends are all about to leave you, you haven't slept in a week, and you just want to cry!

Some camps have adopted a policy in which the director meets with all the teachers and preachers at the beginning of camp week to review and urge them to use good judgment. Some no longer have evening or late-night invitations. When a young person wants to be baptized, they lovingly take him to the phone to call his parents and get their response. Parents who agree that the time is right, and give the go-ahead, should want to come and be with their son or daughter--thus further emphasizing the seriousness of this great decision. Other parents will compliment their child's desire to obey, and gently say, “When you get home from camp we will sit down with God's word together and make sure you are ready.”

For all of you who make the sacrifice to work in summer camp, I applaud you. But I urge prayerful consideration about your approach to camp preaching and exhorting. Teach those sweet children. Show them Christ's law, His love, His church plan; but stop those emotional pleas to get these children down the aisle! Save your emotionalism for another day. It is abusive of the plan of salvation and of these young people.

WOT

DON'T GET TOO CLOSE

Chuck Webster, Editorial

We live in a casual world. We “dress down” for work on Fridays, play golf in shirts with no collar (a break from tradition), and watch Broadway plays in casual clothing (another break from tradition). “Do I have to dress up?” is a question we learn at an early age. “Come as you are” has become a familiar refrain, a sort of catch phrase for our modern culture. Our speech also reflects this nonchalant demeanor. Young folks often refer to older people by their first names, instead of the traditional “Mr.” or “Mrs.” and “Sir” or “Ma’am.” These have become old-fashioned, quaint, and a bit too formal.

It should come as no surprise, then, that this casual attitude is influencing the way we view God. Casual is “in” with religious groups today. Notice the emphasis in this church advertisement:

Saturday Night Alive is a church service given for different folks, in a different way, at a different time. . . . The time is better for many, the dress is casual (I’ve seen people come straight from their garden with T-shirt and shorts), but you can dress the way you wish. . . .

Someone said “they should issue seat belts for that service.” This is the place where . . . one sometimes sings, “God’s Open for Business--its [sic] Saturday Night!” And don’t forget, it’s a “holy happing [sic] hospitality place where Faith Finds Rhythm and The Message is Grace” (taken from the internet; emp. in original).

People like to attend service at the Bellevue Community Church in Nashville because, among other things, they can “dress for comfort” (quoted by Dan Chambers in *Showtime: Worship in the Age of Show Business*, p. 28). Two reasons visitors like the Highland Park Church in Nashville is that they can “dress for comfort (505 blues, dockers, or a three-piece suit)” and they “. . . love [the] free coffee, soft drinks, and doughnuts” (quoted by Chambers, *ibid*). One man began his prayer by looking up and saying, “Good morning Daddy. . . .” The message is clear: today’s generation does not like stuffy, traditional, formal environments; they like it casual, easygoing, and relaxed.

Most of us in the church of Christ are largely unfamiliar with the kind of blasé attitude suggested by the quotes above. But have we at times become a little too “familiar” with God? Have we brought Him down to a human level where our actions and speech suggest that there’s very little difference between us and Him? When Moses approached the burning bush,

God cautioned him, “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5). In other words, “Moses, don’t get too close. You are on holy ground.” The same admonition needs to be sounded today: when we approach God we must remember that God’s presence demands reverence, respect, and fear. Here’s why:

Are we sometimes guilty of thinking God is like us? Do we sometimes enter the worship assembly with the same attitude that we might enter a theater? Do we dress the same? Do we address God as if He were a peer? We need to remember God’s nature. He is high and holy, perfect and infinite in every benevolent attribute. In the middle of Psalm 50:21 is a telling phrase: God says, “You thought that I was altogether like you” (NKJV). Remember . . . *don’t get too close*.

Throughout God’s revelation He has impressed upon humanity the need to act and think differently when in His presence. When preparations were made for the law to be given, explicit instructions were given concerning the people’s behavior.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, *that ye go not up* into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether *it be* beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. . . . Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them (Ex. 19:10-13, 21-24).

Remember the principle? *Don’t get too*

close.

Isaiah once saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1) and the seraphim worshiping, crying out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). Did the prophet feel like the appropriate response was “holy laughter”? Did he pull up a chair and have a friendly chat with the Lord? Notice Isaiah’s response: “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:6). He was overcome with feelings of unworthiness, that it was somehow unbefitting for him to be in the presence of God. . . . *Don’t get too close*.

Most of us have been taught since childhood that when the Bible says to fear God, it means something less than fear; the meaning is more akin to respect and reverence. A closer look, I believe, indicates that we have watered down what the Bible *really* teaches: we *are* to fear God. In one of David’s psalms he says, “For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens” (1 Chron. 16:25,26). The Hebrew word translated “feared” is *yare*, which means “to fear, revere, be afraid, stand in awe of, be awed.” Other meanings are “to be fearful, be dreadful, be feared, cause astonishment and awe, to be held in awe, . . . to make afraid, terrify” (*Strong’s*). Of the 314 times the word is used in the Old Testament the most common translation is “fear” or “afraid” (266 times). Other renderings are “terrible” (23 times), “terrible thing” (6), “dreadful” (5), “reverence” (3), “fearful” (2), and “terrible acts” (1). The psalmist uses this word in Psalm 111:9 when he says of God, “Holy and **reverend** is his name.” “Reverend” is translated in other versions as “awesome” (NKJV, NAS, NIV) and “terrible” (RSV). Peter, James, and John fell on their faces and were “sore afraid” when they heard God’s voice on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:6). When John saw the Lord he fell on his face as if dead (Rev. 1:17). The meaning is clear: God’s Name is awesome, fearful, awe-inspiring, dreadful, and therefore we are to fear and respect Him. . . . *Don’t get too close*.

But how is this principle to be applied? That will be the focus of next month’s editorial.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Todd Clippard, Hamilton, Alabama

Imagine several groups of sheep gathered around their shepherd, pulling at him from all directions. "This way is best!" cries one group, while another group, pulling in the opposite direction, insistently cries out, "No, this way is better!" Or picture this--a group of shepherds pulling, pushing, pleading, and/or dragging a flock of ungrateful, grumbling sheep.

In the real relationship between shepherds and sheep, events like those described above never happen. Yet, in the church these images are all too commonplace. "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (Jam. 3:10).

The Bible gives specific qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 for men who would serve in the capacity of an elder (shepherd). An eldership that actively shepherds the flock that is among them, and truly takes the oversight thereof (1 Pet. 5:2), is worthy to be followed and ought to be greatly appreciated. "We beseech

you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:12,13). This passage clearly teaches we are to love and appreciate our elders (i.e., them which are over us in the Lord) for the sake of the work they have undertaken.

The Bible also speaks of our responsibility as sheep to be submissive and follow our shepherds. In Hebrews 13:7, we are commanded to "remember (be mindful of) them who have the rule over you. . ." The word "rule" has two basic meanings, both of which apply to the eldership. First, the eldership has authority in matters of judgment in the local flock. Second, the eldership is to lead or take the lead so the flock may follow. This meaning is expressed in the latter part of the verse, "whose faith follow,

considering the outcome of their conduct" (NKJV).

Lest anyone think the eldership has no authority other than that of example, look to Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them who rule over you, and be submissive. . ." Again, the reason for this imperative is found immediately following, "for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account." The verse closes with this charge, "Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable to you." I would not want to face my Lord in the judgment having been a thorn in the flesh to the men who gave of themselves to watch for my soul. Every Christian has the responsibility to make the task of oversight a joy for them who shall give an account. What kind of account will be given regarding your conduct toward your elders? Think about it!

WOT

RESPECT FOR THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

Gary L. Grizzell, Cookeville, Tennessee

There are a number of reasons we should love, honor, and respect the Word of God. The Bible gives us a knowledge of the existence of God, creation, Jesus Christ, salvation, heaven, and hell. It gives us a knowledge of God's will for us (Eph. 5:17). The Word of God frees us from sin and all its evil consequences which reach out to grab and destroy us. It frees us from the power of sin (Col. 1:13,14). It frees us from the pollution of sin, i.e., guilt and fear (2 Tim. 1:7). It gives us from the pleasure of sin (Heb. 10:25). It frees us from the old man of sin (Rom. 6:3,4). It offers us heaven where we will be free from the presence of all sin. The Bible tells man of his origin, his purpose of existence, and his destiny (Gen. 1:1; Eccl. 12:13,14; 2 Cor. 5:10). The Bible is the only book that deals sufficiently with the subject of death.

Though God has given us the Bible to guide and instruct man in the way of righteousness, why then is the nation (and the world) so full of sin problems? All one has to do is read the daily newspaper or watch the evening news on television to see that our society is full of crime and sin. Our interest turns to concern when we recognize that God eventually delivers an increasingly rebellious people into the hands of its enemies (Neh. 9:26,27).

As an approach to answering the question of why our nation is full of sin problems in spite of the fact that most (if not all) in this country have access to the Bible, consider the following facts. Jesus teaches that only a *few* will enter heaven while the *majority* of men will enter hell in eternity (Mt. 7:13,14). Why is this the case? A look at the *first* sin ever committed reveals that Eve violated God's law by eating of unauthorized fruit

(Gen. 2:16,17; 3:1-6). If we can find out the reason Eve committed that *first* sin, perhaps then we can understand the reason that most will be lost on the day of judgment. After all, Adam and Eve were the entire population of man in the Garden of Eden at that moment in time. Yes, it is true that Eve was deceived by Satan (1 Tim. 2:14). But why did she *allow* herself to be deceived? Yes, she fulfilled the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (Gen. 3:6; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). But why did she *allow* herself to transgress through these avenues? It is *not* true that she was ignorant of the law of the trees. Note that she revealed her level of knowledge in her conversation to Satan. She even knew she was not to "touch" the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:3). The *underlying reason* Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was

simply because she disrespected the authoritative Word of God. This is also true with reference to Adam. When tempted to eat of the forbidden tree Eve faced a decision. She could have chosen to either respect what *God* had said or to do her *own* will. Biblical history clearly reveals that she disregarded the words of God. Figuratively speaking, she spat on the Word of God. Figuratively speaking, she stomped under foot the Word of God. She wanted what *she* wanted and she was going to have it! She had eternal life in her hands and dropped it. Without discounting the problem of ignorance of the Scriptures, we must recognize that disrespect for God's Word is the greatest reason for the sin problems in the world.

Again, why are all the sin problems in our society--abortions, homosexuality, immorality, unethical conduct, active euthanasia, humanistic philosophies, religious error, etc.--in existence? Why is it the case that *most* will be lost on the day of judgment? The reason is that age-old problem of mankind and that is a *lack of respect* for the authoritative words of God.

What are the five steps which constitute the plan of salvation according to the New Testament? A lost and dying world answers, "Well, I don't know and I don't care" (Rom. 10:17; Jn. 8:24; Lk. 13:3; Rom. 10:9,10; Acts 2:38). What are the five authorized acts of worship which God accepts in the Christian Age? Again, the answer comes from so many, "I don't know and I don't care" (Acts 20:7; Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 14:15; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Tim. 4:2). What does the New Testament teach about faithful Christian living? What is the work of the Lord's church? What is the church authorized to do and not to do? What three ways does the Bible authorize a religious belief or practice? Again, many say, "I don't know and I don't care." However, the Bible teaches that all men *will* reap what they sow and that God is not successfully mocked (Gal. 6:7,8).

DENOMINATIONALISM

All the sin problems in denominationalism may be laid right at the doorstep of a lack of respect for the Word of God. Who is to have all authority in religious matters? Paul stated that "He (Christ) is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). Jesus himself claimed the right to command and enforce obedience. He

stated that "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). This rules out any man who claims to be the earthly head of the church (the word "pope" is never found in the Word of God). The people in Jesus' day recognized He spoke with the authority of God (Mt. 7:28,29). All today *must* produce New Testament authority for questions relating to salvation, Christianity, and religion (Col. 3:17).

Denominationalism is the setting up of man-made institutions with their own peculiar doctrines, creeds, beliefs, and traditions (Mt. 15:7-9). The problem with this arrangement is that it takes Christ off the throne and puts the "Reverend" on it (or some other unauthorized person, council, or organization*). The word, "reverend," is used only once in the KJV and is descriptive of the name of God (Psa. 111:9). No man has a right to place himself on the level of deity (Mt. 23:8).

While all 66 books of the Bible are the inspired words of God, the *New Testament* is the *binding* law in the Christian Age (Heb. 10:9; Rom. 15:4). If your creed book contains *more* than the Bible contains, then it contains too much. If your creed book contains *less* than the Bible contains, then it contains too little. If your creed book contains just what the Bible contains, then it *is* the Bible and no other creed book is needed (1 Cor. 4:6).

The work of the Reformers sought to put the Bible into the hands of the common people. Many sacrificed their lives for this cause. In America that goal has been accomplished. Many today have *more* than one Bible. Now that the Bible has been put back into the hands of the people, let us demand a book, chapter, and verse from those who preach from the pulpits (1 Pet. 4:11). Let us imitate the first century Bereans who searched the Scriptures *daily* to see if what the apostle Paul had preached was really in the Bible. Surely if the *inspired* apostle Paul did not become offended when his message was graded by the people, neither should any preacher today (Acts 17:10,11). Let us tell our friends who are in religious error they have the opportunity, right, and obligation to "prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Let us recognize that we can interpret the Word of God for ourselves on things necessary for salvation and that any "church" that is built upon *man's* doctrine instead of the doctrine of Christ has no authority for its

existence (Eph. 5:17; Mt. 15:13,14).

IN THE CHURCH

All the sin problems in the church such as materialism, a fleshly definition of love, the belief that doctrine is not important, the lack of zeal for evangelism may be traced back to this same problem first exhibited in the beautiful garden--disrespect of God's authoritative Word. (cf. Heb. 13:5,6; 2 Jn. 5,6; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 9-11).

IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

All the sin problems in the individual Christian's life such as the failure to continue in daily prayer and the failure to study the Bible, means that at some time, somebody, when the crucial decision was to be made, *chose* to disrespect what God's Word said and instead chose to do what he wanted to do (cf. Phil. 4:6,7; 2 Tim. 2:15).

Men are to "rightly divide" the Word of Truth, the Bible, according to 2 Timothy 2:15. Though this command was originally written to a preacher, Timothy, the principle is certainly applicable to all responsible human beings. Many have *read* the Bible but how many have been *approved of God* in their study? Many have *read* the Bible but how many have *studied* it? Many have claimed to have *rightly divided* the Bible, but how many know the difference between the Old and New Testaments, explicit and implicit teaching, commands, approved examples, and implications?

The solution: The Bible shows the way to abundant life (Jn. 10:10; 14:6). May we show God we appreciate His giving us His book by: studying it, believing it, practicing it, and even teaching it to others. Then we can say, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path . . . O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97, 105). *You*, my friend, are at the crossroads--what will your decision be? Will you respect the Word of God today? Will you believe and obey the gospel of Christ today so as to position yourself to spend eternity with God?

* The Bible teaches Christ as head and elders as overseers (Col. 1:18; Acts 20:28).

SETTING PRIORITIES

J.C. Choate, Winona, Mississippi

I realize that not all Christians can give full time to preaching the gospel. I realize also that "vocational workers" can make tremendous contributions to the Lord's cause, and that all Christians are to be busy in His work. But I realize, too, that we have a problem in our thinking concerning priorities.

What is the problem?

Somehow, somewhere along the way, we have lost sight of what should be the most important thing in the minds of Christians. We have forgotten that the reason we were left in this world was to preach the gospel. We don't have heroes in the church--elders, preachers, and missionaries--that we teach our children to look to as examples of following God and as patterns for the height of service in developing their own lives.

Why not? We read about Paul and we admire his courage and dedication. He would be a wonderful example, a heroic example, to follow. We look at Peter, at Timothy, at Barnabas, and we see them as heroes of the First Century. Their heroic image lies not in the fact that some of them were apostles but in their desire to give their lives to the spreading of the kingdom. They were heroes because they were willing to set aside secular pursuits and to devote their time exclusively to the preaching of the gospel.

Do we hold up this type of hero to our sons and daughters today? Do we really encourage them to develop into this type of hero for the twentieth century? Or do we, in the secret places of our hearts, feel subconsciously that sparks of secular talent must at all cost be fanned to a flame, and that when it all boils down, those who are left to preach the gospel are those very few who preach out of great desire or those who have no other particular talent?

People excuse themselves from the responsibility of preaching by reasoning, "I am just not cut out to be a speaker." But then, often, they will spend years of rigorous study and training to develop themselves in a secular field. What challenges must be met and overcome to be an engineer, a dentist, a lawyer, a

doctor? If they had put the same desire and effort into training to preach the gospel, could they not successfully have learned to do that?

There would be a few exceptions, I realize, but I am convinced that almost any young Christian could excel as a preacher if he was willing to invest the time and effort and energy into developing along those lines that he invests in learning a secular vocation.

On the other hand, just how many would choose to preach if they were required to study eight long rigorous years in preparation? Or if they had to pass a very difficult bar exam before being allowed to preach? Or if they were required to work their way into the ministry through competition and winning over one challenger after another in order to be able to go on to the next, as in most sports? Or if part of their training was as agonizing and as shocking to the emotional system as the dissecting of a dead human body is in the training to be a doctor? Or if they would graduate from college with a \$60,000 to \$75,000 indebtedness on their education? Or if their lives would be committed, as is true in many fields to a twelve-, fourteen-, or sixteen-hour work day, and no time to really count as their own to be with their families?

Certainly, there is a difference in the pay scale, and doctors, lawyers, engineers make much more money than the average preacher. But money doesn't explain the drawing power of these professions for many people. What really appeals is that these are respected positions. The sole word "doctor" or "lawyer" or "engineer" establishes a newcomer's credibility in a community. We know that these people are "the cream of the crop." They are intelligent people of initiative and achievement, they are successful, they will be pillars in the community. In other words, these are our secular leaders, our "heroes," and a young man who pictures himself as scaling the top, as proving his intelligence and worth, pictures himself in one of these highly respected professions.

That is understandable in the world. But what has happened in the church? Anyone in the world, with a sense of integrity, can be a good doctor, a good lawyer, a good president. But no one in the *world* can be a good preacher of the gospel. That work is left exclusively for God's children. And if we were truly aware of our special relationship with Him and of the special work He has left us in the world to do, and of the teamwork we establish with Him when we go out to preach His gospel, then shouldn't our most intelligent people, our most successful people, our heroes, in the church be those who dedicate their lives to this work?

If we were training our children to view life through God's eyes, wouldn't those sons and daughters who desire to prove themselves most dedicated, most talented, most intelligent, most successful devote their time and energies to learning to preach the gospel? And for those who just cannot attain such a high goal there could always be the second choice of becoming doctors or lawyers or teachers or engineers or some other secular worker.

If our thinking was molded in this way, preachers would have a high image of self-respect to live up to, and surely there would be few who would turn out to be hypocrites and scoundrels.

And if we trained our children in this line of thinking, surely more excellent people would preach God's word, and more parents would proudly send them out to work great changes in Satan's domain.

And if we had more men (and wives) of such caliber, the world would be turned up-side down through their dedicated efforts.

And the effects of this thinking would be eternal.

We claim to be a people who are spiritually alive. We claim to realize the value of the soul. We claim to believe in the gospel and in heaven and hell.

What has happened to our priorities?

WOT

A STUDY OF HELL

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

HELL -- ITS REALITY

Many deny the existence of any such place as hell. In 1942, L.R. Wilson polled some seven hundred denominational preachers concerning their belief in and their thoughts concerning hell. Taken over fifty years ago, that poll revealed that 34% (238 out of 700) rejected belief in hell as a reality. A 1962 Harris poll (taken among seminary students) revealed that 71% rejected the reality of hell. The most recent poll concluded that only 27% of Americans believe in hell (William S. Cline, "Is Hell Real?" in *In Hope of Eternal Life*, p. 300). Granted, to think of such a place as it is described in the New Testament is not the most pleasant of tasks. However, the reality of such a place cannot be successfully denied when the Scriptural evidence is taken into consideration.

In the Bible, man is seen as existing in three distinct states. He is seen, first, as existing in this life with a physical body housing a spirit being (Dan. 7:15; Jam. 2:26). As seen in James, the physical and the spiritual must be intact in order for physical human life to be a reality. When these two separate, death has occurred. Second, man enters into another realm of existence at death. In this realm or place he exists as a disembodied spirit (Gen. 25:8; 35:18; Lk. 16:19-31; 24:36-40). Third, the Bible speaks of the eternal state of the wicked and the righteous (Mt. 25:46; Mk. 9:43; Lk. 12:5). As the Old Testament was written largely in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, naturally there are different words expressing the ideas of these two places of abode for those who have departed from this life. A study of these words is interesting and casts a great deal of light on the subject of hell's reality.

The Hebrew word *sheol* is the word translated "hell" in the Old Testament. While it is also translated "grave" and, at times, as some contend, it may refer to the grave itself, it is not used exclusively of the grave. (Some maintain that it is never used of anything but the grave itself and, thus, build such doctrines as annihilationalism and "soul-sleeping" on this. If it could be proven that it refers to the grave itself in every instance, these individuals might have an argument. But, such cannot be maintained.) The first use

of the word in the Old Testament reveals that it refers to something other than the grave. In Genesis 37:35 the Record reveals the words of Jacob upon his learning of his son Joseph's death (which, recall, was not the truth of the matter, as Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery). The Bible states, "And all his [Jacob's] sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave (*sheol*) unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him." Remember that Jacob had been led to believe that his son had been torn and devoured by wild beasts (Gen. 37:31-33). Hence, he would not have been buried in a grave. Yet, Jacob declares that he will be reunited with him (H. Daniel Denham, "A Study of Heaven and Hell in the Original Languages," in *In Hope of Eternal Life*, p. 84). Therefore, Joseph (if he had indeed been dead at this time) would have been in existence in *sheol*, and not lifeless in a tomb somewhere.

In the New Testament two terms are used to present the places of abode of the dead. The term *hades* refers to the same place as the Hebrew term *sheol*. Hades is the temporary place of abode of the dead (Lk. 16:19-31; esp. v. 23). It incorporates both "paradise" (where Lazarus was; also Lk. 23:43) and "tartarus" (2 Pet. 2:4 - "hell"); one being the place for the righteous (paradise) and the other for the wicked. As with *sheol*, *hades* does not refer merely to the grave, but a definite place of existence for the departed.

