

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

Vol. 38 No. 1

January 2001

“WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ‘WHAT’S HIS NAME’?”

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

The command to assemble comes in the form of a very forthright statement in God’s word. The Hebrew writer said, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). It is very obvious that God wants us to assemble together when the saints meet collectively. This command, however, is one which is often overlooked and disregarded. Look at any church bulletin and you will likely notice a drop (usually drastic) in the numbers from Sunday morning to Sunday evening; and, an even greater difference on Wednesday evening.

Lost, too, in the midst of such is the identity of the “casual attender.” Normally, one who attends sporadically does not get involved, does not seek any meaningful

association with other members and, often, slips away completely and unnoticed. Suddenly, one day, someone asks, “Whatever happened to ‘what’s his name’?” You get the point. Close fellowship was never established, not even to the point of remembering that person’s name. A soul has drifted away and an opportunity for growth and maturity has passed.

What can we do to avoid this scenario? First, be friendly. Of all that can be done this is perhaps the most general (all can do it) and the most beneficial. Make it a point to speak to someone different at every service. Especially make it a point to speak to visitors and those who do not attend regularly. Second, take it upon yourself to befriend someone who might be new or who is not involved. No one knows the amount of good that can be done by

simple acts of courtesy and kindness. Third, write a note or make a call to one in need of encouragement. Make it a point to get the name and address of a visitor. Learn where a new member (or one not so active) lives. Stop by for a couple of minutes to encourage them. You will benefit greatly. Fourth, make it a point to invite them to special occasions (gospel meetings, youth activities, singings, etc.). Most of us are hesitant to take charge and be aggressive in new and unfamiliar surroundings. Every visitor and every weak member needs someone (you?) to give him that extra bit of encouragement; that bit of encouragement which might well propel him to greatness in service to God.

So, what have you done for “what’s his name” lately?

WOT

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Our minds simply cannot comprehend the vast size of our universe. Astronomers tell us that sunlight, traveling at the speed of 186,300 miles per second, reaches the earth in 8.5 minutes. That same light, however, would take more than four years to reach the nearest star, *Alpha Centauri*. And there are hundreds of billions of stars in the Milky Way alone, which is but one galaxy among millions, perhaps even billions. Indeed, it is unfathomable!

In the midst of that enormous universe is our relatively small planet--"only" about 8,000 miles in diameter and 25,000 miles in circumference.

But since we are Christians, not astronomers or geologists, our primary concern isn't light years and diameters. We, like the Lord, are much more interested in *people*, approximately six billion of whom live on earth today.

Perhaps an illustration will help us grasp the vastness of this population: If one were to begin counting the people in the world at the rate of one per second, it would take about 1,667,000 hours, or 69,458 days, or almost 200 years, to complete the task. But complicating the overwhelming job would be the fact that the earth's population is increasing at the rate of approximately 1.7%, or about 102 million people, per year. In other words, the earth's population increases by 11,643 *every hour*.

But again, we're not demographers, so our primary concern isn't population statistics, but rather what those numbers represent--*souls*--and that is the crux of the greatest challenge facing God's people today.

With souls being our chief interest, we are interested, of course, in what people are *religiously*. According to the most recent data available, the six billion people are approximately

characterized as follows:

- 900 million are nonreligious (atheists and otherwise).
 - 1.2 billion are Muslims.
 - 800 million are Hindus.
 - 350 million are Buddhists.
 - 380 million are members of a Chinese folk religion.
 - 370 million follow another non-Christian religion.
 - 2 billion affiliate themselves with Christianity.
- (*The World Almanac: 2001*, p. 692).

With our interest in the final destiny of every soul, the above data are disturbing for the following reasons:

1. Even allowing for the most liberal view of biblical teaching--i.e., that one is saved by simply claiming some sort of faith in Christ (a position the Bible does not support)--roughly four billion people living today are lost in their current condition. Four billion people do not claim any sort of allegiance to Christ!! And yet clearly, Jesus left open no other door: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6). "... for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (Jn. 8:24). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "... he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (Jn. 3:36). "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 Jn. 5:12).

2. Of the two billion people who claim to follow, or at least believe in, Jesus Christ, roughly one billion are members of the Roman Catholic Church. Another 300 million of "Christendom" are Anglicans or

Orthodox. Though many of these 1.3 billion people are good morally, they are members of apostate organizations of which scripture clearly warns (Acts 20:29-31; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). They have abandoned the scriptural plan of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8,9; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38), God's plan for church organization (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1:5-9; Acts 14:23), and simple New Testament worship (Jn. 14:24; Acts 20:7), and have introduced myriad practices that are contrary to the Bible (papacy, sprinkling, purgatory, etc.).