Another term found in the original language of the New Testament is *gehenna*. It has reference to the eternal place of abode for the wicked. It, then, is the place thought of most often when the word "hell" is used. This word is found some fifteen times in the New Testament. Jesus referred to it as a place into which the soul can be cast (Lk. 12:4,5). It is referred to in Matthew 25:41,46 and described as a place of "everlasting fire" and "everlasting punishment." That hell is a reality can easily be seen from these and so many other references. If for no other reason, the fact that Jesus spoke of its existence should be abundant proof of the same.

HELL -- ITS LOCALITY

When presented with the idea of the existence of a place, the natural question to be asked is, "Where is it?" Children, when confronted with the death of a loved one and the thought that they are "gone to heaven," often ask the question, "Where is heaven?" It is only natural that such a thought would cross one's mind. However, try as one may he cannot locate either heaven or hell on a map of either the earth or the constellations above. So, then, just where is hell?

Being bound by time as we are, humans naturally associate everything in a time frame reference. We have watches on our wrists, clocks on our walls, and calendars on our desks. Thus, to comprehend timeless eternity is something that transcends human thought. Likewise, with road signs on the highways, maps in the glove boxes, and memories from previous journeys, we naturally associate places with a distinct, precise locale. To do otherwise is beyond the thought process of most. Thus, if such a place as hell is presented to him, the average man "reasons" that if it can't be shown to him or pointed to on a map, it must not exist.

Others associate hell with the "mythology" of religion. It occupies a place in the same realm as angels, streets of gold, gates of pearl, and (to them) the tooth fairy--none of which are a reality. However, unlike the figments of man's imagination, angels, heaven, and hell all exist. The fact that pictures of them cannot be presented or that they cannot be pinpointed on a map does not negate their existence. Jesus spoke of preparing "a place" for the obedient (Jn. 14:2,3). Such a *place* (heaven) exists, even though it is beyond the realm of human sight and beyond the borders of time. Likewise, the rich man spoke of "this *place* of torment" (Lk. 14:28). Just like heaven, hell is spoken of as being "a place." And, like heaven, it cannot be pointed out on a map or travelled to in time. But, it exists nonetheless. It exists in the spirit realm, the unseen realm, the timeless, eternal realm.

Just as light is associated with good and darkness with evil (Mt. 5:14; 1 Jn. 1:5-7), so heaven is often spoken of as being "up" and hell as being "down." In Matthew

11:23 Jesus stated, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought *down* to hell." The reference is not necessarily one of direction, but one of demotion. Having exalted themselves through their pride, Jesus revealed they would be punished; i.e., brought down from their self-exalted position. Hence, hell is a real place occupying a location in the eternal realm.

HELL -- ITS FINALITY

Hell is a place void of hope. For those who, through "the wages of sin" (Rom. 6:23), "earn" a place there, there is no "appellate court." There will be no escape, no means of obtaining a second chance. There will be no period of parole and no furloughs. There will be no "time off for good behavior." There will be no "change of venue" or possibility of a new trial. Unlike the ideal purposes of American penal systems to punish and reform, hell does not carry with it any promise, hope, or goal of reformation. This, then, is one of the most terrifying aspects of hell--the finality of it all.

Books, articles, and interviews written by and about those incarcerated often speak of that moment when the cell door slams. Many individuals have tried to describe the sound and the eerie feeling that comes when that door closes, locking them away from the outside world, freedom, and all things held so dear. The finality of all that is involved in the prison process becomes a crashing reality at that point. Hope suddenly vanishes with the deafening sound of steel against steel. That kind of complete end, hopeless climax and indescribable feeling of emptiness awaits those who, through their love of the world, choose to dwell eternally in hell. Such a reality awaited the rich man (Lk. 16:19-31).

HELL -- ITS IMPARTIALITY

In Acts 10:34 the Record records the words of Peter as follows: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." This statement in particular concerned the salvation of the Gentiles through God's plan. Concerning the salvation of man there is no respect of persons with God (cf. Tit. 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). His Son died for the sins of the entire world (Jn. 3:16). All who are heavy laden with sin are invited to come to Him (Mt. 11:28,29). Those who do so with a broken and contrite heart, desiring forgiveness and eager to obey, will be graciously

accepted (Psa. 34:18; Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:37,38; 9:6; 22:16; Jn. 6:37). There is no distinction with God concerning a man's purse, position, or peers when it comes to the subject of salvation. All must approach Him on the same level and be saved in the same way. There is not and will be no respect of persons with the just Creator of man.

On the other hand, there will likewise be no distinctions made among those who have chosen the road to destruction. Regardless of what a man might have accomplished in life, gained through business, achieved through education or accumulated in wealth, if he has failed to be obedient to his Maker he will stand just as naked and undone before Him as the lowest of society's offscouring (Heb. 4:13). Although he might consider himself worthy of being present at the marriage feast of the Lamb (Mt. 22:1-14), if he "has not on a wedding garment" (Mt. 22:11) he will be as unworthy to be present as anyone can be (Mt. 22:12,13). Just as obedience to God's will brings His favor regardless of one's position in life (Heb. 5:8,9), so disobedience brings His wrath upon "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6), regardless of their status in life.

Our God is an impartial, just God who extends mercy to His children (Rom. 9:16; Jam. 5:11; 1 Pet. 1:3). His plan of obedience for mankind is an impartial plan based not upon the merits of man but upon his acceptance of the Christ through obedience to His will (Heb. 5:8,9; Jam. 1:25; Jn. 8:24; Acts 17:30; Mt. 10:32; Mk. 16:16; Rev. 2:10). His standard of judgment, being the word He has given to man (Jn. 12:48), the "perfect law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25; 2:12), is likewise impartial, seeing neither race, nationality, color, nor status in life (Mt. 25:31-46; 1 Sam. 16:7). Those disobedient to it will be condemned by it (2 Thess 1:6-9). Their position in life will make no difference before God in judgment. Being Himself impartial and judging by an impartial standard, there will be no partiality shown toward any. Again, the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16) vividly demonstrates this principle.

HELL -- ITS ETERNITY

The final attribute of hell which shall be noted in this study is the eternal aspect of it. As was noted earlier in this study from the results of surveys, there are numerous individuals who try to discount the existence of hell. Many are the individuals

who and several are the religious groups which either deny the reality of hell or downplay its existence. Others have tried to rid it from their thinking by trying to dispense with the eternal aspect of its duration. However, just as Scripture refutes those who think hell does not exist, it is likewise pointedly against the ideas of those who believe it is a place of only temporary duration.

In reference to hell, Jesus noted it as a place "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Lk. 9:47,48). There are seven instances in the New Testament in which the words "everlasting" or "eternal" are used in conjunction with hell (Mt. 18:8; 25:41,46; Mk. 3:29; 2 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 6:2; Jude 7). Additionally, three verses in the Revelation depict it as existing "forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11; 19:3; 20:10).

In Matthew 25:46 the Record reveals the end result of the judgment scene as presented by Jesus in this context. Having just depicted the scene concerning those who had failed to obey Him and their objections to His conclusions (Mt. 25:41-45), Jesus next declared, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." From this passage it is clearly seen that the duration of hell is just as long as that of heaven. The punishment meted to the disobedience is the same length of "time" as is the life granted to the righteous. Both are eternal, everlasting, having no end.

To realize that hell is a place of finality (which is to say it is the "end of the line" as far as opportunity and hope are concerned) is one thing. But, to realize that it is a place of eternity (which is to say it will never end) is quite another. It is an eternal imprisonment of punishment without any possibility of parole. However, if one realizes these matters now and seeks to avoid this place through obedience to God's will, he need not fear this place of torment.

Dear reader, heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Hell is a prepared place for an unprepared people. Why not make your preparations now to enter that eternal abode of the redeemed and avoid that awful place of eternal punishment? The Lord eagerly awaits your response. His people in His church eagerly await the opportunity to assist you. Sin is awful, its penalty high, and its exactness sure. But, Jesus has paid the price for you. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 10:28). Obey the gospel--today. WOT

THE TRAGIC FORFEITURE

James E. Haynes, Jr., Pottsboro, Texas

The book of Hebrews challenged Christians then and it challenges Christians today, "Be steadfast to heaven's cause!" It in essence says what the half-brother of the Lord said in brevity, "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). These brethren of days gone by were being tempted to go back to the old, dead covenant. They wanted to go back to it rather than endure the afflictions associated with the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:17, 1 Pet. 4:16). As a result, they were forfeiting all that heaven had graciously offered (2 Cor. 8:9).

Throughout the thirteen chapters of this inspired book, the author with clear-cut logic unravels their arguments with a determined effort to "snatch them out of the fire" (Jude 23), before it was everlastingly too late. The main focal point of the discussion centers around Heaven's Son, Jesus the Christ.

Jesus Christ was overwhelmingly superior to all things. He was their blessed Chief Shepherd (Heb. 13:20). He was the Captain of their Salvation (Heb. 2:10). He was their new, eternal High Priest (Heb. 7:17). He was their everything! Why would they even contemplate leaving the One who was their all in all?

We often sing in our assemblies a song entitled, "He Is My Everything." But do we really believe it? Do our lives reflect what we often sing? Do we really recognize Jesus as our Lord and Savior? Brother, Sister, or friend, He is still the blessed Chief Shepherd; He is still the Captain of Salvation; He is still the eternal High Priest! May we never, ever forget that He is the all in all! How tragic it would be to forfeit Heaven's everything! *WOT*

Editor's Note: Please note that our e-mail address (sixthavenue@tds.net) is once again active. Feel free to correspond with us at this address concerning any WOT matter (subscriptions, article submissions, etc.).

THE WORDS OF *Truth*

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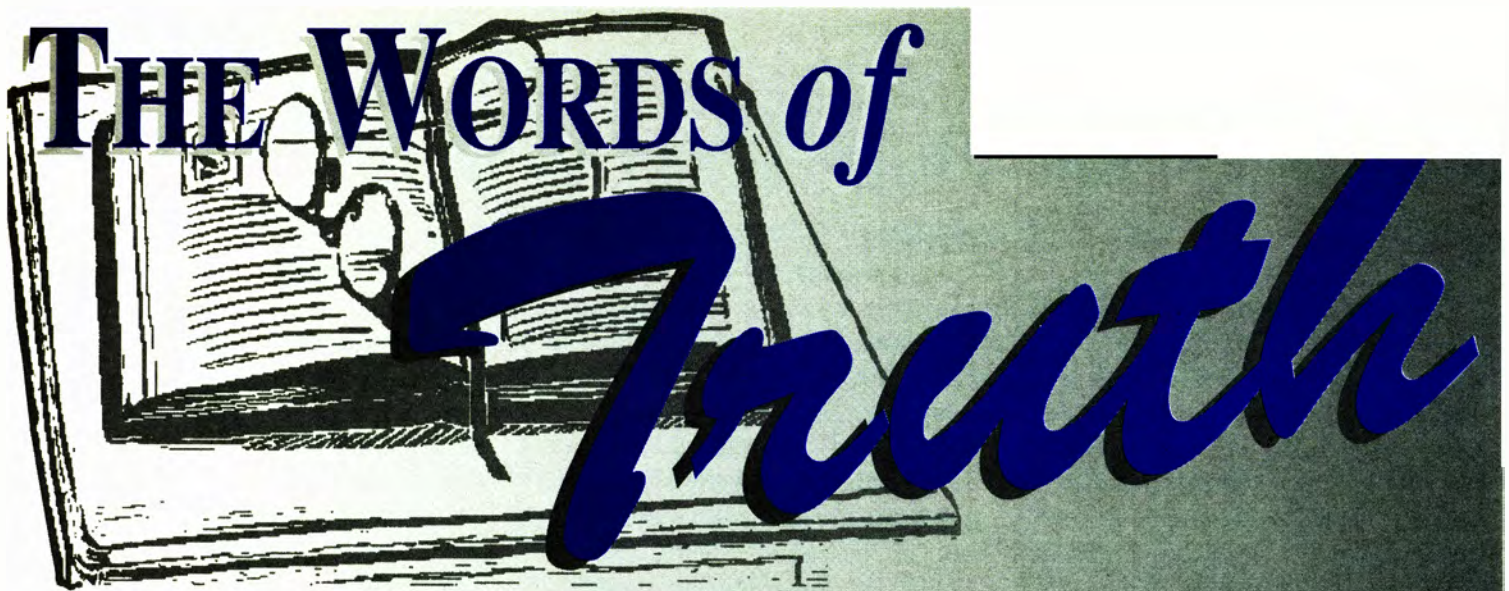
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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HOLY GROUND

Mike Benson, Cookeville, Tennessee

Hearing is but one element of listening--it is not the same thing as listening. Hearing implies that sound waves have been received; listening implies that understanding and comprehension have taken place (See H. Norman Wright, "The Gift of Listening," *More Communication Keys for your Marriage*, 88-102).

Ironically, listening is often *the* neglected realm in a marriage. Observation and experience have taught me that the overwhelming majority of marital problems are due to the fact that one or both partners are poor or ineffective listeners. Husbands and wives hear audible sounds (i.e., words, language, etc.), but they don't actually hear underlying meaning, nor do they grasp the other's feelings.

The Bible emphasizes listening (Psa. 34:15-18; 116:1,2; Matt. 11:15; 13:9; Lk. 8:15). One secular author calls it the *holy ground* of marriage. He observes:

Intimacy begins with the ears. . . .
The failure to listen might be the biggest hindrance of all to intimate communication. Real listening begins when a husband and wife decide to devote themselves to studying the innermost thoughts and feelings of their mate. This is *holy*

ground--and listening is the doorway to all that lies beyond [emphasis mine--mb]. There is little more irritating than the feeling that no one is listening. One woman said, "My husband always seems to take a pen out of his pocket and play with it while I am talking to him." Another said, "He never looks at me. He won't put down his paper and make eye contact." Still another complained, "He always answers me with some humorous aside, or tries to change the subject if I'm upset. Or even worse, he tries to complete my sentences, thinking he knows exactly what I am about to say." That kind of half-hearted listening would be discouraging, would it not?

. . . Listening goes beyond just hearing words. A wife seems upset. Her husband says, "Honey, is anything wrong?" She hesitates, then blurts out, "I guess not. . . . I'm just a little low today--a little down, that's all." Hearing her "I guess not," he moves to the next thing: "That's good. I wonder if the Astros are on tonight?" Did he miss something? You bet he did. He missed an open door to real communication. He heard the words, but he failed to

understand. A better response would have been, "You really are down, aren't you? How can I help?" She allowed her husband to see just a little bit of her heart and he declined the invitation to further revelation (Ed Young, "Can We Talk?" *Romancing the Home--How to have a Marriage that Sizzles*, 117,118).

How can we walk into the holy ground of our spouse's soul? The Bible counsels:

1. **Listen for comprehension.** "A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart" (Prov. 18:2). ". . . The ear of the wise seeks knowledge" (Prov. 18:15b). "The wise man learns by listening. . . ." (Prov. 21:11).
2. **Listen all the way through--from first to last.** "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13).
3. **Listen readily.** "Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jam. 1:19; Eccl. 3:7; 5:2).

WOT

DON'T GET TOO CLOSE (2)

USING GOD'S NAME REVERENTLY

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Last month we emphasized our society's casual and somewhat irreverent approach to God . . . its lack of emphasis on the awe that His holiness and power demand. We pointed out God's warning to Moses when he approached the burning bush, "Don't get too close" (Ex. 3:5), and emphasized the principle: we should always approach God carefully and reverently. Last month we stressed the *why*; this month we begin to focus on the *how*.

The thought is almost staggering. How can we, mere human beings, hindered by our sinfulness, inadequacies, and shortcomings, even begin to think about approaching God, the omnipotent and holy Creator of all things? Even more humbling is the thought of our cultivating a relationship with the One who "laid the foundations of the earth" (Job 38:4) and whose light we cannot approach (1 Tim. 6:16). And yet the Bible clearly teaches that an intimate relationship with God is possible through Jesus Christ. In fact, the Hebrews writer tells us that we can "come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16). We must never de-emphasize the fact that God has graciously allowed us, through Christ's death, to call Him our Father and to be temples for His presence (1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:22). We should be diligent to grow closer to God in this respect, always striving to know Him more fully.

But the intimacy Christians enjoy with our Father must never be reduced to irreverence. In one sense, God certainly wants us to get as close to Him as possible. But in another sense, in the area of respect and reverence, we must be sure to "keep our distance." Perhaps the following suggestions will help:

Use God's Name reverently. One of the first commandments of the decalogue was, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7; cf. Lev. 19:12; 22:2; Deut. 28:58). The Jews of old took this command very seriously, as illustrated in the respect they showed for God's Name as they copied biblical manuscripts. Frederic Kenyon describes the scribes' painstaking effort:

A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, . . . Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. The length of each column must not extend over less than forty-eight, or more than sixty lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written in it without a line, it is worthless. . . . No word or letter, not even a *yod*, may be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him. . . . Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every word the breadth of a narrow consonant; between every new section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. . . . (*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, pp. 78,79).

But when the scribes prepared to copy God's Name, the detail became even more meticulous:

Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, *not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him.* . . . (Ibid, p. 79, emp.

mine, ccw).

What amazing respect! They obviously believed that God's Name was worthy of special attention.

Contrast that with the attitude many have toward His Name today. The world has taken His Name and made it part of perhaps the most common exclamation in our language: "Oh my ___!" One can watch very few television shows or movies without hearing God's Name repeatedly taken in vain. As a result many Christians have become desensitized, hearing the language, but not being shocked by it. Worse still, some Christians have adopted the world's irreverent speech, using God's Name as if it were an ordinary name (i.e., profaning it). Others, perhaps limited somewhat by conscience and not quite able to use His exact Name, "soften" it by using a euphemism instead. "Gosh," "Golly," and "Gee" are examples of such changes designed to make vain speech less offensive.

God's Name is worthy of our utmost respect. In the model prayer, Jesus encouraged us to begin with an affirmation of the holiness of God: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Mt. 6:9). The Greek verb translated "hallowed" means "to be venerable or hallow, to separate from profane things and dedicate to God" (*Strong's*). Though this phrase is certainly not limited to our speech, it clearly includes it. In other words, let God's Name always be holy, different from other names, set apart, special. Use it only when you are consciously thinking of what that Name represents. Never let it pass your lips in a flippant or casual way.

Don't get too close. Use God's Name reverently.

THE WEEKLY OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

[Editor's note: The following article is taken from one of my favorite web sites--www.christiancourier.com--home to dozens of scholarly, well-written articles. It would be well worth your time to visit and bookmark this wonderful site. While there, subscribe to the printed edition of The Christian Courier--a bargain at \$5 per year.]

There is much disagreement in the religious community of "Christendom" as to when the Lord's Supper, commanded by Jesus, should be observed (Mt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:17-20). Several theoretical views may be entertained.

1. Some allege that the communion need not be observed at all; they contend it was a cultural phenomenon of the first century, and thus not binding today.
2. Many argue that the time element is inconsequential. Thus the supper might be served at any time — daily, weekly, monthly, or even annually.
3. Members of the church of Christ generally have maintained that the Lord's supper ought to be eaten each Sunday, and that the communion is restricted to that day.

What does the New Testament evidence suggest?

The "Cultural" Argument

The notion that the Lord's supper was merely a cultural circumstance of the early church, and so was never intended to be an abiding obligation upon Christians for all time, is refuted by the explicit testimony of the New Testament. Paul instructed the saints in Corinth that as long as they ate the elements of the sacred supper, they would proclaim the Savior's death "till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). The apostle clearly anticipated that Christians would be honoring the Lord, by partaking of the communion, until the very end of time. This view, therefore, can hardly be given serious consideration.

The "Any Time" Position

A vastly greater segment of those who profess an allegiance to Christianity maintains that the time factor is irrelevant. These folks, though obviously sincere, overlook, we believe, two important matters:

1. The issue of authority: what does the New Testament actually authorize?, and;
2. The spiritual connection between the Lord's supper and the Lord's day.

Let us explore the matter of authority. We will assume, for the moment, that the concept of "authority" is important to most people. Some argue, therefore, that there is authority for observing the Lord's supper on days other than Sunday. The main passage advanced in support of this position is Acts 2:46: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat [food] with gladness and singleness of heart." Not a few writers contend that "breaking bread" in this passage is an allusion to the Lord's supper, and that the communion therefore was being observed "daily." The argument is flawed in two particulars.

1. The term "daily" denotes the frequency with which the disciples were meeting in the temple. Grammatically, "daily" does not modify "breaking bread." There is no support for "daily . . . breaking of bread" here, regardless of what "bread" signifies in the text.
2. The "breaking bread" of this passage is not a reference to the Lord's supper. This is evidenced by the fact that the phrase is paralleled with "eat their food" in the same

clause.

"Food" translates the Greek term *trophe*, which essentially means "nourishment" (Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 835). The word is employed sixteen times in the Greek Testament, and never is it used of the communion, for such was not designed as a nourishment for the body.

Note the comment of Presbyterian commentator Albert Barnes:

Here ["meat" - KJV] it means all kinds of sustenance; that which nourished them - *trophes* - and the use of this word proves that it does not refer to the Lord's supper; for that ordinance is nowhere represented as designed for an ordinary meal, or to nourish the body (*Acts of the Apostles*, 59).

A. T. Robertson, a prominent Baptist scholar, observed that the language is "clearly referring to the regular meals at home" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, III.39).

Aside from the considerations discussed above, there is no historical evidence from the post-apostolic period that Christians partook of the Lord's supper on occasions other than Sunday. One historian notes: "The Lord's supper was a constant feature of the Sunday service. There is no second-century evidence for the celebration of a daily eucharist" (Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 96).

Finally, this factor should be taken into consideration. There is a spiritual connection between the Lord's supper and the Lord's day that is severed when the communion is attempted at other times within the week. The supper consists of two elements — the

bread and the fruit of the vine, which symbolize the Savior's body and blood, i.e., his death.

At the time of his death, Jesus' flesh was broken open (his bones were not broken), and his blood was poured out. This was to pay the price for human redemption (Mt. 26:26-28; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7). On the first day of the week, three days after his death, Christ came out of the grave (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1).

When, therefore, the communion is eaten on Sunday, there is a vital link between the Savior's death and his resurrection — a connection that does not exist at any other time. This point, taken with other supporting evidence, is compelling indeed.

Sunday Communion

The only authoritative case that can be made for the frequency of the Lord's supper is this: it was observed each Lord's day by the early Christians, and, so far as the evidence reveals, on that day only.

There is the suggestion in the inspired record that after the Lord was resurrected, the disciples began meeting together on the first day of the week. For example, John 20:26 indicates that "after eight days," i.e., on Sunday, the Master's men were assembled again. Robertson says this passage "seems to mean that from the very start the disciples began to meet on the first (or eighth) day" (V.336).

Some fifty days following Jesus' death, the church was established on the day of Pentecost, which always occurred on a Sunday (Lev. 23:15,16). Noted historian John Mosheim wrote:

All Christians were unanimous in setting apart the first day of the week, on which the triumphant Savior arose from the dead, for the solemn celebration of public worship (John Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.35).

From that first Lord's day the members of Christ's church were observing the communion in a regular fashion. Luke

records that they "continued steadfastly [the imperfect tense form suggests a sustained practice] . . . in the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42).

Scholars are almost wholly agreed that "the breaking of bread" is a reference to the communion supper.

Luke is speaking of the greatest things done in this first congregation and characterizes the celebration of the Lord's Supper by use of the expression that was common at that time: "breaking the bread" (R.C.H.

Lenski, *The Interpretation of Acts of the Apostles*, 116).

But the evidence gets even stronger!

Near the conclusion of his third missionary campaign, Paul departed from Philippi just after "the days of unleavened bread" (which followed the Jewish Passover; cf. Acts 20:6). He was hurriedly making his way toward Jerusalem, where he hoped to arrive by Pentecost, slightly more than a month away (cf. 20:16). In spite of the fact that he still had a journey of several hundred miles remaining, he took the time to "tarry" seven days in Troas, the port city of Mysia.

Why this delay, in view of his urgent mission? The most reasonable answer is this: the apostle wanted to meet with the whole church in Troas, and he knew the brethren would be assembled on the Lord's day. Note Luke's use of a conjunction to mark the transition between verses 6 and 7 of chapter 20.

Certain texts, as reflected by the King James Version, simply state that the "disciples came together." Most others have: "we were gathered together," which is another of those references indicating Luke's presence with Paul. But the expression, "were gathered together," is a passive voice form, signifying to "bring or call together, gather a number of persons" (Arndt, 790).

The suggestion is this: this assembly was convened by an extraneous directive — the most logical inference being, by divine authority. Sunday

worship was not an arbitrary decision of the first-century church.

The primary design of the meeting was "to break bread." In the grammar of the Greek Testament, this reflects an "infinitive of purpose." In other words, the prime purpose of the Lord's day meeting was to observe the supper.

The implication is clear: if the communion is not observed, there really is no authority, certainly no necessity, for even meeting every Sunday!

There is, however, convincing evidence that the primitive church did assemble every Lord's day. In his first Corinthian epistle, Paul commanded those Christians to contribute into the church treasury "on the first day of every week" (NASB).

While the term "every" (Grk. *kata*) is not brought into the English rendition by either the KJV or the ASV, it is present in the original text. J.H. Thayer translated the phrase: "on the first day of every week" (*Greek-English Lexicon*, 328).

When one draws these points together, here is the irresistible conclusion.

1. The early church, under the oversight of inspired apostles, met regularly — upon the first day of each week.
2. The primary purpose of their Sunday meeting was to observe the Lord's Supper.
3. The communion supper, therefore, was observed each Lord's day by the apostolic church.

Conclusion

What clearer evidence could be desired for those who wish to replicate the practice of the ancient church in their own lives? Where is the authority for doing otherwise?

Christians must urge their contemporaries to return to the apostolic pattern of worship. Worship must be according to divine truth (John 4:24), not mere human inclination. *WOT*

IF

Paul Sain, Pulaski, Tennessee

If you are searching for the truth, please read and answer every question, look up each scriptural reference, and learn the truth, that you may obey (Mt. 7:21).

Search the scriptures (Acts 17:10-11), and hear and obey the truth.

IF all churches are right, why does the Bible make it so plain that there is only one (1 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18-24; Eph. 1:22,23; Mt. 16:16-18)?

IF all ways are acceptable, why did Jesus say that only those who follow the strait and narrow way will receive eternal life (Mt. 7:13,14)?

IF Jesus is the head of all churches (plural), why did He say, "I will build my church" (singular) (Mt. 16:18)?

IF Christ wanted different denominations, why did He pray for unity (Jn. 17:21)?

IF we can show you proof that Jesus Christ was the founder of the true and only church, His church, will you accept the Bible and it alone (Mt. 16:13-19; Lk. 24:45-47; Eph. 1:22,23; Acts 2:14-47)?

IF God has promised salvation out of the church, why did Christ die for it (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27)?

IF the church has nothing to do with our salvation, why does the Lord add us to the church (Acts 2:47)?

IF one is saved by faith only, were the devils not saved? They believed and trembled (Jam. 2:19).

IF one can be saved without faith, why did Paul say it was impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6)?

IF one becomes a Christian when he believes, why was not King Agrippa a Christian (Acts 26:27,28)?

IF faith comes in answer to prayer, why are we told that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; Jn. 20:30,31)?

IF "faith alone is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort" (as the *Methodist Discipline* says), why

did James say, "Faith without works is dead" (Jam. 2:20)?

IF one can be saved without complete obedience to the gospel of the Lord, why did Paul say that Christ is to take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8)?

IF man can be saved by obeying the doctrines and commandments of men, why did Christ say it was vain worship to follow them (Mt. 15:6-9; Mk. 7:7)?

IF one can be saved by just believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, why did Jesus say that "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 7:21)?

IF Christ will save anyone as long as he or she is sincere and good, why did the Hebrews writer state explicitly that Christ is the Savior of those who obey Him (Heb. 5:8,9)?

IF the Lord will save us without baptism, why did He command it (Acts 10:47,48)?

IF we can receive remission of sins without baptism, why did Simon Peter say baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)?

IF baptism has nothing to do with salvation, why did one of the Lord's inspired preachers tell a sinner to "arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16)?

IF a man can be saved and not be baptized, why did not Jesus say, "He that believeth and is NOT baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16)?

IF we can get into Christ without baptism, why did Paul say we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27)?

IF the Lord will save without baptism, why did Paul put "newness of life" after baptism, and not before (Rom. 6:4)?

IF sprinkling, pouring, and immersion are all scriptural baptisms, why did Paul say there is one baptism and that it is a burial (Eph. 4:5; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:11,12)?

IF we can get into the body of Christ without baptism, why did Paul say we are baptized into the body (1 Cor.

12:13)? Remember the body and the church are one and the same (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22,23).

IF baptism is a Christian duty, please name the place in the Bible that gives ONE example where a Christian was ever commanded to be baptized.

IF one is saved before baptism, he is saved before his sins are remitted (Acts 2:38).

IF one is saved before baptism, he is saved before his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16).

IF men have a right to make laws, change them, or delete them, why did Christ say that He had all authority (Mt. 28:18-20)?

IF the Word of God is able to save men, what need have we of anything else (Jn. 8:32; Acts 20:32)?

IF the Word of God is complete and furnishes us unto every good work, how can we make it better by adding to or taking from (Rev. 22:18,19; 2 Tim. 3:16,17)?

IF preachers have the right to preach their opinion, why then did Paul say to "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2)?

IF creeds and manuals are necessary, why are we told to follow and obey the "perfect law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25; Mt. 7:21)?

IF you can be a Christian, worship God acceptably, practice every principle of Christianity, live, die, and go to heaven without ever hearing of, belonging to, or in any way supporting a denomination, then why are not these denominational groups useless and unnecessary (1 Cor. 12:27; Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:47)?

IF when you search the Bible you fail to find the name of your denominational church in the pages of inspired scripture, why should you remain in it (1 Cor. 1:10-13)?

IF you think a man has a right to prefix his name with "Reverend," "Father," "Master," etc., be sure and read Psalm 111:1-9 and Matthew 23:8-12.

IF instrumental music is to be used in the church services, why was it omitted

by Paul as he wrote, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12)? If the instrument should be used, why did Paul omit it in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19?

IF there is nothing in a name, why did Peter say salvation is in the name of Christ (Acts 4:10-12), and why did Paul declare that whatever we do is to be done in the name of Christ (Col. 3:17)?

IF the Word of God authorizes elders (to oversee, Acts 20:28) and deacons (as servants, workers, 1 Tim. 3: Titus 1), what scripture gives the authority for ecclesiastical heads, councils, synods, cardinals, or popes (as various religious groups are so organized)?

IF a man cannot fall from grace, why did Peter say that one can be "again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the

beginning" (2 Pet. 2:20-22)?

IF one can be eternally saved without being faithful (once in grace, always in grace), why did the Lord say to be "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10)?

IF Hebrews 10:9 teaches that the old law was done away, and the new law established, why do some today continue to keep the Sabbath day (Saturday)?

IF the kingdom of God (the church) is yet to be built, why did Paul and John say they were in it (Col. 1:13,14; Rev. 1:9)? Why did Jesus say that it would come in the lifetime of His apostles (Mk. 9:1)?

Concluding Thoughts

IF it doesn't make any difference what a man believes so long as he is sincere,

why are we told that we will be damned if we believe not the truth (2 Thess. 2:12)?

IF God promised to save all, regardless of what they do, why did Paul say, "we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11)?

IF there is no punishment for the wicked after death, why did Christ say certain ones would go into everlasting punishment (Mt. 25:46)?

IF you are lost, condemned in judgment, it will not be the fault of either God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit. They want you to obey the gospel and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).

IF you enjoy simple New Testament worship, attend the services at the church of Christ nearest you: "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18) (from *Truth in Love*, vol. 6, no. 10, May-June, 1993). W0

DISTURBING THE PEACE

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

Sometimes you have to kick a little and cause a stir. You have to rock the boat, raise your voice, and speak your mind. But when what you have to say is explosive, you also have to expect some fallout.

Consider this biblical example of disturbing the peace: "But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans'" (Acts 16:19-21, NASB).

Yes, they were guilty of disturbing the peace, but not because they were leading a riotous rally. Paul and Silas disturbed the peace by proclaiming Christ and overturning a profit-making scheme. The confusion they caused was inseparably linked to their crystal-clear presentation of spiritual enlightenment. God commanded them to disturb the restful, pagan peace that

had darkened the hearts of these people, and they faithfully followed the heavenly directive. Today, we need to hear that same decree. The good news is intended to disturb the peace.

The unrighteous need to be disturbed. We disturb the peace of the sexually immoral and the liar by telling them God is disturbed by their peace! The neighborhood gossip and the slanderer need their way of life condemned and they need the Way, the Truth, and the Life commended. When sinners are satisfied in their sin, they must be shown that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Ignorance may be bliss, but knowledge can bless. The pleasures of sin are fleeting (Heb. 11:25), and this unsettling fact needs to be brought to the attention of the unrighteous.

The religious person who is in error needs to be disturbed. Nicodemus was alarmed when he heard the words, "You must be born again" (Jn. 3:7). But the tranquility of his settled convictions had to be challenged so that he could be led to the peace that passes understanding. Millions today

ardently follow Jesus according to the religious light they have--but they have never been born again. We must lovingly help them hear the jarring words of Jesus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5).

We should never belittle the sincere faith of someone who does not know the truth about becoming a Christian. But while we must be humble, we must also be convicted. Humility keeps us from arrogance; conviction spurs us to speak because we know that doom awaits "those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8).

The righteous often need to be disturbed. The Corinthian church needed to be shocked: "You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst" (1 Cor. 5:2). There was sin in the church, and they were proudly tolerating it. When a congregation marches down the path of least resistance, sin spreads like a cancer.

Paul compared the damage inflicted on a congregation by unchecked sin to a small amount of leaven working through the entire lump of dough (1 Cor. 5:6).

The message to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2,3) powerfully demonstrates a time when the Lord intentionally upset the pious peace of his people because he did not find holiness and godliness among them. Jesus praised the good, but he

emphatically denounced the various departures from the way of righteousness. Can we possibly imagine that the Lord does not want his congregations challenged today when apathy is present? When many have left their first love? When there are spiritually bankrupt Christians who mistakenly believe they are rich and have need of nothing?

Our Lord once declared: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the

earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household" (Mt. 10:34-36). Let us take the spiritual sword with us everywhere we go. Are you disturbing anyone's peace in the spirit of love? The fallout is worth it. Eternity hangs in the balance. Disturb the peace! *WOT*

ADVICE FOR PREACHERS

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

What tools (books) do you recommend in Bible study?

To get the most out of the Bible, one needs to know the background of the books of the Bible. This often involves a careful study of ancient history and church history. About one-third of my library falls into this category. It is necessary to have excellent books in the area of word studies. The best dictionary for Bible references is *New Bible Dictionary* by Eerdmans. Its companion volume, *New Bible Commentary*, is especially helpful in its introduction to each book of the Bible. A recent work, *A New Testament Commentary* by Zondervan, is great also. Not only is W.E. Vine's classic work on New Testament words exceptional but his commentaries on various Bible books (Zondervan) are great. Other fine writers are F.F. Bruce, Donald Guthrie, and Leon Morris. No preacher of the gospel ought to forget *God's Prophetic Word* by Foy E. Wallace, *The Hub of the Bible* by James Bales, or Homer Hailey's recent books on the prophets and the book of John.

What methods of study and what kinds of notes are helpful and how do you mark your Bible?

Simple outlines can be very helpful but to me a long, detailed analysis robs one of really putting the material to use. In fact most preachers I have known who insist on minute, thorough, tedious outlining are long-winded and

dull speakers. To get a precise summary of a passage and then pull out two or three pungent points that are practical is the goal I strive for in Bible study. Marking my Bible is very important to me, but I probably use this approach differently than most. When reading a passage for my own edification, I will underline words or thoughts that demand further study or that excite me to "dig deeper." Out in the margin I will either put "Imp" (important) or "Prepare a sermon." Usually this will cause me to do some memory work on the key verse in that context. Most of the notes I will write in my Bible, however, are cross references that form a commentary on the passage under observation. These references come from previous study, outlining, or the verses I have memorized through the years in concordance fashion. This means that most of my memory work has been by subjects and not just blocks of verses from sections of Holy Writ. This approach is more useful and fruitful.

As to what kind of notes I take, most people who have seen them say, "Impossible!" They serve my purpose but they are not recommended for others. My typical sermon outline will have three or four major headings and then under each will be about twenty scripture references (such as Eccl. 2:1-11; Lk. 12:15-21; 1 Tim. 6:6-17), and that's all.

What are the most important things

to remember as we study?

- A. This is God's holy word (Isa. 55:11).
- B. This must be passed on to others (1 Tim. 4:16).
- C. I must apply it to myself (Psa. 119:11).
- D. It is an eternal matter (Tit. 1:2).
- E. The world must not keep me from teaching it (Gal. 1:10).
- F. Reverence for it enthalls me (Psa. 119:161).
- G. Strengthen the church with the message (Eph. 3:21).

What is the best advice you can give in regard to Bible study?

- A. Be reverent and prayerful (Jer. 15:16).
- B. Enjoy each moment; look forward to it (Psa. 119:2).
- C. Here is an opportunity to grow (2 Pet. 3:18).
- D. Use what you learn or you will lose it (Heb. 10:32).
- E. Thank God for the challenges of the Bible (2 Pet. 1:4-11).
- F. Be practical; learn the context; never quit learning (Gal. 6:9).

Preachers should not allow others to keep them from serious, regular study. The machinery of "church work" often distracts and the entire congregation suffers with a pabulum diet. Brethren, let us study, obey, live, love, and share the precious Book divine. How grateful we ought to be for the golden moments we spend with the Holy Scriptures! *WOT*

THE CHRISTIAN'S ABUNDANCE

Mike Winkler, Gallatin, Tennessee

Jack Katz was not a person content with mediocrity. Katz, an offensive tackle for the University of Florida, was the fastest lineman on the football team in the early 1960s. During spring practice, he asked his coach, Ray Graves, if he could run wind sprints with the running backs. Permission was granted, and for the next several days Jack Katz managed to finish last in every sprint. Coach Graves asked him if he would rather run with the linemen and win instead of running with the backs and losing. Katz responded, "I'm not here to outrun the linemen. I already know I can do that. I'm here to learn how to run faster; and if you've noticed, I'm losing by a little less every day." Today, Christians cannot afford to be satisfied with mediocrity. Rather, we must work to abound or excel in all we do. The Bible encourages Christians to "abound" in:

- **Deeds of kindness**--Inspiration portrays Dorcas as a woman "abounding in deeds of kindness and charity, which she did continually" (Acts 9:36).
- **Hope**--Paul prayed that the Romans would "abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). Paul, early in Romans, defined hope as a confident expectation (8:25) and encouraged all Christians to rejoice in this hope (5:2).
- **Good works**--The Corinthian church was encouraged to "always abound in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Titus was to instruct the brethren at Crete to "be ready for every good deed, . . . to engage in good deeds" (Tit. 3:1,8,14).
- **Love**--Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that their "love abound more and more" (Phil. 1:9). As Christians, we should have an abundance of love for:
 - God (Mk. 12:30).
 - The brethren (1 Thess. 3:12).
 - All mankind (1 Thess. 3:12).

Let each of us, as God's children, resolve to abound in all things and never be satisfied with mediocrity. WOT

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The Words of Truth

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THE WORDS of Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25)

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WHAT DOES 1 TIMOTHY 4:8 MEAN?

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

It was not just a crucial conflict in a world war. It has come to describe America's battle with its expanding waistline. Obesity is a national problem. Weight gain often seems inevitable. "Dunlap's Disease" is a problem I fight. Solomon is rebuking me when he writes, "...Put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite" (Prov. 23:2). A Christian's body belongs to the Lord and must be properly maintained (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2; 6:19,20). One's body can be harmed by overeating as it can with alcohol and tobacco.

One tried and true way to prevent disease and bodily harm stemming from being overweight is exercise. Doctors say that no diet is complete without it! Proper exercise aids in the prevention and management of heart problems, diabetes, cancer, and several other serious conditions.

Many times, perhaps defending their own inactivity, well-meaning people cite 1 Timothy 4:8--"For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Their basic position is that, since exercise "profiteth little," they are justified in living out a couch potato's life. Let us understand

Paul's inspired statement a little better. **The verse is speaking comparatively.** The "little" in the first part of the verse is contrasted with the "all things" in the second part of the verse. Compared to godliness (i.e., God-likeness), which impacts one's earthly and eternal existence, bodily exercise pales in importance. Cannot the same be said of retirement efforts (Matt. 6:19-21), recreation (1 Tim. 5:6), household chores (Lk. 10:41,42), and even work (Jn. 6:27)? Yet, all of these are legitimate, even necessary, pursuits. So it is with bodily exercise.

The verse reveals that exercise does profit. What does it do a "little"? It profits. It benefits. It gives advantage. Its healthful benefits are well-documented. Some would contradict Paul and say that it does no good at all.

The verse warns against extremism. The fitness craze, for some, has become fanatical. They seem to have made bodily exercise their god! They are obsessed. The Greek culture, to which both Paul and Timothy were heavily and regularly exposed, were extremists on this point. The Greek Games were the original Olympics. It was a constant

obsession. Paul says such extreme devotion is ludicrous. So it is today! **The verse warns against poor prioritizing.** Anything put before service to the Lord is in the wrong place! It is possible for exercise (and gluttony, TV, video games, etc.) to come between one and putting God first. To this extent, any activity or pursuit is sinful (Matt. 6:33). If you spend three, four, or more hours each week exercising and little or no time studying the Bible, visiting the sick and needy, praying to God, and doing Christian service, your priorities are WRONG! You are guilty of sin. If some gave as much devotion to godliness as they did bodily exercise, our churches would be much stronger!

But, let us avoid abusing this-- and any-- passage! Paul is not denouncing exercise. To the contrary, exercise will improve us physically and mentally. It can improve our attitude and performance as Christians. It must, however, be kept in its proper place. If we are going to fanatical about anything, let it be our service to God as Christians (Rom. 12:1,2). That is the key to making everything (ahem) "work out"!
WOT

DON'T GET TOO CLOSE (3)

WORSHIPING GOD'S NAME REVERENTLY

Chuck Webster, Editorial

In the midst of a very casual and irreverent culture, what should our attitude be toward the God of heaven and earth? Last month's editorial emphasized the fact that we should *use God's Name carefully*. Now we turn our attention to another facet of humanity's relationship with Jehovah God. "Don't get too close" was the warning God gave to Moses (Ex. 3:5): this principle of being careful as we approach God clearly applies to worship.

THE IRREVERENT PROPHETS

What was going through Nadab's and Abihu's minds as they started toward the worship service that day? Were they distracted, perhaps, with problems at home? Or could it have been some petty argument between fellow priests that occupied their attention? Or maybe the weather, or some upcoming sporting event, or aching feet from all the traveling? Whatever the reason, the two priests lost their focus on this particular day. Knowing full well that God had given specific instructions regarding the place from which they were to get fire to use for burning incense (Lev. 16:12--from before the altar), they foolishly chose rather to offer "strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not" (Lev. 10:1). The result was disastrous: "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD" (v.2).

CARELESS WORSHIP

Old Testament history was written to, among other things, give us insight into God's nature (Rom. 15:4). So why the inclusion of this disastrous event? Surely the lesson is clear: God expects all who worship Him to do so reverently and carefully. Along that vein, this text has been often applied, and rightfully so, to warn against the inclusion of man-made additions to New Testament worship (e.g., mechanical instruments). It seems, however, that the principle goes even deeper. In their actions Nadab and Abihu "betrayed a

carelessness, an irreverence, a want of faith, most surprising and lamentable" (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 453). Simply put, they worshiped God thoughtlessly and indifferently, unwisely neglecting the preparation needed in order to please God in worship. And for their negligence they paid dearly.

WHICH IS WORSE?

But the question is, what is the application to New Testament worshippers? Is it simply a prohibition of going beyond the authority of God's word in the outward *actions* of worship? It seems clear that this example is given not only to warn us of unauthorized actions, but also to urge us all to approach worship cautiously and conscientiously. Which is worse--to worship God with mechanical instruments or to think about the stock market while singing "Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah"? One might suggest that the former indicates a predisposition to disrespect, but could not the same be said of not sufficiently preparing one's *mind* for worship?

FOOTRESTS OR KNEELING RAILS?

Sometimes it seems that we have strayed from the old-fashioned notion of *reverence*. Mack Lyon tells a story about going into an old church building and seeing bars beneath the pews. A friend gestured toward the padded "footrests." Brother Lyon responded, "No, those are kneeling rails" (*Holy and Reverend is His Name*, p.37).