3. Of the 700 million left in Christendom, the majority are members of one of the many Protestant denominations, most of which find their origin in one sense or another to the Reformation movement that began in earnest in the sixteenth century. Reacting to abuses they saw in Catholicism, men such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others attempted to reform the Roman Catholic Church. Though their intentions were honorable, and though some of the outcomes were beneficial (e.g., the Bible became available to the common man), they introduced to the world a form of denominationalism that has deluded millions of people.

The Bible, of course, speaks of only one church (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4). Denominationalism, by its very definition, violates the spirit of New Testament Christianity and contradicts specifically the prayer Christ prayed shortly before His death: "Neither pray I for these alone, . . . [but] That they all may be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:20,21). The denominational world has also deviated from biblical doctrine in other

areas--teaching salvation by faith only and scorning the New Testament pattern for worship and church organization.

4. The obvious conclusion is horrifying. Though only God knows the exact number of the saved, it is profoundly troubling to note that of the six billion people living today, the vast majority are, in Paul's words, "without Christ, . . . having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Bound for "outer darkness" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of

teeth" (Mt. 8:12), hundreds of millions of people are stumbling blindly through life without the slightest realization that this world's Creator loves them immeasurably and urgently wants them to accept His offer of grace.

The question for us is simple, yet profound, and undeniably relevant: *Are we doing all we can to plant the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of the people in this world?*

Too often we work, we play, we sleep, we eat, perfectly complacent to carry on life's normal activities, never

truly grasping the fact that we live in a world that is going to hell. That neighbor, that friend, that relative--living outside of Christ--have we said anything to him or her about the Lord?

No, we are not responsible for converting six billion people. What we are expected to do is sow and water the seed (Mt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 3:6; Lk. 8:11).

Six billion people, most of whom are lost! That is, without doubt, the greatest challenge of the new millennium.

WOT

GOOD NEWS: HELL IS NOT HOT!

Mike Thomas

A recent issue of *U.S. News & World Report* suggested that most people are adopting a version of hell that does not include an eternal torment with fire (January 31, 2000). "Modern educated Americans" are finding it difficult to believe in a "blazing underworld where anguished souls writhe in endless torments." Leading the pack of religionists to embrace this new concept of hell is the Catholic church, as stated in its 1992 revised catechism: "The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God." Pope John Paul II went on to say in a speech last summer at the Vatican:

. . . rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God . . . [the Bible] uses a symbolic language [that] figuratively portrays in a pool of fire those who exclude themselves from the book of life, thus meeting a second death.

Actually, it is not a new concept to extinguish the flames of hell. In the sixteenth century both Martin Luther and John Calvin thought the fiery torments of hell were only figurative and that hell was a place where man is forced to exist without God: no flames,

just loneliness and regret. Professor Douglas Groothuis of the evangelical Denver Seminary said it best when he responded, "Separation from God may seem like freedom from a domineering spouse or parent. Why fear that?" Amen, sir!

The false reasoning is essentially two-fold: (1) God is too good to punish man with eternal fire; and (2) fiery hell is figurative language. Some have said that if God is cruel enough to make man and punish him with fire then "I have no need for a God like that."

In response, consider first God's references to hell. He says it is a place of unquenchable fire (Mk. 9:43-48), a furnace (Mt. 13:42,50), a lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10; 21:8), and a fiery act of vengeance on His enemies (2 Thess. 1:8,9). Even if the flames of hell are figurative, what image does God want us to see when we think of hell?

"No, no, no. Hell is a place without God, not a place of flames. Fire is figurative language!" Yes, hell is painful for those who occupy it because they are separated from God (Mt. 25:41). But that is only one aspect of it! The other references that say hell is hot are just as literal and applicable

as those that say it is a place without God. The concept of hell's being equivalent to fire is based on the word of God, not man. The idea originated with Him and has been passed down to us.

Our chief concern in this effort to extinguish hell is--why is it so hard to believe in an eternal punishment with fire? Is it impossible for God to create such a place? Certainly not. If He can make the sun burn without end since the foundation of the world, He can create a similar environment for those who rebel against Him. It is not beyond His reach.

Some say, "It's contrary to God's nature. He's too good to do that to man." Again, we must respond, why? And how do we know that? Why is it so hard to believe God is too good to punish with fire? Who are we to say He is evil for punishing man with fire? What is unjust about it if He is the One who originated man's life? If some say fire is punishment too extreme, what is to be said of those who think *any* punishment is too severe for sin? Will we then remove the concept of hell entirely by saying it is figurative language and contrary to God's nature? If not, why not?

We must realize that God's thinking is not equivalent to man's thinking. What He thinks about sin is not what man thinks about it. He once told Israel, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways. . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8,9). The conclusion is obvious. We cannot judge God by

our finite and fallible standards and opinions. *His* thoughts on any subject are superior to *our* thoughts.