Question: where are our kneeling rails today? All of our modern buildings are carefully designed to include padded pews (sitting comfort), pleasant acoustics (hearing pleasure), and attractive decor (visual delight). But where are the kneeling rails? Physical design aside, where is our emphasis on making certain the worship is offered reverentially and respectfully to God?

WORTHY OF RESPECT

Is God worthy of honor? Does God expect to be revered? Notice His admonition to the people of Malachi's day:

A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 1:6-8).

If we were in the presence of the governor of our state, or perhaps the president of our country, would we enter his presence and treat him flippantly, or would we act and speak respectfully? Doesn't God deserve infinitely greater respect than a mere human leader?

NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

The Old Testament principle was clear: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD" (cf. Lev. 26:2). The sabbath day, and physical tabernacle, of course, are relics of the abolished system, but the principle of reverence for God in worshiping Him has been consistent in every age, whether patriarchal, mosaical, or Christian. It would be odd for God to have demanded careful reverence throughout previous dispensations of His interactions with humanity, and then to accept careless and flippant worship in the age in which He fully revealed His tremendous blessings to us. The point is, if there has ever been a time where God deserved our awe and respect, certainly that time is now.

DO WE SHOW GOD OUR REVERENCE?

What does it signify about our respect for God in worship if we display the following inconsistencies . . . If we are careful to be on time for work and school, but habitually arrive late for worship? If we would never keep an appointment with a high ranking government official dressed casually, but approach God weekly in attire fit for the ball park? If we sit with closed lips while the congregation is singing hymns

of praise? If our minds constantly wander to topics other than the important matter at hand? If we whisper, pass notes, and rustle paper during the sermon?

GIVE GOD OUR BEST

God has always demanded our best in every area, and certainly worship is no exception. Biblical worship does not happen accidentally. It requires

forethought, careful planning, and preparation to ensure that our hearts are ready to worship. God has always taken both our attitudes and our actions in worship very seriously. We should closely examine ourselves, making certain that when we presume to worship the great I AM, we approach Him with the greatest of reverence, awe, and fear. WOT

WHAT TRIBULATION?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

The dispensational view regarding the end times involves a seven-year period known as “The Tribulation.” This period is preceded by *the rapture* in which it is believed that Jesus will snatch His saints from earth and take them to heaven for seven years during which time sinners who are left on earth will suffer a great tribulation. Advocates of the tribulation view believe that the greatest revival of all the ages will occur during this time. At the end of the seven years Jesus will come with His saints and set up an earthly kingdom in which He will reign for a thousand years from the throne of David in Jerusalem. The Scriptures do not support such a position.

Proponents of the tribulation theory base their beliefs on a misapplication of the signs Jesus gave to His disciples with reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24:1-35). There are some **remote signs** (Mt. 24:4-8) to which Jesus alluded. These signs included the appearance of false messiahs (Mt. 24:5). The Jewish historian, Josephus, points to several who made such a claim following the Lord’s death. One, Simon Magus, boasted, “I am the word of God, I am the comforter, I am almighty, and I am all there is of God.” The beginning of sorrows for the Jewish nation would consist of wars, famines, and earthquakes (Mt. 24:6,7). All these things would occur sometime previous to the destruction of Jerusalem. It was not long after the Olivet Discourse that strife, insurrections, and wars were filling both Palestine and other parts of

the Roman Empire. Agabus (Acts 11:28) made mention of a famine which occurred during the reign of Claudius Caesar. Various writers mentioned at least a dozen earthquakes which occurred in some of the major cities previous to A.D. 70. Though some have taken these signs as indicating the approaching end of the world, Jesus taught that these signs did not even mean the end of Jerusalem. He said, “But the end is not yet” (Mt. 24:6).

Beginning in verse nine Jesus related some **nearer signs** (Mt. 24:9-14). The disciples themselves would endure persecution and troubles before the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:1ff; 12:1,2). The faith of many would wane (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:15; 4:10,16), and there would be many false prophets (cf. Acts 20:29; 2 Pet. 2:1,2).

The **approximate sign** preceding Jerusalem’s destruction would be the preaching of the gospel in all the world (Mt. 24:14). Jews from all nations of the world were present on the day of Pentecost when the gospel was proclaimed (Acts 2:5). Paul rejoiced that the faith of the Roman brethren was known throughout the whole world (Rom. 1:8). All nations of the world heard the gospel proclaimed before the year A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed (Col. 1:6,23).

The **immediate sign** was the appearing of the “abomination of desolation” (Mt. 24:15-28). Luke’s parallel passage clarifies his identity as being the Roman army (Lk. 21:20). The disciples were instructed to immediately

flee upon their first opportunity (Mt. 24:16-18). That opportunity came when the Roman army was temporarily called to another battlefield. At that time Christians fled to Pella, located east of the Jordan River. The Roman army returned and continued their efforts to overthrow Jerusalem. It has been estimated that over a million Jews lost their lives in that terrible siege, but not one of them was a Christian. In verses 29-31, apocalyptic or figurative language is used by Jesus to describe this great national disaster. The same language is used to describe the downfall of Babylon (Isa. 13:10), Edom (Isa. 34:4,5), and Egypt (Ezek. 32:7,8; Isa. 19:1).

That Jesus was not referring to the end of the world, but to the destruction of Jerusalem, becomes clear when He said, “This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.” This verse divides the entire chapter into two main sections: (1) Events that befell the contemporary generation of Jesus; and, (2) Events that are to occur at the second coming of the Lord. Definite signs that point to it accompany the first event. The second is not accompanied by signs, but by the admonition for man to be ready, “. . . for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mt. 24:44). The Bible does not describe a period of tribulation that precedes the Lord’s second coming; rather, life will be rather serene (Mt. 24:38). The question of supreme importance is “Are you ready?” WOT

TURNING THE LIGHT ON “PRO-CHOICE”

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

There are few, if any, truly good things in life which can survive if not fenced in by proper boundaries. American freedom, in the beginning, was like a sweet drink for those who wanted to escape the tyranny of religious and economic oppression, but it sours into poison if prostituted to provide haven for immoral ideas and actions. The freedom of speech, for example, has been sadly misused by pornographers as a shield from those who would like to see their vile trade stopped. Freedom of speech can be good for society, but pornography destroys society.

For whom should freedom of speech and liberty of action be unavailable? Some would foolishly answer, “Freedom for everyone, anytime!” Surely we don’t believe that. Our liberty to do what we want must end for every man or woman who wants to use freedoms to harm fellow citizens. Level-headed Americans have always believed that. Theoretically, it is on this premise that our legal system is built.

I have freedom to shake a man’s hand, but not freedom to strike him with my hand.

I have freedom to enter a man’s house when I am invited, but not when I break in uninvited.

I have freedom to buy a man’s car, but not the freedom to steal a man’s car.

I have freedom to sell a man an apple, but not to sell a man an apple laced with poison.

My rights stop where another man’s begin.

This is why those who call themselves “pro-choice” hold a view which at its core is evil. Abortion involves at least two people: the

mother and the unborn baby. That truth will never change. Have you ever considered the difference between one who holds the “Pro-life” position and one who holds the “Pro-choice” position? It is this: One places emphasis on the rights and value of the baby, while the other places total emphasis on the mother.

They are also different in that in the pro-life side, the baby is safe, and with adoption, the mother is inconvenienced but not physically harmed. On the pro-choice side, the baby dies and the mother considers herself to be more inconvenienced.

The pro-choice advocate argues that a woman has freedom to choose, and that government should protect her right to kill her unborn baby up until the baby is born except for his head. But wait! What happened to the bedrock American principle that says I cannot have freedom which places my preferences over the welfare of the innocent? That principle is trampled by each person who advocates abortion rights be he Jew or Gentile.

And where does this selfish, evil heart which permits the killing of the unborn lead people? How many of God’s laws must be broken and ignored in a man’s heart in order to allow him to advocate abortion? And after he has broken them, what kind of man does this choice make him? I have often wondered how comfortable pro-choice people would feel living next to a doctor which commonly performs abortions. What kind of man has a conscience which would permit that? And would you want him for your next door neighbor? Your children’s school principal? If he was available and you had to run some

errands, would you leave your small children in his care and feel safe? He may wear a white jacket when he works, but that does not change what he truly is inside. He is a hired killer. The difference between him and a medical doctor who uses his skills to heal is crystal clear and shockingly stark. One saves--the other kills. The mother who pays up front for an abortion is paying that man to make sure her unborn baby is dead.

Pro-abortion Americans, whoever they are, hold an evil position and need to be ashamed of themselves and repent. Our Lord gave us the foundation of all human relationships when He said, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12)

If this were cemented into all our hearts, abortion as we know it today would immediately cease.

Consider the unborn baby and ask some sobering questions: “Is it human or animal?” Obviously human. “Is it living or dead?” Obviously living, otherwise abortion wouldn’t require killing it. “Is it innocent or guilty?” Obviously innocent.

Only in reference to abortion can Americans feel enlightened and proud when they smugly advocate the deliberate killing of innocent human beings. And only in present-day America will politicians brag about it for votes.

This article is not intended to offend but to enlighten. People, and especially Christians, need to shake off contemporary liberal thinking and use their voice to protect the innocent.

ONE DAD, ONE DECISION

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

Can one decision made by one father affect the course of history?

By faith, Noah saved his family from the destruction of the ungodly world. As a preacher and as a parent, he modeled what it meant to seek God. Genesis 6:9 allows us to peer briefly through the window of his soul: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God" (NASB). What a tribute!

But after the flood, Genesis 9:20-22 records this turn of events: "Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside."

Somewhere along the way, Ham had rejected the righteousness of his father. If Ham had imbibed more of his father's faith, he would have reacted properly when his father imbibed the wine that robbed him of sobriety. There is no other way to explain why he did not treat his father with greater honor. He could have shown some dignity in a situation that was anything

but dignified. The disgrace of Noah could have been quelled quietly.

But Ham irreverently gossiped about his father. His brothers would have none of it. Shem and Japheth "took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness" (v.23). The text highlights their carefulness: "[they] walked backward...their faces were turned away...they did not see."

Ham, already a father himself at this time, made one decision. The ramifications were horrific. His son, Canaan, was cursed (v.25), and Ham's descendants certainly became a curse upon the world. From Ham's line would arise Amorites, Jebusites, Hivites, Philistines, and others who would pursue abominable idolatry. Centuries later, numerous battle fields would soak up an ocean of blood spilled because of them. They would be swept away by the Israelites, and they would also corrupt the Israelites with false religion.

How often do we as fathers consider

that one decision on our part can affect history? Our actions can bless or curse generations to come. Our character counts. And our character is formed by a series of choices.

A popular song in which a mother is advising her young children contains this earnest line: "When you come close to selling out--reconsider." On the day when we are dueling with the devil, the all-important question will be whether or not we have been deciding to wholeheartedly follow the will of God on the days that preceded the conflict. Satan seduces us, wanting us to sell him our devotion to God. The haunting legacy of Ham should cause us to reconsider and ask ourselves, "Who am I? Am I the man God wants me to be?"

One dad making one decision can change the world. Those of us who are fathers must heed the urging of 1 Corinthians 16:13: "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." The eternity of our children, our grandchildren, and countless others in the world could turn on the hinge of our integrity. WOT

BE CALM IN THY SOUL

Mike Benson, Cookeville, Tennessee

"They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end" (Psa. 107:26,27). Perhaps you can identify with the seamen described by the Psalmist. The waves caused by storms on the sea of life have left you feeling emotionally "tossed" (cf. Jonah 1:5).

I find it intriguing that our Lord is never portrayed in Scripture in such a fashion; He is never characterized "at wits' end." In striking contrast, He is calm, self-controlled and at peace. How can we account for this perpetual serenity--especially when we consider

all of the "stress" in His Life. . . .?

Observe:

Jesus began the morning by talking with His Father. "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed" (Mk. 1:35; cf. Lk. 4:42). Even after the strenuous activities of the previous evening (cf. Mk. 1:32-34), Jesus rose before dawn and left His bed to engage in undisturbed, intimate discourse with His Father.

Brethren, if He who could speak and bring twelve legions of angels to His side felt the need to commune early and in private with God, how much more

important is it for *us* to do likewise before the world takes possession of our thoughts? "My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up" (Psa. 5:3; cf. 119:47). "Pray in the morning . . ."

During the day, when things were hectic, Jesus often took a break by talking with His Father. "So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed" (Lk. 5:16). Even as great crowds of people gathered to hear Jesus' message and to be healed of their afflictions, the Great Physician slipped secretly away. You might say He "closed His office, left His patients

in the waiting room, and took some time alone to attend to His own welfare." He couldn't dispense medication indefinitely without rest and rejuvenation from above.

Now consider--if Jesus needed to withdraw from the demands made on His time and energy to get into His private prayer closet (Mt. 6:6), doesn't it stand to reason that we need to do the same? When the requirements of our job press our spirit and tension fills our hearts, shouldn't we emulate the Savior and entreat the Great I Am? "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6,7). "Pray at the noontime . . ."

Jesus ended the day by talking with His Father. "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. And when evening had come, He was there alone" (Mt. 14:23). Jesus had miraculously fed thousands with a boy's lunch--five loaves and two fish (cf. Jn. 6:9-14). As

a result, the multitude intended to force Him into becoming their king. The following day, the Lord foiled their political aspirations by urging them to accept the Bread of Life (cf. Jn. 6:26,27)--the totality of His teachings (cf. Jn. 6:63,68). Sadly, after hearing His message, many of His disciples turned away from Him in confusion and disappointment (Jn. 6:60,66), never to return. Why did Jesus "flee" (φευγει, Lenski, 569) from the multitude's presence to pray? Perhaps to thank His Father for strength and victory over the temptation (cf. Heb. 4:15) to accept the crowd's bid for kingship (cf. Matt. 4), or perhaps to summon resiliency to endure their forthcoming rejection. I cannot say for certain--but I do know that He prayed in the evening and that His recorded prayers were always concerned with something important in His ministry (cf. Lk. 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,28; 11:1; Mt. 11:25; Jn. 11:41; 17:1, etc.).

Following a hard day's labor and all its attendant frustrations, do you conclude with a petition to your heavenly Father? If you find your soul tossed to and fro, it may well be because

you haven't been on "speaking terms" with God before slumber. "Pray in the evening . . ."

How long has it been since you talked with the Lord, and told Him your heart's hidden secrets? How long since you prayed? How long since you stayed on your knees 'till the light shone through? How long has it been since your mind felt at ease? How long since your heart knew no burden? Can you call Him your Friend? How long has it been since you knew that He cared for you? (Mosie Lister, "How Long Has It Been?," 1956).

"Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven" (Psa. 107:28-30). "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer" (Joseph Scriven, Charles C. Converse, "What a Friend We Have In Jesus," 1855, 1868). "Pray all the time . . ." (cf. 1 Thess. 5:17).

WOT

THE BOOK OF PHILEMON

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

This little one chapter book is truly a sparkling gem in the epistles Paul wrote. It gives us personal insight into the mind of the great apostle as well as a background study of the slavery system of the Roman Empire in the first century. Philemon, from Colosse, was a member of the church and a master of slaves. Paul had evidently converted him to Christ. One of Philemon's servants named Onesimus had run away from home and had come to Rome where Paul was imprisoned. Onesimus found Paul and helped him. Paul taught the runaway slave the gospel of Christ and converted him to the Lord.

In the letter we know as "Philemon," Paul sends Onesimus back home to his master. In this short epistle the apostle tells Philemon that he will repay anything Onesimus owes him as his master. He also exhorts Philemon to take the slave Onesimus back "as a

brother beloved in the Lord." Paul reminds Philemon how much he owes him for the spiritual blessings he brought into Philemon's life. The apostle calls upon the providence of God in the entire matter by saying: "Perhaps he left thee for a season that he (Onesimus) might return to thee"--as a brother in Christ! The economic situation was not nearly so important to Philemon as the spiritual relationship between brethren in the Lord! How we need to learn this lesson today and we will if we seek first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

Paul then tells Philemon to get a place ready for him to stay when he is released from prison, the Lord willing. There was a close and beautiful relationship between Christians 1900 years ago.

Now let us examine some of the lessons learned from the book of

Philemon:

The close ties between fellow

Christians. In verse six Philemon was exhorted to strengthen and not weaken the young brother in Christ, Onesimus. His faith was to be manifested in such a powerful way that Onesimus, a babe in Christ, would grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Sometimes those who have been members of the church for years lose their zeal and this adversely affects those just entering the service of the Master. May we never be guilty of hurting others by our lack of enthusiasm for spiritual matters (cf. Rev. 2:1-5).

Paul's personality and sense of timing. Although Philemon is a short, one-chapter epistle we learn a lot about the apostle Paul from reading it. Only one other New Testament book unveils his personality so fully, and that is 2 Corinthians--in thirteen chapters. Paul

had a sense of humor and perfect timing in his missive to Philemon. He also shows genuine compassion for Onesimus, a recent convert. Paul also reflects optimism in regard to being released from prison in order to have the opportunity to visit Philemon again (cf. Phil. 4:11-19).

Terms of endearment. The apostle Paul uses several noticeable terms of affection and endearment in this letter:

(1) dearly beloved, (2) fellow-laborer, (3) fellow-soldier, (4) partner, (5) fellow-prisoner, (6) "knowing you do more than I say . . ." (7) a brother

beloved in the Lord. The Bible teaches affection for brethren elsewhere. Notice Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Again, in the New Testament we read: "Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22; cf. 2:17).

The difference Christianity makes.

Paul sends a runaway slave, Onesimus, back to Philemon his master and says: "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus . . . which in time past was to thee

unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me" (vv. 10,11). Paul could have used his power as Christ's ambassador (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20) to force Philemon to allow Onesimus to stay with Paul in Rome, but the apostle would not do anything selfishly for his own comfort. In verse fifteen of this noble piece of literature Paul makes it clear that under the sovereign providence of God Onesimus had obeyed the truth and could now return as a brother beloved in the Lord. Paul would pay Philemon anything Onesimus owed. I doubt he ever got a bill!

WOT

"BUT IT'S SUCH A SMALL THING!"

Jerri Manasco, Boaz, Alabama

Children sometimes will object to parental discipline by saying, "But it's a small thing!" Often adults faced with the fact of a misdeed will defend their actions by asserting, "But it's such a small thing!"

In the Garden of Eden Satan convinced Eve that what God said was not all that big a deal! Satan wanted Eve to think that just because God said it did not make it so. The serpent sweetened the temptation by suggesting that eating of the forbidden tree would bring God-like wisdom (Gen. 3:5). He made it even sweeter by promising, "Ye shall not surely die." The word "not" is such a small thing, but Adam and Eve learned that it was a major matter when they were expelled from Eden (Gen. 3:8-24).

God offered deliverance from the overthrow of Sodom in Genesis 19. Lot passed on the warning to his family, but his sons-in-law saw it as a little thing; in fact, they thought their father-in-law was trying to be funny, and he "seemed as one that mocked" (Gen. 19:14).

The instructions God gave were so very simple. He said, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee . . ." (v. 17). That seems to be such a small thing, but Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt (v. 26). Modernists and skeptics would say that was such a small thing to punish her for, but Jesus warns, "Remember Lot's wife" (Lk. 17:32). What a small verse, but how meaningful!

Moses forfeited his chance to lead Israel into Canaan when he violated a

specific command of God. Israel was thirsty and demanded water to drink. God told Moses, "Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, and **speak ye unto the rock** before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink" (Num. 20:8).

Moses took the rod as commanded, but instead of speaking to the rock as God clearly said to do, Moses "with his rod, . . . smote the rock twice" (v. 11). Because of this angry indiscretion, Moses was forbidden by the Lord to lead Israel into their land of milk and honey (v. 12). This seems like such a small thing, but it meant a great deal to Moses!

Nadab and Abihu "took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 10:1,2). Modern religionists say that this was such a small thing to result in such drastic judgment.

One must look closely into the text for the reason for the "harsh" judgment. The two priests had offered something "which he commanded them not." The two men sinned by offering what God did not want! It may seem to be a small thing to some today to place soft drinks and burgers on the Lord's table and call

it the Lord's Supper, or to have a dance troupe perform an "interpretive dance" depicting the crucifixion during the Lord's day worship or any other time. *But it is a sin to add to the revelation of God!*

The ox-cart was used to transport the ark and in process of the journey the ark would have fallen off had Uzzah not reached out his hand to steady the ark (2 Sam. 6). Uzzah, though well-intentioned, met the judgment of God in being struck dead. This may seem a small thing to some, but God was displeased. Later, David saw their error and said, "we sought him not after the due order" (1 Chron. 15:13).

These are a few examples written for our learning (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). What seems to be a small thing is a major thing when it involves a positive command of God! When it is a question of divine authority, it is a matter of grave concern.

Is it but a "small thing" to insist on baptism for the remission of sins? It is a major concern when the Bible specifies the purpose for baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3,4; etc.). Is it a "small thing" to insist on the one church Jesus built? It is a major thing when we read in the Bible of "one body" (Eph. 4:4; cf. 1 Cor. 1:10; Jn. 10:16). Is it a "small thing" to insist on pure morals? Is it a small thing to insist on personal accountability and responsibility?

It is never a "small thing" when God's truth is involved.

WOT

"THESE AIN'T MY BOOTS"

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

Perhaps you heard the story of little Johnny who was in the first grade. On a rainy day his teacher, Miss Brown, had just finished putting on the 36th boot on the 18th child and only had Johnny left to go before she could finally take her lunch break on what had been a hectic morning. Miss Brown had a very difficult time getting Johnny's boots on him, but finally managed to accomplish the task. As she finished the job and stood erect stretching her aching back, Johnny said, "Teacher, these ain't my boots." So hurriedly, yet kindly, Miss Brown removed the boots from Johnny's feet; whereupon Johnny continued, "They're my brother's, but my Mama said I could wear them to school today."

Just like little Johnny we can all say, "These are not my boots." Likewise, we could say, "This is not my house;" "These are not my clothes;" "These are not my children." We can even truthfully say, "This is not my body" (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19,20). The early disciples understood quickly the importance of eternal matters and the insignificance of "things" when the two are placed side-by-side. The Bible reveals about them, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32).

Everything we have belongs to God. It is not mine. It is not yours. He has given us the privilege of taking care of it for a time. Little Johnny said, "Mama said I could wear them to school today." In essence, our Lord has said we can take care of a house, a car, clothing, children, and our own bodies for a time. However, just as the early disciples realized that these things are only temporary and that they should be used in a fashion that gives glory to God, we must likewise come to this same understanding. When we get to thinking that our accomplishments are great and start relying on the "things" that surround us, let us be reminded of little Johnny and say, "These ain't my boots."

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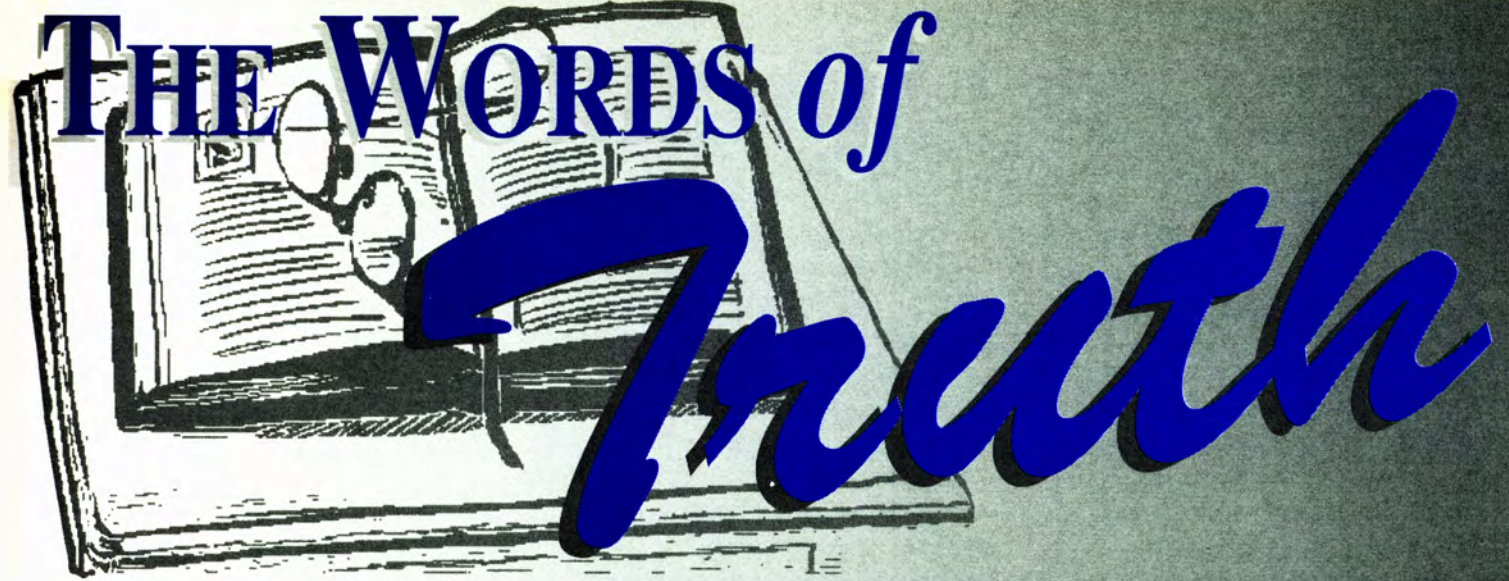
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Tracy Dugger, Austin, Texas

The kingdom of heaven (also called the kingdom of God or Christ) was an anticipated event of the Old Testament. It was predicted to come to pass in the latter days:

1. Daniel 2:28a - "But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days." For an interpretation of the phrase "latter days" see Hebrews 1:1,2 and Acts 2:16,17.
2. Daniel 2:44 - "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."
3. Isaiah 9:6 - "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." During the life of Jesus Christ that same kingdom was predicted to be in the near future:

1. John the baptizer preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Mt. 3:2). This meant that the kingdom was near.

2. The Savior preached the same message: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17).

3. That same message was enjoined upon the disciples of Jesus: "And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 10: 7).

4. Jesus stated the nearness of the kingdom in another forceful way when He remarked, "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" (Mk. 9: 1). There are three options in the interpretation of this passage: a) Jesus was correct in encouraging these people to expect the kingdom to come in their lifetime; b) If the kingdom has not yet come, then there are two thousand-year-old people living today; c) Jesus was mistaken. I am going to stick with the first one!

The kingdom did indeed come in their lifetime--in the first century. In fact, the anticipated kingdom of Christ came on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Before this day (Acts 2) the kingdom of Christ was always spoken of as a future event. But following the day of Pentecost, the kingdom of Christ was always spoken of as already in existence. Some believe the kingdom of Christ is yet a future event. They could not be more wrong about a thing!

In Acts 8:12, Philip preached the kingdom. In Acts 14:22, Paul told those souls that they would enter the kingdom through much tribulation. In Colossians 1:13, Paul told those brethren that he as well as they had been translated into the kingdom. This is why John could contend in Revelation 1:9 that he was in the kingdom.

Yes, the kingdom is a present institution. It is here and the way that one enters it is through the new birth (Jn. 3:3-5)!

WOT

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Gus Nichols (1892-1975)

The Christian life cannot be separated from Christ. Christianity is a way of life, a way of living successfully and abundantly. It is not a cold and heartless theory, but a warm and fervent spirit and manner of living. It is an overseeing, superintending, wonder-working faith, powerfully at work in and through us to do the will of God. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 Jn. 5:4). We do not need great wealth, talents, and material blessings so much as we need great faith. The apostle Peter called it "Precious faith" (2 Pet. 1:1). And he says it is something to be "obtained." It comes by hearing and learning the word of God (Rom. 10:13-17). It is produced by divine testimony. And it should grow and increase unto obedience, trust, and complete reliance upon the Lord (2 Thess. 1:3; Isa. 26:3).

This faith is in Christ, and not merely in some set of rules or principles by which to live. It is true, there are commandments to be kept, and regulations for the good life, but our faith is not in these, but in the Great Physician who prescribed them. We would just as loyally have followed some other prescription if He had required it. We obey and follow Christ, not because we clearly see the merits and good in each commandment. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16,17). Like Abraham, we become "strong through faith" (Rom. 4:16-20). Faith is one of the magic words of the Bible.

Faith is the powerful and amazing motor which impels and drives us up the hills of life, over the mountains, across the valleys, across swollen rivers and impassable gulfs, until we are safe in that city whose builder and

maker is God (Heb. 11).

If we would call the roll of those great in the sight of God, we must call the roll of those of great faith. For example, in Hebrews 11 such a roll was called. Verse 1, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." Verse 2, "By it the elders obtained a good report"--a good reputation. Verse 3, "Through faith we understand." Verse 4, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Verse 5, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death." Verse 6, "Without faith it is impossible to please him"--God. Verse 7, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." Verse 8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed: and he went out, not knowing whether he went." Verse 9, "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." Verse 10, "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (It takes great faith to do this.)

Verse 11, "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." (She did not know she was thus becoming so great by faith, the mother of a great nation of people.)

Verse 12, "Therefore sprang there even of one, (one man, even Abraham) and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable." Verse 13, "These all

died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Verse 14, "For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." Verse 15, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from which they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." Verse 16, "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." (If you don't read this whole paragraph again, you are sure to miss something. You may not see their faith through every word of these verses.)

Verse 17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; (See v. 11 again) and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." Verse 18, "Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Verse 19, "Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." (O my soul, how we do need faith like they had!)

Verse 20, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." (They had in their faith room for a future. They did not live only for this world, but for a world to come. Their faith reached up and out, into another world, making this life richer and sweeter.)

Verse 21, "By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff." (See Gen. 48:5; Gen. 47:31. His faith did not forsake him in death. No believer, in the hour of death, has ever given up faith, and begged his loved ones to give up

religion, and try infidelity.)

Verse 22, "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." (Here is the faith of another dying man, and he believed God's promise to bring these people out of bondage and back to Canaan, and requested that they bring his bones back with them. See Gen. 15:13-16; 50:24.)

Verse 23, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." (See Ex. 1:16; 2:2.)

Verses 24-26, "By faith (Yes, they are still doing great things because of their great faith) Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." (See Psa. 84:10-12; Joseph chose what was best for the future, rather than what was easy for the moment. This is one of the great differences between believers and unbelievers. And oh, how we do need millions of young people right now like Joseph. The future of our

offspring is largely in their hands.)

Verses 27,28, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him (God) who is invisible." (Ex. 12-14; He endured the trials, hardships, and wrath of king Pharaoh, as seeing God--as if he could just look up and see Him and obtain strength any time it was needed.) "Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." (Ex. 12:21; We need this faith more than we need wealth, education, or anything else on earth. This is real faith, and it gets things done, and always obeys God.)

Verse 29, "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." (Ex. 14:26-31; 1 Cor. 10:1-12.)

Verse 30, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." (See the details of their faith at work in Josh. 6. We must have members of the church with faith like this, or we cannot have the church which Jesus built--Mt. 16:18.)

Verse 31, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." (Then realizing that time and space were running out, he concluded in the next verses.)

Verses 32-40. (Please, Please, turn and read these verses from Heb. 11.)

Now, we have seen what can be done by the people of God and how they have overcome obstacles seemingly impossible to overcome, yet they did it--they did win the victory. They did achieve. They lived right and their lives were not wasted. And they did it because of the power of faith which works--even works wonders in human lives. Many of them did not have any of the Bible to aid and give them more faith, as we have it. They only had some oral messages from God. But they excelled all others on earth--they did it "BY FAITH."

NOW, WHAT HAS BEEN DONE, CAN BE DONE! Every time Satan whispers to you that you can't succeed in life, that you can't live right and obey God, just remember it has been done, and it can be done again and again, as long as the world shall stand.

Strong faith will make us to succeed, and to obey the Lord faithfully. And love with all our hearts will make the whole process a joy divine. Love can make every burden light, and every yoke easy. Just one day of such a life will be worth more than many years wasted in sin because of unbelief, hatred, prejudice, and strife. Let us will and determine to believe, obey, and trust in God! *WOT*

"THE WORD WAS WITH GOD"

Curtis A. Cates. Memphis, Tennessee

"God With Us"

Christ our Lord was and is One of the three Persons of the Godhead, or Godhood (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9). As manhood designates those characteristics, essence, and nature of humanity, so likewise does the word God or Godhood designate the characteristics, essence, and nature of

Deity. The Bible speaks of the *one* nature, essence, and substance of God (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 6:4; 1 Kng. 8:60; 1 Chron. 17:20; et al.), but this does not indicate just *one* personality. Just as mankind is composed of numerous personalities, yet one finite nature, just so the Godhood is composed of three personalities, or persons, yet one infinite nature. Distinct substance and

For man to believe in God is not enough (Heb. 11:6); he must also believe in Christ. The Lord urged, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (Jn. 14:1). It is of this Jesus that John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (Jn. 1:1,2).

nature make God Deity just as distinct substance and nature make man humanity.

Christ was with God in the beginning, proving that Christ predated the beginning. This same Christ (God the Word) tabernacles among men--"God with us" (Jn. 1:14; Mt. 1:23). He became the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 1:18). When John said, ". . . and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," he was affirming not only His very essence of Deity but also that Christ was immediately in God's presence--literally, face to face with God, where He had existed from eternity. Christ was without beginning and is a distinct Person, as are God and the Holy Spirit.

Three Persons in the Godhood

The one God is composed of three Persons, not of three mere manifestations of one Person. Some have averred that since God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit possess the same characteristics (such as eternity, deity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, justice, sovereignty, et al.), then these must be designations of the three individual manifestations of the one Person who comprises Deity.

The fatal weakness in this averment is a failure to acknowledge the *differences* among the three Persons in the Godhood. To illustrate, this writer could affirm: since both John Doe and Mary Doe are Americans, since John and Mary are Memphians, since John and Mary are registered voters, since John and Mary are licensed drivers, since John and Mary have three children, therefore John Doe and Mary Doe are just one person. However, so to affirm is to ignore the many distinguishing characteristics between these two persons and is to err in the conclusion reached.

Christ is One of Three Persons in the One Godhead

First, God and Christ are two distinct

Persons. 1. Christ Himself observed, "For my Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28). 2. Christ came to the earth not "of myself, but he (God) sent me" (Jn. 8:42). 3. The Son could "do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (Jn. 8:28). 4. Christ and God were distinct persons, "because I go unto the Father," the Lord said (Jn. 14:12,28). 5. God is not subject to Christ (1 Cor. 15:27). 6. When Christ was on earth, God knew things Christ did not know (Mk. 13:32). 7. While Christ was being crucified on the cross, God forsook Him (Mt. 27:46). 8. Though some saw Christ on earth (1 Jn. 4:12), John affirmed afterward that "no man hath seen God at any time" (1 Jn. 4:12). 9. God spoke from heaven while Christ was on earth (Jn. 12:28; Mt. 17:5). God the Father and Christ the Son are two distinct Persons.

Second, God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are different Persons. 1. When Christ was baptized of John, God was in heaven speaking, Christ was on earth just having been baptized, and the Holy Spirit was descending in the form of a dove (Mt. 3:16,17). 2. The great commission commands aliens to be baptized "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." the grammar showing three Persons in the Godhood. 3. All three--the Holy Spirit, the Highest, and the Son of God--are distinguished in Mary's conception (Lk. 1:35). 4. Christ made clear distinction among the Holy Spirit, the Father, and Himself when promising the Holy Spirit to the apostles (Jn. 14:26). 5. Paul often made the same distinction, as in Ephesians 2:18, where he wrote, "For through him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; et al.). 6. Peter wrote, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctification of the Spirit, unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2). 7. Jude likewise affirmed, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your

most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20,21). What abundant evidence exists!

Third, additional proofs show that three Persons--not one--make up the Godhead, including Christ. Paul wrote, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). 2. Christ promised, "Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he shall show you things to come. He shall glorify me" (Jn. 16:13,14). The Holy Spirit would speak of Christ, not of Himself. 3. The Son of man was "standing on the right hand of God" when Stephen was killed, not on His own right hand (Acts 7:56). 4. Luke records, "How God (one separate Person) anointed Jesus of Nazareth (a second separate Person) with the Holy Spirit (a third separate Person) and with power: . . ." (Acts 10:38). 5. Christ is God's possession, truly an individual within Himself. 6. Anticipating that the Pharisees would not accept Christ's witness of Himself, the Lord said, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true." Thus, He added, "There is *another* that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true" (Jn. 5:31,32). Thus, two were bearing witness.

Conclusion

The Word, Christ, had enjoyed full fellowship with God and with the Holy Spirit in eternity. He was a distinct Person, the agent through whom everything was created at the beginning. He became the Son when He was begotten of God, speaking of the virgin birth of Christ. However, He did not become "A God"; Jesus also did not become the Word, but "the Word became flesh."

THE POWER OF SPEECH

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

Proverbs tells us that death and life are in the power of the tongue. Jesus said that by our words we shall be justified or condemned. Peter informs us that to see good days involves keeping our lips from guile and from speaking evil. Hitler inflamed the Nazi world with carefully chosen words of hatred, excitement, and slanted viewpoints. Franklin Roosevelt used brilliant words in his famous "fireside chats" to stir a nation and calm an era of depression. Football coaches have won or lost decisive games with wise or unwise speeches before contests on the field began.

Ephesians 5 contains stern warnings against the use of filthy and foolish words (v.4). James 1:26 tells of the hypocrisy of pretentious people who claim to be religious while failing to bridle the tongue. A famous gospel song declares:

Angry words! O let them never
From the tongue unbridled slip;
May the heart's best impulse ever
Check them ere they soil the lip.

Bitter words, like sharp arrows, pierce and wound the soul (Psa. 64:3). We must guard the door of our mouth lest we do terrible harm in the world about us (Psa. 141:3). In Proverbs 6 we learn of seven things God hates. Three of them refer to the misuse of our speech: (1) lying, (2) false witnessing, and (3) sowing discord among brethren.

Each one of us, through the years, has wished he could recall many things said in anger, retaliation, and thoughtlessness. So much damage can be done through envious words and shallow thinking! It is really dangerous to allow that small member

of our body, the tongue, to run loose (Jam. 3:1-10). A daily application of Colossians 4:6 is needed by all: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." We each need to carefully measure our words and ask God for wisdom in the exercising of our freedom of speech (Jam. 1:5).

The sin of tale-bearing is condemned in the Bible, and the application of the golden rule of Matthew 7:12 prohibits our abusing our neighbor with unfair words. Someone has said, "Gossips are like blotters. They absorb a lot of dirt but usually get it backwards." Careless words have wrecked promising lives and unkind remarks have broken hearts and severed friendships.

Have you ever heard of Gossip
Town,
On the shores of Falsehood Bay?
Where old Dame Rumor, with
rustling gown,
Is going the lifelong day?
It is not far to Gossip Town,
For the people who want to go;
The Idleness Train will take you
down
In just an hour or so.

Only eternity will reveal the damaging nature of the fiery tongue!

In Psalm 40:9 we find a very striking three-point lesson. The inspired writer said: "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest." It is certainly true that Jehovah fully knows about our speech. We might "fool the hapless public and be a subtle fraud" but we can never

deceive God in this matter of words (Gal. 6:7). As Jesus said, "By thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words shalt thou be condemned" (Mt. 12:37).

The improper use of our tongue in cursing, lying, gossiping, and flattering is no more damning than our failure to use our lips to praise God, convert sinners, restore the erring, and build up the kingdom by preaching the gospel and rebuking sin. I am confident that hell will have many occupants who made one serious blunder--they simply sealed their lips, and thereby the gospel was "hidden to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3). No doubt men who claimed to be gospel preachers will be in that sad company also for shutting their eyes and lips to flagrant sin that should have been clearly opposed. Many brethren who "never miss a service" consistently miss opportunities to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" (2 Tim. 4:3).

Have you ever studied the Bible with this question in mind: What would the history of the world be if others had sealed their lips as we do today? Stephen, Jeremiah, Paul, Amos, John the Immerser, and Daniel all valiantly spoke out for God under trying conditions. We must also speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11) as we are set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). It will not please the Lord if we fail to courageously give answer when the world asks for a reason of our faith (1 Pet. 3:15). The sincere speech of loyal servants of the Master is powerful, piercing, and penetrating in the midst of an age of profanity, secularism, and debauchery. Let us speak out for the Truth that makes men free indeed (Jn. 8:31-36)!

MR. BUSH, MR. GORE, AND THE CONSTITUTION

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

In some ways the Bible is to Christians what the U.S. Constitution is to Americans. These documents define who we are by erecting boundaries of right and wrong. But standards of right and wrong will always face constant opposition by those who resent being told what to do, who dislike being held to any standard. That seems to be a defining difference between the two major presidential candidates in the upcoming election. Let me demonstrate.

In interviews about the abortion issue and the impact the appointees to the Supreme Court would have, the two men both revealed their view of the U.S. Constitution:

Mr. Bush: "(I) will appoint judges who strictly interpret the constitution, and who will not use the bench to legislate."

Mr. Gore: "(I) would appoint judges such as the late Thurgood Marshall and William Brennan who view the constitution as a changing document and are not locked in the narrow meaning of words as they were used two hundred years ago."

As anyone can see, the view of those such as Mr. Gore effectively eliminates the Constitution as a standard for America. With this view, no American could point to the Constitution and say, "I know for sure what is right for America because the Constitution says this . . .", because it is, to him, a changing document containing words which have no narrow meaning. In other words, they have no meaning at all. The Constitution means whatever the sitting president and the Supreme Court want it to mean.

Yet this is not meant to be a political article. I simply want to illustrate two major views of the Bible. One is that words mean something. They are the vehicle by which one conveys thought, and the vehicle God used to reveal His will in the Bible. Jesus said we can know the truth (John 8:32), and such is true

because God delivered His system of faith to us completely and totally (Jude 3). We can KNOW that we are living in harmony or out of harmony with God because we have His word, the Bible. Therefore, we take a verse, consider its context, the definitions of the words in the original language, and other verses which speak to the same subject and may add meaning, and we come to the truth which God conveyed.

Now consider the other view of the Bible. Remarkably similar to Mr. Gore's view of the Constitution, this view of the word of God says that the Bible is a changing document. This urges that a verse may teach differing things to different people and yet all still be right. In fact, this idea is the heart and soul of the denominational approach to religion (i.e., "We're all going to heaven, just different ways"). It is further argued that many clear teachings of the Bible, which are applicable to all generations, (such as whether or not women can be preachers and elders), can be ignored today because we are living in the twenty-first century and customs have changed. . . . "We shouldn't be locked into the narrow meaning of words as they were used two thousand years ago."

Be careful of men's attempts to water down the scripture to fit everybody's preferences. Words mean something! 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 says, ". . . even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

The most common threats to the Scriptures are listed as follows, and every reader ought to be prepared to reject them:

1. "God (or the Holy Spirit) speaks to me personally and often tells me right from wrong, separate and apart from the Bible."--This implies that the Bible is either incomplete or inadequate, and must be added to in order to "completely furnish us unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). If God wanted to communicate today this way why would He need the Bible at all? Furthermore, how could one know for sure the difference between God's speaking to their minds and their own imagination?

2. "We believe the Bible is God's word, but we believe our traditions/creed/new testament are also God's will."--Thus is the heart of Catholicism, Mormonism, and most other religions of men. But such reduces the value of the Bible until it is no longer a solid standard for our lives. Which documents do you think such a religion would follow if the Bible and their beliefs disagreed? If they really believed the Bible they would not have those other things to begin with.

3. The New Hermeneutic--Hermeneutic means "science of interpreting the scripture." Anytime you read the Bible and apply its teaching to your life, you are engaged in using your hermeneutic. The new hermeneutic, promoted by some in the churches of Christ, simply urges that we cannot definitively know truth. We can know what we believe from the scriptures, but could never be sure enough of those teachings that we could criticize someone else's beliefs when they differ.

One doesn't have to think very hard to realize that this simply teaches that we can't know truth, and that the Bible doesn't actually give us truth.

The book of Jude, only one chapter long, is a cry to the church to hold to the revealed truth of God so they will not lose their hope of heaven. Some false teachers had crept into the church and were a threat to the souls of Christians

who might listen to them. When you read this short book again, be impressed with how meaningless and absurd it would be if people couldn't really know, by the revealed words of God, what was true doctrine for the church today.

When people view the Bible as some view the U.S. Constitution, they force their standard to conveniently adjust to their personal whims. Is that what God

meant for us to do with His word?

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8,9).

“For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of

God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:2,3).

“But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4).