This is the heart of the problem with the efforts to extinguish the fires of hell--we are trying to judge God by *our* standards. We do not consider sin to be worthy of eternal fire so we conclude that punishing it in such a severe way must not be right. The problem is that

God does not see sin as insignificant as man does! To Him it is horrible enough to punish with eternal torment. And if to God sin is that abominable, then we should view it similarly.

Hell is a real place, and if we are not careful in our attitude and behavior toward God we will see that it is a place where the pain is equivalent to literal, eternal fire! WOT

THE AGE OF THE EARTH

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

How old is the earth? There are a number of interesting figures always floating around and changing. Some theistic evolutionists say the universe is about twenty billion years old while the earth itself is about 4.5 billion years old. They are called *theistic* evolutionists because they believe in God and a very old earth at the same time. Although the Bible declares a young earth, they seek to read between the lines to find eons of evolutionary time. Some hold to a gap theory, suggesting that there were millions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2: Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Genesis 1:2 - "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Others use their imagination and claim that the six days in which God created our world were not twenty-four-hour days as we know them, but rather days containing millions of years. Quite a stretch indeed. Read Exodus 20:8-11:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven

and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

I should say at this point, that if the Bible did not address this question, I would not care one whit about the age of the material universe. I know it will be destroyed when the trumpet blows and that is enough for me (2 Pet. 3:10). And yet, the Bible does give some compelling insight into the age of the earth. Let's continue.

Adam was the first man created. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:45-47:

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul: the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

Jesus told us that Adam was made at the beginning of the creation, not millions of years after it began: "But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female" (Mk. 10:6). Jesus, the Word of God, is certainly a reliable source, because He was there. "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).

What this demonstrates is that humanity and the earth are approximately the same age. Now to the

next step. Just how old is humanity?

Luke 3:23-38 spells out the family tree from Christ all the way back to Adam. You will count seventy-five generations. If you allow a random but generous sixty years for each generation, that comes to 4500 years from Adam to Christ. From Christ to the present day is 2000 years; thus, the earth's age should be measured in thousands of years, not billions.

Most who look at this the first time still wonder how the scientific age-of-the-earth testing could be so wrong. Can't scientists prove that some rock formations are much older than a few thousand years? Yes they can, but that doesn't affect the truth of the Scriptures. For you see, God did not create an earth bearing evidence of a brand new world, but an old one. Adam was not created as a baby, but a full-grown man, ready for marriage! When he was one minute old he was fully grown. Eve was likewise a grown woman the moment she took her first breath. The trees in the lush garden of Eden no doubt bore the circles of many years in their trunks, yet were freshly created. The animals created on the sixth day were already mature. So it was with the rest of the earth: brand new, but bearing the marks of a longer existence.

Our world is not really that old after all. 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 frees 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 us 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 recognizing 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 most (if not all) in this country have access to the Bible, consider the following facts. Jesus teaches that only 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; Gen. 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. Not discounting the problem of ignorance of the Scriptures, disrespect for God's Word is the greatest reason for the sin problems in the world.

Again, why are all the sin problems in existence in our society such as abortions, homosexuality, immorality, unethical conduct, active euthanasia, humanistic philosophies, religious error, etc.? Why is it the case that most will be lost on the day of judgment? The reason is that age-old problem of mankind: 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 "Pope" 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 establishment 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 King James Version of the Bible, 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 Peter 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--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

The existence of sin problems in the individual Christian's life--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; and 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 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).

RU-486 — MURDER BY MOUTH

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

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While feminists rejoiced, and the news media exploited the story, many sensitive souls again hung their heads in sorrow on account of the ongoing slaughter of innocent babies in this country.

"Abortion Pill Ok'd," the headlines shouted, and Gloria Feldt, president of Planned Parenthood (what a misnomer!) called it "an historic moment." The Food and Drug Administration had just handed down a ruling that would allow pregnant women to utilize, for the first time, a personal method of performing an abortion, the legalization of the infamous RU-486 — the "murder-by-mouth" pill.

Via this new method, the destruction of a conceived child is accomplished in stages. The pregnant mother goes to a doctor's office where she takes a mifepristone pill during the first seven weeks of pregnancy. The drug blocks the progesterone receptors in the lining of the uterus. The lining subsequently thins, weakens and the child detaches from the uterus lining.

Two days later, the woman returns to her co-conspirator's office, where a second pill (misoprostol) is provided; it generates the contractions needed to expel the tiny baby from its mother's body.

Finally, within about two weeks, the mother returns to the doctor to confirm that the abortion has been completed. If for some reason the infant was not aborted, by previous agreement, the woman must submit to a surgical termination.