WOT

ACTING IN IGNORANCE

Todd Clippard, Hamilton, Alabama

In 1 Timothy 1:12,13, the apostle Paul penned these words, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief.” Paul was intimately acquainted with the sacred writings of that day, but he was ignorant as to the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth and the genuineness of the church. However, when Paul learned the truth he did not continue to live his life as he had before, but rather changed his life and his teaching to conform to the truth he now understood. On six different occasions, Paul wrote unto the brethren, “I would not have you ignorant,” or some variation thereof, meaning he wanted to provide them with some information. Thus, we use the term “ignorant” here in its purest sense, meaning “not to know or understand.”

Paul was neither the first nor the last to conduct his life outside of God's will due to ignorance. In his sermon on Mars' Hill, Paul spoke of an altar dedicated “to the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). He continued by saying, “whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.” Note the NKJV rendering, “therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.” Later in that same sermon, Paul gave the following admonition, “Truly, these times of this ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to

repent” (17:30). Thus Paul says, “Ignorance is no longer excusable.”

Apollos was a man who was “mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), but he was ignorant of the baptism of the Great Commission, knowing only the baptism of John the Baptist (v. 25). When he was taught the way more perfectly (v. 26), he changed his teaching to conform to the truth (v. 28). Apollos acted in all sincerity and with a desire to please God, *but this did not make him right*. Paul, the former blasphemer and persecutor, said of himself, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). However, *having a clear conscience did not make him right*. Like these men, we must conform our lives and our teaching to the will of God when we are taught the truth (Jn. 17:17). We cannot continue to live and act as before because “we have always done it this way.” We must recognize our error and move ahead, thankful that we have an opportunity to live in greater harmony with God's Word.

In Acts 3, Peter accused his audience of murdering the Son of God (vv. 14,15). In verse 16, he tells his hearers that the One whom they slew is now alive and it was through His power that the lame man now “walked and leapt about.” But listen to what he then says, “Yet now brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. . . Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins might be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (v. 17,19). They

were taught the truth and then told to repent. This is the same message given by Paul on Mars' Hill. To repent means to amend one's thinking and one's life. I sometimes refer to it as a change of attitude leading to a change of action. We cannot willfully continue in any action after having been taught the truth and expect mercy from God. If we fail to reform our ways, we stand in stubborn disregard and rebellion to the word of God. Can there be any hope for such? God forbid! “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin” (Heb. 10:26).

The Bible speaks of those who would be willfully ignorant of God's will. Peter spoke of scoffers who would reject the teaching of the second coming, being willfully ignorant of the global flood that destroyed the world (2 Pet. 3:3-6). In his epistle to the brethren at Corinth, Paul recognized that some would not accept his teaching as authentic and authoritative. “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord, but if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant” (1 Cor 14:37,38). Paul was not excusing their ignorance, but rather lamenting the fact that some would refuse to receive the holy scriptures that are able to make one wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15).

“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17).

WOT

THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY

James W. Watkins, Lewisburg, Tennessee

“But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing” (Jam. 1:25). Observe, please, that James is speaking of a PERFECT law, the law of LIBERTY. Paul refers to it as “. . . the law of the SPIRIT of LIFE in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2). It is the law of God’s grace. Paul said, “. . . for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). The difference between the law of grace and a legal system, such as the law of Moses, is that the former is founded upon a basis that satisfied the demands of justice, relative to human guilt, and brought salvation within reach of sinners. The “law of liberty,” therefore, is just that; it tells the sinner of the basis and way of freedom. The Old Testament was a system of carnal ordinances (Heb. 9:9,10), a legal system, and this condemned the violator (Rom. 3:20).

Notice that James tells us that this law of liberty is a perfect law. It is perfect in revealing God’s will (1 Cor. 2:4; 9:13; Gal. 1:11,12; 2 Tim. 3:16,17). It is perfect in its design, the salvation of lost humanity (Psa. 19:7; Jn. 8:32; Rom. 1:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:3). It is perfect in its power to reveal MY limitations and needs (Heb. 4:12,13; Jam. 1:22-24). It is a perfect standard of conduct (Rom. 12:1,2; Eph. 4:28-32; Jam. 1:27; Tit. 2:11,12).

But what of its liberty? Thanks be unto God for His marvelous grace. The blood-sealed covenant, will, testament, law of His Son gives us liberty from the bondage of law. Peter said that the law was “. . . a yoke . . . which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10). The law of liberty, therefore, sets us free from legalism (Gal. 5:1; Gal. 3,4; Rom. 7:1-4; Col. 2:14-17). Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone that believeth (Rom. 10:4). The law of liberty sets us free from the guilt of sin (Mk. 16:15,16; Rom. 6:17,18; 8:2).

Do not misunderstand--liberty is not license. We are not at liberty to change God’s law (Gal. 1:6-9). We cannot alter the basis of acceptable worship (Jn. 4:24; Mt. 15:8,9), and we are not “liberated” to commit sin. Sin is bondage (1 Jn. 3:4; Rom. 6:6).

The New Testament is law. It will not tolerate willful violation (Heb. 10:26). It is, however, law in the sense of a will in which I am named beneficiary. Receiving the blessing is simply a matter of walking by faith; it has already been bequeathed. WOT

The Words of Truth


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THE WORDS OF Truth

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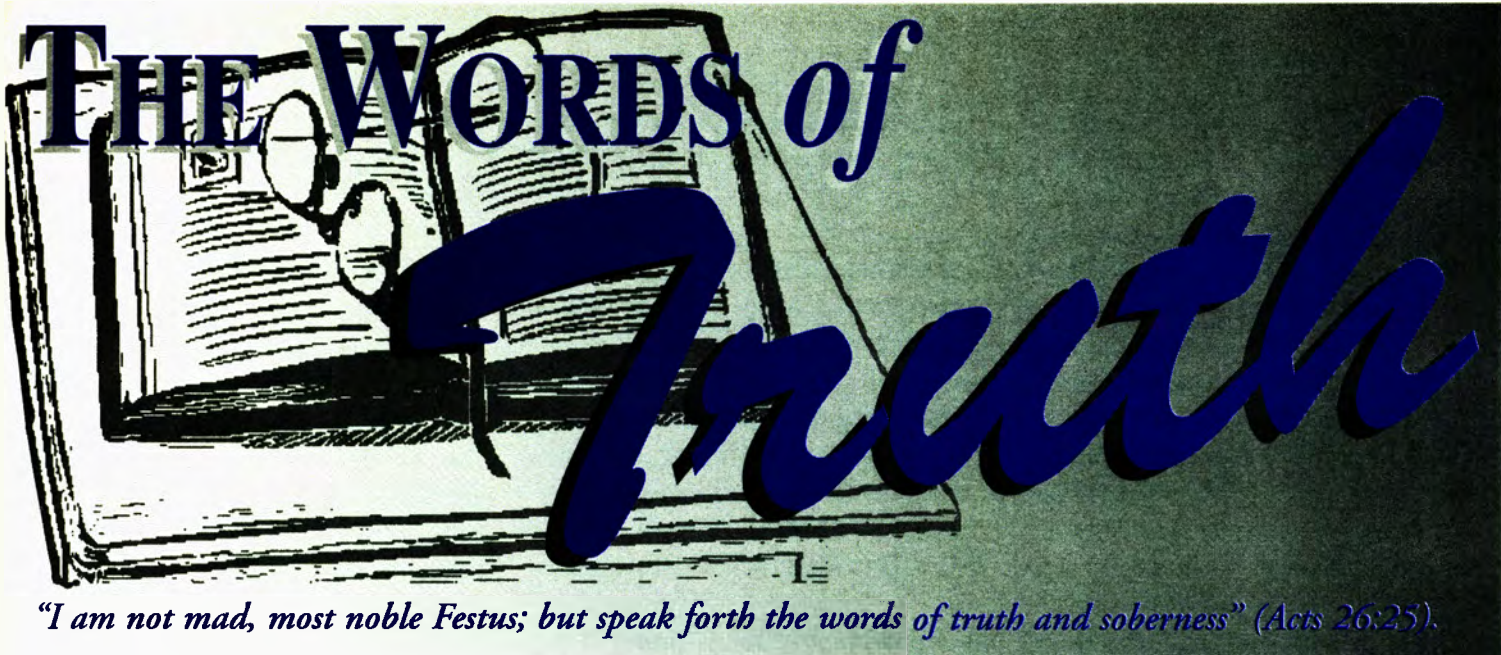
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Mike Benson, Cookeville, Tennessee

Question: "What is the difference between Holy Spirit baptism, water baptism, and the baptism of fire? Please explain."

This is an in-depth question. Briefly, let's notice the following distinctions:

1. **Holy Spirit baptism was a PROMISE to representatives of all flesh** (i.e., Jews--Acts 2; Gentiles--Acts 10,11). "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28,29; cf. Mt. 3:11; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:2-5).

- It was not for all men (Jn. 14:17).
- It was an act of the Lord.
- It was administered by the Lord (Mt. 3:11; Jn. 1:33).

- It was administered in no name.
- It was given for the purpose of revealing and confirming the Word (Jn. 16:13; Heb. 2:4).
- It was not promised after Ephesians 4:4,5.

2. **Water baptism is a COMMAND to all mankind.** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19). "... Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:15,16; cf. Acts 10:48).

- It is for all men.
- It is an act of man's obedience.
- It is to be administered by men (Mt. 28:19; Acts 8:38).
- It is to be administered in the name of (i.e., by the authority of) the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- It is to be administered as a condition of salvation (1 Pet. 3:20,21; Acts 2:38).
- It is to continue until the end of the world (Mt. 28:20).

3. **The baptism of fire is a THREAT to all who are disobedient.** "John answered, saying to all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire'" (Lk. 3:16,17; cf. Mt. 3:11).

- It will be for all rebellious men (Rev. 21:8; Mt. 13:41,42).
- It will be an act of the Lord's vengeance (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

LESSONS FROM THE BIRDS

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Our world is filled with countless reminders of the nature and power of God, myriad stimuli that silently preach powerful sermons. One can scarcely take a step without coming in contact with the fingerprint of God's omnipotent hand and being overwhelmed with His obvious influence on the world. Perhaps the psalmist said it best, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psa. 19:1).

When we look around us we constantly confront objects that stimulate memories of biblical lessons. A star-filled sky whispers quietly of a night several thousand years ago when God asked Abram to try to count the stars (Gen. 15:5). It was confirmation of God's promise to build a great nation through Abram's seed--a promise of which we are the beneficiaries today.

Every time a farmer tills the soil he should be reminded of Jesus' simple, yet powerful, story of a "sower [who] went forth to sow" (Mt. 13:3ff.). The modern-day image of a shepherd guiding his sheep in the wilderness reminds us of the "good Shepherd" who so willingly gave His life for His sheep (Psa. 23; Jn. 10:11). It is impossible to escape these and other visual images that speak so readily of spiritual precepts. That fact is likely the reason that our Lord used object lessons so readily and effectively--He was aware of our tendency to learn and digest more information when we are able to *see* as well as hear.

Of all of the Lord's visual objects, though, perhaps none is more readily visible today than the feathery

creatures to which He so often referred. And perhaps He used birds so frequently because He knew that throughout the ages, regardless of the lifestyles that people lived, we would constantly see these "birds of the air" (Mt. 8:20). What, then, do we learn?

We see the sparrow . . . and remember that God is concerned about us. It is almost overwhelming to think of how big our world is . . . and how many people exist. In fact, in a world of over six billion people, it might even be tempting to think that perhaps God has forgotten about some of us. Surely with that many people He doesn't have time to be concerned about *every single person* . . . But actually, the contrary is quite true.

Jesus put it this way: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:29-31). A farthing was the smallest coin in circulation in Jesus' day and was worth one-sixteenth of a denarius, the average daily wage for a laborer. It would buy two sparrows, which were as common and relatively valueless in New Testament times as they are today (MacArthur, *Matthew 8-15*, p. 223). In other words, there was nothing alive that was considered of less value in first century culture than a sparrow. Yet, Jesus points out, even the sparrow is noticed by God.

In a parallel passage Jesus asks us, "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the

very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Lk. 12:6,7). Every time a sparrow dies God takes notice. Doesn't it follow, then, that when a tear runs down your cheek, God cares? He knows when your heart is breaking. He cares when life's burdens hinder your sleep. He is watching when you, like Elijah, feel all alone in a hostile world (1 Kng. 19). In a world of six billion people, God is the God of the individual . . . of *you* and *me*. Cast "all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

The sparrow reminds us, *God cares.*

We see the rooster . . . and remember not to deny our Savior. When Peter heard Jesus predict that the apostles would desert Him, he was as confident as perhaps any Christian has ever been, boldly asserting, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Mt. 26:33). Jesus' response was quick and to-the-point: "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (v. 34). The subsequent record shows, of course, that Jesus was right: the confident apostle lost his courage three times in a span of a few minutes (Mt. 26:69-75). On two separate occasions two young ladies suggested that perhaps Peter had been with Jesus. Their accusations were met with a vehement denial (vv. 69-72). When a third party indicated that Peter's speech betrayed him, he punctuated his denial with cursing and swearing (vv. 73,74). And

perhaps while the sound of his cursing was still in the air, he heard a common and yet chilling sound: “immediately the cock crew” (v. 74). A normal occurrence in Jerusalem, no doubt, the rooster’s crowing at this particular time signified more than an impending sunrise; it denoted the blatant denial by one of Christ’s closest friends, a member of His “inner circle.” It was a denial by one who had been present at Jesus’ transfiguration when the Lord’s deity was underscored with God’s thundering pronouncement: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mt. 17:5). It was by the same apostle who, along with James and John, had been invited to accompany Jesus deep into the garden just a few hours earlier and to witness from a distance Christ’s excruciating struggle. Yet this dedicated follower of Christ faltered. In a moment of weakness he gave in to his doubts and fears. And when the rooster crowed all of these memories came crashing back into Peter’s mind. The text says simply, “he went out, and wept bitterly” (Mt. 26:75).

If something so tragic could occur in the life of one of Jesus’ most dedicated followers, it can certainly happen to us today. Pressured by the brazen accusations or subtle intimations of our peers, we sometimes acquiesce to temptation and deny our Lord. It usually isn’t as glaring and overt as Peter’s denial, but is nonetheless as real. Instead of flagrant and offensive swearing, perhaps our denial by speech comes in the form of what we *don’t* say instead of what we *do* say. Would our *not* telling our friends about Christ be paramount to actually saying we don’t believe in Him? Is *not* talking about Christ an implicit denial of our faith in Him?

Denial presents itself in many

forms, one of which may also be what we *do*. Peter’s denial occurred, at least in part, because he was warming himself by the fire of unbelievers. Could the same sometimes be said of us? Do our associations indicate that our affections lie with the world more closely than they do with Christ?

Or denial may manifest itself in the priorities we set. The confession and denial of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 10:32,33 are not to be equated solely with one’s *words*. Jesus was saying, in essence, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men *by living for Me*, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men *by not living for Me*, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 10:32,33; words in italics added, ccw).

The rooster reminds us, *don’t deny the Lord*.

We see the eagle . . . and remember that life is short. Perhaps prompted by the discovery of an old (and aging!) photograph or a chance encounter with an old high school classmate, all of us have been struck by the realization that life is passing by so quickly. *Has it really been that long?* is a question we ask with greater frequency as the years pass. Yet we certainly aren’t the first ones to make this “discovery.” Many years ago, God’s suffering servant Job commented often on the brevity of life: “Man that is born of woman is of few days . . . My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle . . . [and] swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good. They are passed away as the swift ships” (Job 14:1; 7:6; 9:25). And then he used an illustration from the animal kingdom, perhaps one he had personally witnessed: “My days . . . are passed away . . . as the eagle that

hasteth to the prey” (Job 9:26).

The image of an eagle’s pursuing its prey at breakneck speed has fascinated us all. To Job this phenomenon caused him to reflect on how quickly time passes. Like an eagle that appears out of nowhere, moves with amazing speed, and then disappears, so are the days of our lives.

Perhaps the sight of an eagle or hawk as it hunts should do the same for us. It is quite easy to fall into the trap of living solely in view of this temporal life, to live as if there were nothing but today and tomorrow. It was that attitude which James castigated when he spoke forcefully of the folly of planning for tomorrow without thinking of God: “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (Jam. 4:13-15).

Like the psalmist urged, we should spend time numbering our days (Psa. 90:12); i.e., using our time wisely by living in view of God and eternity and so as to have no regrets when the end of our days grows nigh. As the proverb goes, *it’s not counting your days that’s important, but making your days count*.

The eagle reminds us . . . *our days are few--use them wisely*.

Can birds preach? Well of course they can . . . if we listen closely. The next time we’re tempted to say, “This is for the birds,” perhaps we ought to remember that the birds have some lessons for us.

WOT

THE LEAST CONFESSED SIN

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

Each sin has its own peculiar and demonic characteristics. Each has its own private set of temptations to draw its victims (Jam. 1:14,15).

Covetousness is certainly unique in its sinister destruction. The Old and New Testaments catalog covetousness as one of the blackest, most heinous sins; yet it is seldom recognized in those who commit it. It was the first recorded sin among the Israelites after crossing Jordan and coming into the promised land (sin of Achan, Jos. 7). It was the first recorded sin within the church (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5).

Francis de Sales, reputed to have heard more confessions than any other Catholic priest, said that the sin of covetousness was never one time confessed to him. Don't you wonder how often it is confessed to God? This is the problem with covetousness--it is seldom even recognized by the victim.

What is covetousness? The general meaning is an "inordinate desire to have more things than one possesses." It is the sin of a man when his desire to have things outruns his desire to be pleasing to God, and it is found among the poor as well as the rich. It is what motivated the Rich Fool in Luke 12:16-21 who, when faced with sudden and unexpected wealth, could see only himself. "This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my

goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

One who makes a calculated effort to acquire gain through dishonest, unfair, or unscrupulous means is guilty of covetousness. "For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness: God is witness" (1 Thess. 2:5).

One who has too much love for money is covetous. "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel" (Acts 20:33).

Desire is natural; covetousness is unnatural. Is my desire for things stronger than my desire to be honest, charitable, or to exercise kindness or sympathy?

What are the consequences of covetousness? Consider four:

1. It makes a person an idolater. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5).

2. It results in bitter domestic

problems, not just between husbands and wives, but between sons and daughters in inheritance disputes.

"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house..." (Prov. 15:27).

3. It causes men to depart from the faith. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia" (2 Tim. 4:10).

4. It leads men to many foolish and hurtful lusts. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (2 Pet. 2:1-3). (For other examples see 2 Kings 5:22-25, and Joshua 7.) Beware of having such a tight hold on your gold that you don't have a hand free to grasp the handle on the pearly gate. WOT

JUDGE NOT? WHY NOT?

Jacob Morse

In a society where it is frowned upon to be "judgmental," a message of tolerance is being spread frantically. What people don't realize (or maybe they do) is that as tolerance increases,

the ethics and morality of our nation, the once definitive right and wrong, begin to disappear. However, no matter how tolerant we become as a nation, right and wrong *do* exist, and they

never change.

Many people in this country claim to be "Christians." By calling themselves this, they are obviously trying to say that they are followers of Christ and His

word, the New Testament. Despite what they call themselves, they continue to live in ways that are not Christian-like, and they continue to tolerate lifestyles that are not in accordance with the word of God. Along with their tolerance comes a defensive attitude, the idea that no one has the right to say anything about the way they (or others) are living. I can confidently say that many of the people who claim to be Christians are doing only that: claiming.

With tolerance being stressed so forcefully in our society, some may ask, "How can you say these things? You are being so judgmental!"

Yes I am.

Many times, when a person who professes to be Christian is questioned about his lifestyle, he immediately quotes Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." As is the case with most verses used to justify wrongdoing,

this verse is often taken out of its proper context. All one has to do is glance down at the following verses to glean from this passage the full meaning. In these verses we are told about an individual with a large wooden beam sticking out of his eye. While in this terrible state, this person is telling another person about a little speck that is in *his* eye. Christ tells us that before we can ridicule an acquaintance about the "speck" in his eye, we must first take the "beam" out of ours.

What Christ is speaking of in Matthew 7 is unrighteous judgment. He is in no way telling us that we cannot cast judgment about someone's lifestyle. Rather, He is teaching against hypocrisy and judging someone when you are guilty of the same thing (or worse). Besides, if I were to speak with someone about how he was living and

ask him to change his lifestyle, I would not use my own thoughts and imagination to pass judgment on him. On the contrary, I would use the Bible without any addition. So, in all reality, it is not the person who is passing judgment, but God, through His word.

Also, before people call themselves Christians, they must realize that being a Christian is not merely using a name. The name Christian doesn't make sinful actions okay. To be a Christian, a person must give up those things, and live according to the Bible. We cannot say that it is wrong to judge when we are commanded to "Reprove, REBUKE, and exhort one another" in 2 Timothy 4:2. In the next verse, Christians are warned of the time when tolerance to the point of ignoring sin will infest society. Reader, that time is now. WOT

THE ARK DIDN'T EVEN HAVE ANY LIFEBOATS

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

The story of the sinking of the Titanic has been a source of wonder, amazement, and mystery ever since that fateful day in April 1912. One of the questions constantly raised about it concerns the lifeboats. Why were they not all filled and used? Why were there not enough to seat every passenger and crew member? Certainly the lifeboats are critical equipment on any seagoing vessel.

There was once such a vessel, however, which was designed by the greatest architect of all time which did not even have lifeboats on it. That vessel, of course, was the ark, and that architect was God Himself. Why? Why wouldn't a vessel that was designed to float upon a raging sea have lifeboats for its occupants? The answer is simple. It was the haven of safety. There was no salvation from a raging sea and torrential rain to be found anywhere outside its confines.

The ark serves as a type of the church in many ways. Numerous lessons have been preached by faithful brethren over the years about the significant aspects of both the ark and the church. Both were designed by God. Both had/have only one door. Both had/have only one light source. Both contained/contain the saved. And, there are many other similarities and thus lessons as well.

One matter concerning each of these items is of vital importance: God is the keeper of those within and the enemy of those without. In Noah's day there was salvation for those within the ark and destruction for those who were without. Concerning the Lord's church there is salvation for those who are within (Acts 2:47) and condemnation to those without. When the time of judgment came in Noah's day, those outside the ark were doomed. When the final day

of judgment comes, those outside the church will have the Lord as their Judge instead of their Savior.

Many today would put, as it were, lifeboats on the ark. They would do so by attempting to make other provisions for salvation than those which God has made. Just as God made only one ark, Jesus built only one church (Mt. 16:18). Just as the saved of the flood were found inside the ark, the saved spiritually are found inside the church, added there by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). There were no lifeboats on the ark (no other means of salvation from the flood). Other than the church which Jesus purchased (Acts 20:28), there are no other institutions to which the saved can be added by the Lord. Where are you spiritually? Are you "in the ark" or in the flood? Are you in the church or in the world? There are no other alternatives. WOT

WHAT DO I SAY AND WHAT DO I DO IN TIME OF LOSS?

Don Williams, Killen, Alabama

“Death never takes a holiday.” This sad fact is seen every day in the obituaries. It is expressed as a long funeral procession makes its way to the cemetery. It is heard in announcements at a worship service, or read in church bulletins. It is demonstrated at hospitals and nursing homes when families are wracked with the pain of knowing that their beloved “is gone.”

In my work with grief I am often asked what can be said or done to help in times of loss and tragedy. The words “I feel so inadequate” are often stated, and rightly so. Nothing we say or do can undo the death that has occurred or the wrenching pain that is being felt. Yet, there are some things that grieving families have told me were of help and comfort to them that caring “others” did for them. The following includes some of these suggestions.

“What do I say?”

Nothing can take the place of your presence. It is not the words you use as much as your presence that is so important. When death occurs, go to the grieving family and be with them. Job’s friends came to him and sat seven days with him without saying anything (Job 2:13). In the New Testament, Mary and Martha had friends to be with them

when their brother Lazarus died (Jn. 11:31). Nothing can take the place of your presence.

Some folks do not know what to say, and thus they avoid going to the funeral home or funeral service. Others say too much and ask inappropriate questions or make inappropriate statements. Still others burden the grieving family with stories of their own losses. The best thing that can be said is this: “I am so sorry to learn of your loss. I love you and I will be praying for you.” Such words will be appreciated. These words, followed by a hug or the grasp of a hand, let the grieving family know that you are concerned and that you care.

“What do I do?”

After you attend the funeral (if at all possible), do not forget the grieving family in the days and weeks to follow. If the death was sudden or unexpected, the reality of their loss may just be beginning to sink in as they return home from the funeral. They need the presence of family and friends then more than ever. It has been suggested that 97% of friends stop visiting the grieving family two weeks after the funeral! Continue to go and be with them. Instead of saying, “Call me if you

need me,” let them know that you will be calling on them in a few days. Reassure them of your desire to do anything you can to comfort their hearts and to help with any need.

If there are small children at home, offer to keep them while necessary errands have to be run. Laundry work, cleaning the house, and taking food to grieving family members can all be beneficial as they try to deal with their shattered lives.

Romans 12:15 tells us to “weep with them that weep.” Our continued love and support to hurting family members can be one way of showing the love of Christ within our lives. WOT

[Editor’s note: Don and his brother Ron co-wrote the book *Walking With Those Who Weep: A Guide to Grief Support*, an excellent thirteen-chapter book on how to help those who are grieving. Just last year, Don wrote *Hope for Those who Struggle: Coping with the Losses of Life*, which includes information for specific losses such as the loss of a parent, sibling, or spouse. It also addresses the issues of suicide, SIDS, miscarriage, and other critical concerns. Either book can be ordered from Don at 62 Ridgecrest Lane, Killen, Alabama, 35645, or from Ron at 1307 Meridian St., Huntsville, Alabama, 35801.]

THE RESTORATION PRINCIPLE

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

In His intercessory prayer prior to His crucifixion Jesus prayed for unity among those who believed in Him (Jn. 17:20,21). Such unity is not evident in our modern world. With displeasure God noted through the inspired writers of the New Testament that there would be a falling away from the sound doctrine that would produce such unity (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3,4). Even among the eldership there would arise men who would lead some in God’s flock astray

(Acts 20:29,30). As prophesied, religious division has occurred; however, such is not for the spiritual benefit of man. The price that has been paid for it is an unbelieving world.

Thankfully, there have been men who have sought to produce unity in the religious world. For example, Peter Waldo of France in the twelfth century remarked, “Unless a matter is enjoined in scripture, we must reject it.” Marcellus in the fourteenth century

stated that the Bible should be the only authority for the church. A Spaniard named Savanarola, in the fifteenth century, was hanged for preaching the possibility of restoring the primitive church. Some of the Reformation leaders in the sixteenth century like Wycliffe, Zwingli, Huss, Luther, Calvin and Knox desired to reform certain abuses that existed in the Catholic Church. While their efforts were noble, unfortunately they fell far short of

promoting Christianity on God's terms. Instead, further division resulted with the establishment of various Protestant churches.

It was in the eighteenth century in America that the idea of restoring primitive Christianity caught fire. The appeal was to accept the authority of the New Testament as the only rule of faith and practice in religious matters. Human creeds that had been the standard of authority for Catholicism and Protestant denominations for a long time were renounced. The appeal was, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." Such an appeal is not only logical, but also scriptural.

We are told, "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). The scriptures are sufficient for every spiritual need of man (2 Tim. 3:16,17). A proper handling of the scriptures is essential to our spiritual life (2 Tim. 2:15). Those who do not abide in the teaching of scriptures do not belong to God (2 Jn. 9). It is the height of human arrogance to go beyond what is divinely revealed in the Bible (1 Cor. 4:6). The Bible should serve as our spiritual "North Star" and should constitute our final court of appeal in religious matters. Did not God set up the church as He wanted it? What is the

benefit of trying to change it? Is not the New Testament a complete record of what God wants people to do? How can finite man improve upon the revelation of the infinite God?

Indeed, "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Observance of this principle will produce the unity for which Jesus prayed. It will result in the promotion of the Lord's church, not Catholicism or Protestantism, or any other man-made religion. It will announce only those conditions of salvation plainly stated in the scriptures. Are we willing to commit ourselves to this principle? *WOT*

A STORY WITH MANY POINTS

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

I spoke with a sweet, sixty-nine-year old woman this morning. She had watched our television program and wanted to speak with me. During the course of our conversation, she told me a story I will never forget. Tearfully, she told of a fourteen-year-old grandson named Matthew who locked himself in his room, took a pistol, put it in his mouth, and pulled the trigger. He was rushed to MCV Hospital in Richmond. He survived, but the bullet is permanently lodged in his sinus cavity and he is in constant, unmitigated pain. The greatest pain, however, is not physical. It is emotional and spiritual. Matthew's mother and father routinely fly out to Las Vegas to gamble, dumping him off with anyone who will take him. They may "win" a few thousand on some trips, but invariably lose their winnings and then some. Recently, the father told the son, "I wish I'd never set eyes on you!" Not long ago, the boy told his grandmother, "Nobody loves me." He also told her, "I want somebody to take me to church." When she offered, he said, "I want my daddy to come and sit beside me." The dear elderly woman lamented that her grandson's parents never show love and affection. In the wake of such tragedy, a young man with most of life before him-- could not bear the thought of continuing one more day in such a topsy, turvy, loveless circumstance.

As I heard the story, my mind was flooded with a variety of impressions

and reactions. My heart went out to the boy. My anger was directed at the parents. My sympathy was reserved for the helpless grandmother. Consider the multiplied lessons to be learned from this terrible travesty.

Bad decisions often carry awful consequences. This young man, by the single squeeze of a trigger, may suffer a lifetime of pain and complications. Despite his understandable pain, he resorted to a sinful solution. He tried to murder himself (cf. Romans 1:29). Sadly, he must "from the flesh reap corruption" (Galatians 6:7). Every moment of painful sensation this boy experiences in his head will serve as a reminder of his ill-chosen choice. How many lives have been rewritten in tragic ways by decisions made suddenly out of lust, anger, passion, and sorrow? We must carefully consider our ways (cf. Haggai 1:5,7).

Sin destroys a proper sense of priorities. The boy's father loves money and taking chances more than that precious offspring that came from him and his wife. He derived more pleasure from losing money than training his child (Proverbs 22:6). They made it clear they loved money (1 Timothy 6:10), and they made it clear they did not love their own boy (Ephesians 6:4). The boy also showed a lack of appreciation for the important by failing to see his own value. His soul is everlasting (Matthew 16:26). Jesus died

for him (Romans 5:8). If only he knew, he would not have sinned against himself. How many today are destroying themselves because they undervalue God's will and even their own lives?

Homes without love crumble. What a poor example of a home this home is! "The wicked are overthrown and are no more, But the house of the righteous will stand" (Proverbs 12: 7; cf. 14:11). Apparently, there was little or no love in this home. This reminds us of how much our homes need to be filled with love. Without it, how many children will feel like Matthew?

Parents have a vital role to play in the spiritual development of their children. Matthew wanted his daddy on a pew next to him "in church." Was that too much to ask? He was hungry for spiritual guidance from his parents. There is a mandate from God to fathers to bring up their children in God's ways (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). This boy was obviously lost, his dad the improper guide. Parents, how are you preparing your children in spiritual matters?

There are too many young Matthews. Empty inside. Unsupported. Unloved. Unaided. What is the condition of your home? Is sin in the way? "Be careful how you walk..." (Ephesians 5:15) in front of your children. They may not try to end their physical lives, but they may not have eternal life! That is the greatest tragedy of all! *WOT*

WHAT THEN SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

Bill Burk, Seagoville, Texas

Pilate was at his own personal crossroads. He had to make a decision. He was the sixth Roman procurator of Judea and within his realm of authority was the power to release one prisoner to the Jews. Who would it be? Would he release Barabbas, a known criminal (Mt. 27:16)? Or would he release Jesus, the One who claimed to be King of the Jews (Jn. 18:36,37)? He knew Jesus was innocent, that He had done no wrong (Jn. 18:38). His wife warned him not to do anything to Him, for she had suffered many things in a dream concerning the Lord (Mt. 27:19). Pilate wanted to please the Jews, but yet he desperately wanted to release Jesus (Lk. 23:20). What was he to do? He tried to wash his hands of the situation (Mt. 27:24). He tried to pass the buck, yet, when it was all said and done, he was just as guilty as the multitude who yelled "Crucify Him!" At one point during Pilate's quandary, he asked a most penetrating question, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate supplied his own answer to the question by turning Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified (Mk. 15:15).

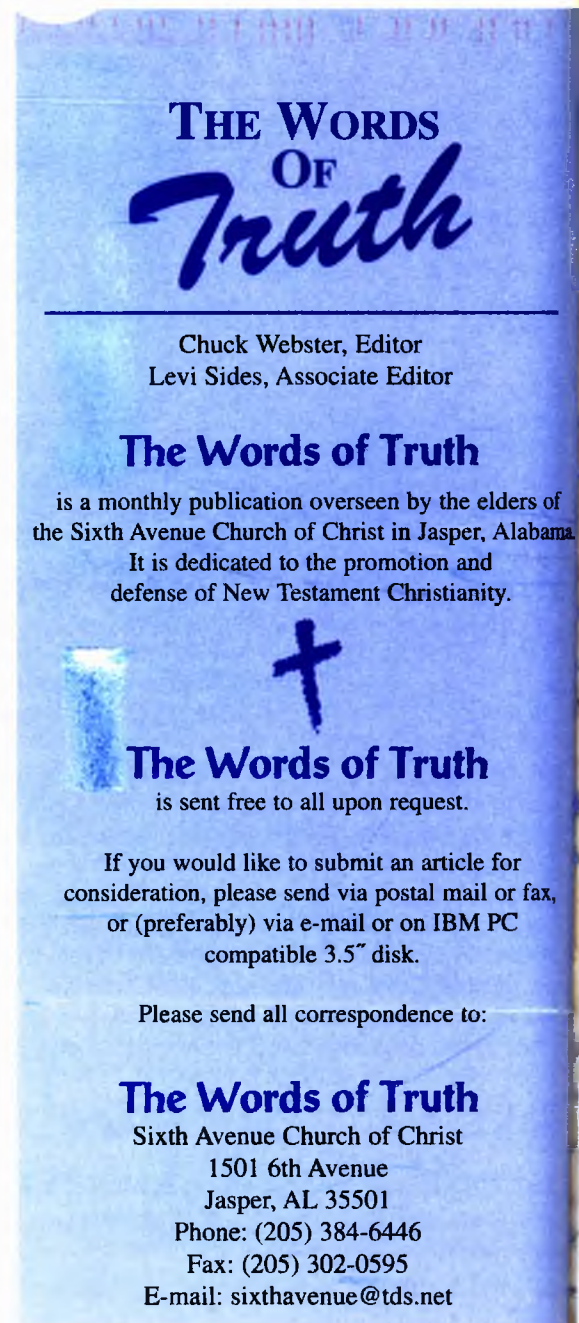
All of us face the same monumental decision in life. We must make a decision about what it is that we do with Jesus. We have only two choices. We can choose to serve Him all the days of our lives (Lk. 9:23), or we can reject Him (Jn. 1:11). Jesus makes it clear that there is no middle ground (Mt. 12:30). We can refuse to make a decision to serve Him, but by doing so, we, like Pilate, become guilty of making a decision against Him.

The question we must consider is this, "Why not accept Him?" He promises us that if we serve Him, we can enjoy the greatest life now (Jn. 10:10) as well as everlasting life to come (Jn. 3:16). He gives purpose for living (Mt. 5:16). He provides constant companionship (Heb. 13:5,6). He provides a relationship with the Heavenly Father (Jn. 14:6; Heb. 7:22ff.). He provides all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). He knows our deepest needs and He provides us with the greatest example to follow (Mt. 6:19-34; 1 Jn. 2:6). So each one of us must ask, "What then shall I do with Jesus?" Let us choose to live for Him (Phil. 1:21).

WOT

The Words of Truth

**Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
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**THE WORDS
OF
Truth**

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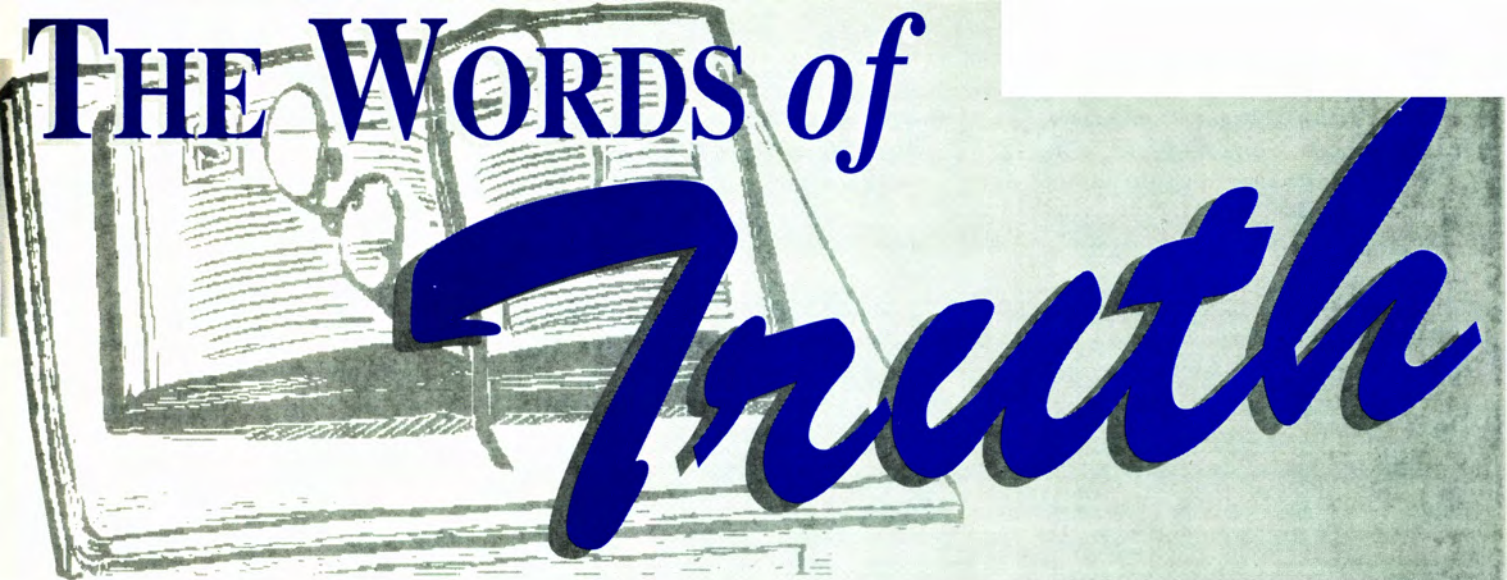
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THE WORDS of Truth

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

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WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

Is the Holy Spirit simply an influence emanating from God? Is He a power or illumination that God imparts to us? Or, is He a divine person? A proper understanding of the identity of the Holy Spirit is critical to properly understanding His work. A careful study of the Scriptures will bring us to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is a divine person in the Godhead and should be referred to in that manner.

The Holy Spirit possesses all the attributes of personality. He is not a mere influence, power, or illumination. The apostle Paul referred to the *knowledge* the Holy Spirit has concerning the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10,11). Reference is made to the *mind* of the Spirit in Romans 8:27. The *affection* of love is attributed to the Holy Spirit in Romans 15:30. We learn He can be *grieved* in Ephesians 4:30. The Holy Spirit has the capability of *speaking* (1 Tim. 4:1) and *teaching* (Jn. 14:26). Paul declared that the Holy Spirit can *lead* (Rom. 8:14). On one occasion at least, the Holy Spirit *forbade* Paul to travel to Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6,7). The Holy Spirit exercised *authority* in selecting Barnabas and Paul to engage in mission work (Acts 13:2) as well as in selecting the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:28). It is not the purpose of this article to study the manner in which the Holy

Spirit accomplished all these tasks, but merely to point out that these endeavors demand the conclusion that He is a personality and not a glorified "IT." It is entirely appropriate, then, to refer to Him with personal pronouns, such as "He" and "Him."

The Holy Spirit also possesses the nature of deity. He is divine as the Father and the Son are divine. When Ananias and Sapphira lied regarding their donation to the church, Peter said they lied to the Holy Spirit whom he described as God (Acts 5:4,5). His deity is affirmed by His possession of all the *attributes* of deity. For example, the word "eternal" is used to describe Him (Heb. 9:14). This word is in contrast to that which is "temporary" or "for a season" (2 Cor. 4:18). The Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, has neither beginning of days nor end of existence; He is eternal. As deity, He possesses all knowledge (Jn. 16:12,13), all power (Lk. 1:35), and is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-10). Not only does the Holy Spirit possess all the attributes of deity, but also He performed distinctly divine works. These also attest to His divinity. For example, the Genesis record relates the involvement of the Spirit in the creation (Gen. 1:1,2). The plural personal pronoun was used when God made man (Gen. 1:26). This is not to suggest that there was

more than one God involved in creation, but that there was more than one personality of the Godhead involved. In the gospel of John we learn that God, the Son, also had a hand in creation (Jn. 1:1-3). Other passages bring to light the Holy Spirit's role in creation (Psa. 104:30; Job 26:13; 33:4). Also, the authorship of divine prophecies is attributed to the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Sam. 23:2,3). The Bible, then, is not the result of special insight and wisdom from religiously minded men, but is from God as men were "moved by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit's name is coupled with other members of the Godhead (Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14), suggesting equality with them. His distinction from the Father and the Son becomes clear at the scene of the Lord's baptism (Lk. 3:21,22). The incarnate Son was baptized by John in the Jordan River at which time the Holy Spirit descended in the bodily form of a dove and the Father spoke from heaven. While all Three possessed the divine nature (deity), they are distinct divine personalities.

The personality traits possessed by the Holy Spirit show Him to be a person, not an impersonal force. In His works, characteristics, attributes, and achievements there is a four-fold cord of testimony that clearly demonstrates the Spirit's divinity.

WOT

“IT WASN’T MY FAULT!”

Chuck Webster, Editorial

At different times in President Truman’s tenure in office, there appeared on his desk a sign inscribed with the words, “The buck stops here,” which was one of his favorite expressions. The saying itself is said to have originated in the old west with a card game, in which a marker or counter, frequently a knife with a buckhorn handle, was used to indicate the person whose turn it was to deal. If the player did not wish to deal, he could pass the responsibility by passing the “buck,” as the counter came to be called, to the next player (Mitford M. Mathews, ed., *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*). This expression eventually evolved into the saying, “The buck stops here,” and means, of course, to accept one’s responsibility and refuse to “pass the buck” to someone else. It has also come to refer to an attitude of accepting responsibility for one’s *wrong* choices.

In modern times it seems that the expression itself is much more popular than the philosophy behind it. Though most know it, few practice it. Many of us, quite frankly, are much like Lucy in Charles Schultz’s comic strip, *Peanuts*. After striking out, Lucy walks away with a scowl on her face, muttering, “This bat is no good! It’s too light! That ball they’re using is no good either! How can anybody hit when the sun is so bright? I bat better when it’s cloudy! It’s too dusty out there, too! I can’t hit well when the wind is blowing! That bat I was using is too short! It’s hard to see the ball today! You can’t hit a ball when the bat is too thin! I think their pitcher is . . .”

Lucy has many modern counterparts, don’t you think? To a great extent, we live in a society of victims. *Reader’s Digest* published an article by Pete Hamill in 1991 with the title, “It’s Not My Fault!” chronicling what the author called “victimism” in America. Hamill referred to an incident

when Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited a high school in the South Bronx. As he stepped from his limousine and began greeting the bystanders, a group of minorities huddled in front of a shelter for the homeless and began heckling the accomplished general. They criticized him for having everything handed to him . . . a “college boy [who] got everything he want[ed].” They, on the other hand, had drawn the wrong hand in life. They were poor and minority, or poor and luckless, and never had a chance. In Hamill’s words, they had in their view “been locked up by bad cops, flunked out by racist schoolteachers, abused by heartless welfare investigators.” What they did not know was that the man across the street—who was then speaking with authority to the kids, telling them to stay in school and avoid drugs—had come from one of the worst slums in America (*Reader’s Digest*, October, 1991). Many people today live their lives under the never-questioned assumption that if they have problems, there must be someone else who is to blame.

But actually, the pass-the-buck-shift-the-blame mentality has long been plaguing the human race. At the dawn of creation God asked Adam if he had eaten fruit from the forbidden tree. He responded, in effect, “The woman *you* gave me, *she* gave me the fruit, and I ate it” (Gen. 3:12). *It wasn’t my fault!*

When questioned, Eve said, “The *serpent* tricked me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13). *It wasn’t my fault!*

During the time that Moses was on the mount receiving the law, the Israelites became restless and persuaded Aaron to craft them a golden idol, which they worshiped. Notice Aaron’s response, when confronted angrily by Moses: “Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the *people*, that *they* are set on mischief. For *they* said unto me, Make us gods,

which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him” (Ex. 32:22,23; emp. added). “You know how those people are!” *It wasn’t my fault!*

God commanded Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites and to spare nothing or no one. The text clearly shows the king’s subsequent disobedience: “But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly” (1 Sam. 15:9). When challenged by Samuel, Saul responded, “Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the *people* took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal” (1 Sam. 15:20,21; emp. added). “The *people* did it.” *It wasn’t my fault!*

Pilate was in a quandary. Before him was an innocent Man, and he knew it. Pressure was mounting from the mob to crucify Jesus Christ, but Roman law clearly demanded acquittal. Should he crucify an innocent Man and satisfy the crowd or release Him and satisfy the law (and his conscience)? But then a thought struck him, and he acted on it. Matthew records what happened: “When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it” (Mt. 27:24). “I don’t want this on *my* conscience.” *It wasn’t my fault!*

But lest we think that the “blame game” is relegated solely to politics, comic strips, and Bible stories, we

need to point the spotlight directly at ourselves and ask, "Are we sometimes guilty of the same spiritual blame-shifting?" Most of us must admit that we are.

Consider the following buck-passing excuses for spiritual problems:

- *Blame it all on my roots*: "I know I have a problem with my hot temper (language, gossip, priorities, etc.), but I got it from my dad . . ."
- *It's this woman you gave me*: "I know I should be more faithful, but my wife (husband, children, etc.) makes it so difficult . . ."
- *The devil made me do it*: "My mind isn't as pure as it should be, but this world we live in makes it almost impossible . . ."
- *The "poor old me" syndrome*: "If you only knew all of the things I've been through . . ."
- *I just don't have the time*: "Life is just so busy these days. The kids have practice, my job is so demanding, . . ."

In order to overcome this destructive mentality, it may help us to understand our reason for doing it. Apparently, the primary motivation is an almost overwhelming inherent desire to avoid negative consequences. Like children caught red-handed who blame their transgressions on siblings, we believe, perhaps even subconsciously, that we can escape punishment if we convince God it wasn't our fault. Certainly this was the primary motivation for Adam and Eve to shift the blame for their poor choice (Gen. 3). Likewise Aaron and Saul reasoned that maybe they could escape God's wrath if they shifted the blame to the people (Ex. 32).

God has put within us a conscience that, when trained properly, helps us do right. When violated it creates unpleasant and uncomfortable feelings that we naturally wish to dismiss. It is here that we find a second reason for passing blame. Like Pilate, we wish to ease our consciences by "washing our hands of the matter"; i.e., putting the blame on others. This transferral of

fault lets us say to ourselves, "I have no guilt in this matter," and thereby quiet our conscience. If we can convince ourselves, whether consciously or subconsciously, that what we did was somehow the fault of another, we feel no guilt. That very fact is what makes passing the buck such an attractive remedy when we are confronted with our own wrongdoing.

In view of the above motivations, though, it might be tempting to suggest that blame-shifting is simply a part of human nature--that it has no significant consequences. Such could not be farther from the truth, however. Several serious, and even potentially destructive, consequences often follow. When we refuse to accept responsibility for our actions . . .

- . . . *We will not be forgiven*. God's forgiveness always hinges on our admitting guilt and making a determination to forsake wrongdoing (i.e., repentance and confession; cf. 1 Jn. 1:6-10). The pseudo-confession, "If I have sinned," is actually no confession at all and does not result in remittance. The half-hearted admission, "I know it was wrong, but I have a really good excuse," indicates a heart that has not fully come to grips with the personal responsibility that must accompany all sin. Like David we must confess, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:13; cf. Ps. 51).
- . . . *We will not grow spiritually*. Failures can be stepping stones to greater heights of spirituality . . . but only if we admit those failures. Bible heroes like David (Ps. 51), Peter (Mt. 26:75), and Paul (1 Tim. 1:15) committed grievous sins, but were able to grow closer to God when they accepted responsibility. Others, like Saul and Aaron, missed tremendous opportunities for growth when they tried to blame others for their mistakes.
- . . . *We will be more likely to sin again*. Perhaps one reason why God requires confession of sins is that it

makes us intimately familiar with our sins. Through confession we are forced to say "I was wrong. . . . I sinned. . . . I failed." Such recognitions make impressions on us, rendering us more likely to resist future temptation. Passing the blame, on the other hand, deludes us into thinking that sin can be committed with impunity. *There are no consequences*, we think. Future temptation may be even more appealing, because when we yielded previously, no apparent harm followed.

The cure, of course, is to submit ourselves wholly to God and His word. We must realize that "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Those who refuse to admit personal guilt are viewed in God's eyes as self-deceived, and even accusers of God. Notice John's pointed words: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8,10).

Each of us will be individually judged. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). On that day, untold millions will be pleading with God, offering to Him scores of excuses for their unfaithfulness. "But my parents . . . my job . . . my upbringing . . . It wasn't my fault!"

It wasn't my fault! It's more than a harmless, child-like expression; it suggests an attitude that will cause many to lose their souls. Contrary to the disposition it represents, let us refuse to shift blame, embracing our guilt, accepting the responsibility for our actions, and then by faith humbly accepting Christ's offer to bear the consequences meant for us. WOT

A CROWD GOD WANTS THE CHRISTIAN TO PLEASE

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

“Crowd-pleasers,” as one generally thinks of the terms, get no high marks with God. Some of the harshest words about preachers, penned by Paul, warn, “For the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine . . .” (2 Tim. 4:3a). The general crowd of men on earth want to hear no message with the backbone and conviction of Christ’s doctrine. The world is ruled by the “immoral majority,” and the principle for the Christian, first penned by Moses of old, is that he “shalt not follow a multitude to do evil . . .” (Ex. 23:2). Hell will be inhabited by the crowd, for most of God’s precious, pinnacle creation will be rewarded that awful place for their sinful rebellion (Mt. 7:14).

Yet, there is a crowd God wants the Christian to please. Built upon the great faith chapter of the Bible, Hebrews 12 begins, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . .” There is great comfort inspired by this crowd. It is the crowd of the faithful mentioned in Hebrews 11, whose faith lives despite their deaths centuries and millenniums ago (cf. Heb. 11:4). This virtue stands around their modern-day counterparts--Christians--today. Also, it may be that in paradise there stand a large number of saints who watch and cheer the living brethren on toward the victory won at the grave (cf. 1 Jn. 5:4). What peace that passes! The witnesses are great in quantity and quality. One may feel alone at any

given moment in the present day, but he can be assured that there have been many throughout the ages who have successfully trod the same hard path and won!

This crowd wants the Christian to “lay aside every weight.” Saints who have gone before have known the heaviest of burdens. Look at Job, penniless, beset by a plague of skin and spirit, and mugged of his name and his progeny. How he overcame! Look at Joseph, sold out by brothers and sold into undeserved sorrows. How he triumphed! Look at Abel, slain for faithful worship and obedient submission. How tall he stands! What weight is there the Christian cannot lift with the aid of Christ (cf. Phil. 4:13)? Casting one’s cares upon the caring Savior makes the burdens bearable (1 Pet. 5:7). The “great cloud” would cheer such victory.

This crowd wants the Christian to “lay aside . . . the sin which doth so easily beset.” Who has faced temptation like Joseph in Potiphar’s house or Micaiah in Ahab’s court (1 Kng. 22)? Who, more than Moses (Ex. 2:12), David (cf. Psa. 51), Peter (Mt. 26:75), and Paul (1 Cor. 15:9), has had to climb out of steeper valleys of sinfulness? Despite the failures of their lives, men can lay aside besetting sins. This “great cloud” exemplifies such!

This crowd wants the Christian to “run with patience the race that is set before us.” The prospect of eternal fellowship inspires jubilation on earth and in heaven. The faithful runner will be crowned (2 Tim. 2:5)! It has been the assurance of the ages, made possible by the atoning sacrifice of Christ that led captivity

captive (Eph. 4:8). Did not Abraham patiently pursue “the crown” (Heb. 11:8,9)? Consider the patience required of the unnamed saints in the crowd, who “wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth . . .” (Heb. 11:37,38). What problem does the modern Christian have more insurmountable than these? “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Eccl. 7:8)!

This crowd wants the Christian to be found “looking unto Jesus.” He was the cornerstone hope of man, whose promise motivated him as early as Eden (Gen. 3:15). The patriarchs looked unto Jesus (cf. Gen. 22:18). So did those under the Mosaical Age (Isa. 53). They looked unto Jesus “that they might obtain a better resurrection” through Him (Heb. 11:35). They sought the Messiah (Dan. 9:25,26), the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), the Saviour and Redeemer (Isa. 63:8,9). Their anticipation was realized in Jesus. Their rooting is that all men would look unto Jesus, the only hope of salvation (Acts 4:12).

Usually, “many” is not safe company (Mt. 7:14,22). But, the positive peer pressure of those mentioned in Hebrews 12:1 can help motivate the Christian today to win the victory through grace and obedient faith. This is one case where one should “follow the crowd”!

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!

Mark N. Posey, Decatur, Alabama

The parent/child relationship is very special (cf. Psalms 127:3-5). This relationship is so important that God used it to describe His relationship to the church (Eph. 5). However, it seems no matter where we look in modern society, we see antagonism, division, and rebellion against the home and the parent/child relationship. We need to improve our families and in doing so we will improve the church; for families make up the church. What is the answer? The answer is simple: we must submit to the Lordship of Christ. We must "gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). The parent/child relationship must be studied with four words in mind (cf. Eph. 6:1-3; Phil. 2:22; and Eph. 6:4): obey, honor, service, and nurture (discipline).

First of all, Paul sets forth what is called a Natural Law. Ephesians 6:1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Children should obey their parents for it is the "right" thing to do! What is required in obeying parents? The Greek word translated "obey" comes

from one word meaning "under" and another word meaning "to listen." So it literally means, "to listen under." However, a parent must be worthy of obedience and listening. Children are to obey parents "in the Lord"--that is, in those things which are consistent with Christ and His word.

Second, Paul makes use of a Divine Law. Ephesians 6:2,3: "Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Paul refers to the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16. He is saying that there is a very practical reason for obeying and honoring your parents: children are promised a long and good life on the earth. To honor parents means to love them, to regard them highly, to show them respect and consideration.

Third, Paul sets forth a Practical Law. Philippians 2:22: "But you know his proven character, that as a son with his

father he served with me in the gospel." Paul describes Timothy as a son serving with his father to spread the gospel message to many people. The Greeks had five words for love. One of those words was *storge*. *Storge* love exists between parents and children. This kind of love is the binding factor by which families stick and stay together no matter how tough things might become.

Fourth, Paul sets forth a Reasonable Law. Ephesians 6:4: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Paul tells us that the father has several responsibilities toward his children: Fathers must not provoke their children to wrath (cf. Col. 3:21); rather, they must nurture their children (Lk. 2:52). Fathers must discipline their children (Heb. 12:5,6; Prov. 13:24), correcting them in love and not in anger, lest we injure the body or the spirit of the child, or possibly both.

WOT

DEATH IS VICTORY

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

Men have been dying for centuries. We usually fear and dread even the thought of death. But, nearly 2000 years ago Christ changed the concept of dying into a symbol of victory, glory, and strength. When, by the power of God, Jesus arose from the grave (Rom. 1:4) we became *more than conquerors* over the ultimate weapon Satan had used since Eden (Rom. 8:36).

Living, Christ loved me,
Dying, He saved me,
Buried, He carried my sins far away
Rising, He justified freely forever,
One day He is coming.
O Glorious Day!

In the Passover scene of Exodus 12

the Bible was already pointing to "Christ, who is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). In the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement, found in Leviticus 16, we can see the beauty of "the Lamb of God" who takes away our sins (Jn. 1:29). Psalm 22 predicted the suffering on the cross one thousand years prior to Golgotha as Jesus quoted from that poignant passage while projected on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me."

In Isaiah 53 we have history written before it happened at Calvary. In fact, seven centuries after Isaiah wrote concerning a Savior who would be rejected by His generation a gospel preacher used that message of redemption to convert an Ethiopian (Acts

8:26-39). In Zechariah 13:1, five hundred years before Jesus shed the blood of the New Testament, it was prophesied that a fountain for cleansing and for sin would be opened outside Jerusalem (Jn. 19:34; Eph. 1:7).

There is a gate that stands ajar
And through its portals gleaming
A radiance from the Cross afar
The Savior's love revealing
O, depth of mercy, can it be
That gate was left ajar for me!

In Colossians 1:20 we joyfully learn that peace was made by the blood of the Cross and now redemption through the sacrifice of our Lord is obtainable. The Redeemer out of Zion (Isa. 59:20) is

worthy and able to save (Rev. 5:12) and to give meaning, consolation, cleansing, and victory to all men who bow in submission to the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). James Metcalfe wrote these penetrating words years ago that ought to bring tears to our eyes:

They crucified my Lord and God
And pierced His gentle heart;
And though it happened long ago
I know I played a part.

My very pride and passion
And my selfishness and greed
Contributed the nails that caused
His hands and feet to bleed.

Ephesians 2 vividly reminds us that

we were dead in trespasses and sins, separated from the Creator, without hope and totally unreconciled. But, the Savior came down and made peace by the blood of the cross. He was the One who died for all, tasting of death by the grace of God for each one of us (Heb. 2:9). What wondrous love that opens up the way to heaven for us (2 Cor. 8:9)!

Scenes surrounding the historic event in the most monumental moment ever known on earth--the death of Christ--center in *Gethsemane* where He suffered, *Gabbatha* where He was tried in mockery, and *Golgotha* where He died between thieves! Jehovah truly spared not His own Son (Rom. 8:32) but rather delivered Him up for us all. Such an unspeakable gift should compel us to

lovingly respond to the commands of Jesus (John 14:15). Paul made it clear in Galatians that Christ lived in him and that Calvary transformed his thinking and emphasis. We today should also be motivated by the shadow of the cross and the suffering Servant (Phil. 3:10-14).

O love that wilt not let me go
I rest my weary soul in thee
I give thee back the life I owe
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

The unsearchable riches of Christ should overwhelm us and compel us to nobler deeds and greater heights in the Master's cause. WOT

“I’M NEARLY DEAD”

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

My friend and I were taking a break from mowing at the Shady Grove cemetery in Saltillo, Tennessee. Two elderly ladies drove up and got out of their car and walked toward us. As we talked, one of them explained what spurred their visit: “Our mother is buried here. My sister and I are the only two left in our family. My husband’s dead, and I’m *nearly* dead.”

What a statement! Since that day I have turned it over again and again in my mind: “I’m *nearly* dead.” I couldn’t disagree with her. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that we all need to admit that we are nearly dead.

Every life is the quickly evaporating vapor spoken of in James 4:14. Our bodies are fragile; any number of causes can snuff the life out of the strongest of men in the blink of an eye. What David said to Jonathan concerning Saul’s murderous intentions could be said on a daily basis by us all: “But truly as the LORD lives . . . there is hardly a step between me and death,” (1 Sam. 20:3; NASB). A sudden explosion, a fateful step off a curb, a fatal hemorrhage, an unavoidable crash--truly, we “do not

know what a day may bring forth,” (Prov. 27:1).

Once we have accepted the brevity of life we can also help others see their own mortality. The rich fool in Luke 12 was dreaming of years instead of numbering his days. Is that not exactly what most people are doing in our day? It is good to ask people outright, “Have you ever thought about where you will go when you die? Have you ever thought about the Lord?” Some people will not think about such things until they are forced to do so.

I talked to a man on several occasions that freely admitted he was not ready to die. He was unprepared to meet the Lord. He said he was certain that there is a hell and that if he were to die it would be his destination. Time and time again he assured me that someday he would obey the Lord; he just wasn’t quite ready yet. He died in his forties. That elusive “someday” never came.

I asked another man about his soul and was told the same story. Every year for five years he would send me on my way without any encouragement that his “someday” was any nearer. He

believed that he was going to spend eternity in hell, but he was unwilling to obey the Lord.

In the course of time a debilitating illness forced him to slow down. He had time on his hands and he started picking up his Bible. He welcomed Bible studies in his home. He told me on several occasions that his illness was the best thing that ever happened to him in his life. The same year that the other man died, this second man was immersed into Jesus.

We cannot force people to obey the Lord but we can tell them they are nearly dead. Hints can be dropped and point-blank statements can be made in a spirit of love that will help them envision their own casket. As we pass by a cemetery on our way somewhere let us remember that someday we will be on our way to a cemetery. Let us never cease to tell those around us that death is coming for us all and after death we will face the judgment. Let us make known to them the salvation offered by the one who declared, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies” (Jn. 11:25). WOT

GOD HAD ALREADY VOTED

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

On March 7, 2000, a vote was taken in the state of California. It was a vote concerning what was labeled "Proposition 22." Proposition 22 was an initiative that simply stated: "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." Who would have thought that our beloved country would have come to such? Who could have dreamed just a few short years ago that this nation would have been voting on whether or not to allow "marriages" between homosexuals? I wonder if they voted on such an initiative in Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, or Zeboim (Deut. 29:23)? The fact that there was such a vote is a sad reflection on our society.

However, the good news is that the proposition passed! By an overwhelming majority (61.4% to 38.6%) the state upheld this definition of marriage. At least this part of the process does provide

some cause for celebration.

The saddest commentary of this entire affair is the fact that the One whose "vote" should have settled the matter to start with was not even consulted. To be certain, there were those who voted for this proposition because of their strong beliefs in Biblical principles. However, for all of those who opposed it and, likely, for many who voted for it, it was not a matter of what God had said on the issue at all. You see, He forever settled the matter long ago when He established the home and defined marriage.

Long before Proposition 22, God had already "voted." He created "an help meet" [suitable] for man (Gen. 2:18, 21-23). To emphasize the need that man had for woman God caused all the animals to pass before Adam so that he could name them. Adam saw each of these and yet found none suitable for a companion (Gen. 2:19,20). Doubtless, he saw these

animals as they would later be described, "the male and his female" (Gen. 7:2). However, there was no "female" for Adam. God formed woman from the rib of Adam and brought her unto him (Gen. 2:21,22). Based upon this union, marriage was established and defined. The Bible states: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Commenting on this, Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Mt. 19:4,5). Clearly, God made them "male and female." Long before any initiative by man, the only "vote" that really counts was already cast.

WOT

CONVICTED OF GREATNESS

Dan Boggs, Everman, Texas

As we look through the eyes of the Hebrews writer, it's obvious that he was convicted of the greatness of Christ. No other explanation is sufficient to describe what we read in these first two chapters of the book. Standing like a lawyer before the jury, he lays out an ironclad case with point after point of indefensible arguments.

Jesus is *greater* than the angels. Who else in the universe can make that claim?! He is the One who was in the beginning, gave up His place in Heaven to be killed as payment for the sins of man, was resurrected by the power of God, and to whom angels minister. He exhibits greatness over angels in His choice to be obedient even to death on the cross.

Jesus is *great* because He is the One chosen to speak to man for God. The prophets and patriarchs had failed to be effective in relaying the love of God. Only by sending His sole heir could God possibly make clear His true, unconditional love. But it was Jesus' blood that spoke to prove that love. The

same men that rejected the prophets also rejected His words, but God spoke through Him.

Jesus is *great* because He established a glorious kingdom. The Prince of Peace suffered undignified humiliation to buy the greatest kingdom ever to exist--a kingdom that would cause others to fall but itself would prove triumphant and eternal. Only Jesus could found that kingdom.

Jesus is *great* because He died for *me!*

There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,

No not one, No not one,

None else could heal all our soul's diseases,

No not one, No not one.

The blood He shed has made my scarlet garment of sin shine in bright whiteness unlike any laundry's soap can. His death led to *my* salvation, allowing me to escape the sentence deserved.

Jesus is *great* because His presence makes Satan tremble. From the curse

uttered against Him in the Garden of Eden, Satan has dreaded the day that Jesus would leave Heaven to conquer death. The empty tomb represents the ultimate victory over the one realm that Satan controls. Through the resurrection, Jesus proved that Satan is not invincible, but can and will be beaten.

Jesus is *great* because He gives aid to those in need. This aid however is of a life-, or rather soul-saving nature. "Throw out the life line," the old song says. That lifeline is the person of Jesus. His aid is that vital lifeline thrown to people who are sinking in sin.

Jesus is *great* because without Him, we will not escape eternal damnation. If we will focus on Him, keep Him as our true center, then our salvation is assured. But, "Without Him I would be nothing, Without Him I'd surely fail."

This great lawyer, the writer of Hebrews, proved the greatness of Jesus through the power of logical thought. The charge has been leveled; Jesus is *great*. The verdict has been pronounced. . . *guilty!!*

WOT

LIES WILL COME BACK TO HAUNT YOU

Tracy Dugger, Austin, Texas

The ninth commandment states, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. 2:16). Paul reiterated this when he wrote, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9). James warns of the damage the tongue can do in James 3:2-8.

The sin of lying is seen from the beginning of the Bible unto the end. In Genesis 3, Satan changed God's simple law by adding a seemingly innocent word--"not." From then on, lies have spewed forth like a volcano. In the very last chapter of the last book of the Bible, at least two admonitions are found against lying: "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. 22:15). "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18,19).

As one purviews the history of man, it is seen that his lies almost always come back to haunt him. The Bible confirms this truth. When the sons of Jacob out of jealousy sold their brother Joseph into slavery, they dipped his coat of many colors into the blood of a goat. They then showed Jacob his coat and said to him, "an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces" (Gen. 37:33). They never thought that lie would return to them or that they would be found out. But an exposing of their lie awaited in Egypt when they later journeyed there for food.

Remember the lie told by Ananias and Sapphira regarding the sale of some land (Acts 5)! When they were confronted by God's spokesman they were given an opportunity to confess and repent. They chose not to and thus were immediately struck dead. Do you think Ananias and Sapphira ever expected their lie to rebound so quickly?

Of course, all sin of which we never repent will come back to haunt us either in this life or the next. John said, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, AND ALL LIARS, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). Men may trivialize lying and excuse it, but God wants us to soberly consider its consequences! Remember, *lies will come back to haunt you!* WOT

The Words of Truth

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