There are many who have no ethical objection to this procedure. Even some, who ostensibly classify themselves as "pro-life," have little

moral difficulty with this procedure because it aborts the fetus at such an early stage of development. The initial pill is taken in that period of forty-nine days following the woman's last menstrual period. Thus, the embryo is alleged to be as yet non-human.

If God is the author of human life (and He is — Acts 17:25; 1 Tim. 6:13), then surely He is the One Who has the right to declare when human personhood begins. And there is ample evidence in the Scriptures to support the proposition that human personhood *commences* at *conception*.

1. In a Messianic psalm that has varied applications in the New Testament, Jehovah said to His anointed, Jesus: "You are my son; this day I have begotten you."

Aside from the theological ramifications of this declaration that are found in the New Testament, the language itself contains a fundamental truth, namely, that the Father-Son relationship *begins* on the *day of begetting*.

This is a powerful argument for the establishment of human personhood at the point of conception.

2. David, speaking by the Spirit of God (cf. see Acts 1:16; 4:25), characterized himself as a *person* (note the multiple personal pronouns, "I," "me," "my," "mine") as he was developing in his mother's body — even when his "substance" was as yet "unformed" (Psa. 139:13-16).

The Hebrew term for "substance" (v. 16) is *golem*, which "denotes the undeveloped embryo" (A.F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*,

Cambridge: University Press, 1906, p. 789).

Derek Kidner of Cambridge said that this language reminds us "of the value that [God] sets on us, even as embryos" (*Psalms 73-150*, Leichester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1975, p. 466).

3. The angel Gabriel informed the virgin Mary that Elizabeth, her kinsman, had "conceived a son" (Lk. 1:36). Note that the thing "conceived" was called a "son;" a family relationship existed from the point of the conception.

Throughout the Old Testament, especially in the book of Genesis, the conception and birth are considered a part of the same process (cf. Gen. 4:1, 17; 16:4; 21:2, etc.). One scholar has noted: "The beginning of new life in the mother's womb was considered so important that it was mentioned as a part of the birth announcement" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - Revised*, G.W. Bromiley, Ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977, 1.756).

4. James affirmed that "the body apart from the spirit is dead" (Jam. 2:26). The opposite of that statement is this: "the body joined to the spirit is living."

From these statements, one may logically conclude that the tiny "living" being, which has been so from the moment of conception, has possessed a "spirit" from that time, and is, therefore, a human being.

No ethical defense can be made for the use of RU-486. The destruction of innocent human life is evil — whether by knife, syringe, or pill.

WOT

TRUST THE INSTRUMENT PANEL

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

Dr. Edwin Lutzer tells the story of flying on a commercial air flight. Seated next to him was a man who used to be a commercial airline pilot, but now flies his own smaller plane. The two became engaged in a conversation about the safety of flying.

The pilot said, "Many people think these huge jets are built more safely and, therefore, are safer to fly than smaller planes. People think that because there are more crashes with smaller planes than with commercial jets.

"But," he said, "that's not true. The reason that so many lighter planes crash is not bad equipment. It's because of inexperienced pilots flying the little planes."

Lutzer replied, "Tell me more."

"The error of inexperienced pilots is that they refuse to believe their instruments," the pilot said. "In a storm, they trust their instincts rather than their navigation instruments. That's where they get into trouble

"For example, they are absolutely convinced that the altitude of the plane is increasing when it's not. There is an internal mechanism that tells them the altitude. But, when the altitude is not increasing, they often choose to disbelieve the instruments and adjust the plane according to their sense. They think that the plane is turning or banking when it's actually not. When the pilot ignores his readings and adjusts the plane according to his intuition, it is sure to crash."

Then he said, "There wouldn't be as many light planes that crash if pilots would devotedly believe their instrument panels rather than accepting what they think their senses are telling them."

Observations:

1. **A crash is inevitable when we attempt to fly by "the seat of our pants" (i.e., by emotion or intuition).** "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12; cf. Jud. 21:25; Acts 26:9).
2. **The instrument panel (i.e., the Word of God) is always true. "The entirety of Your word is truth. . ."** (Psa. 119:160a; cf. 25:5,10; Jn. 17:17; Rom. 3:4).
3. **In order to arrive at our intended destination (i.e., heaven), we must pilot according to divine revelation rather than human intuition.** "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psa. 73:24; cf. 119:105; Isa. 55:8). *WOT*

The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
1501 Sixth Avenue
Jasper, AL 35501

THE WORDS OF Truth

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The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

If you would like to submit an article for consideration, please send via postal mail or fax, or (preferably) via e-mail or on IBM PC compatible 3.5" disk.

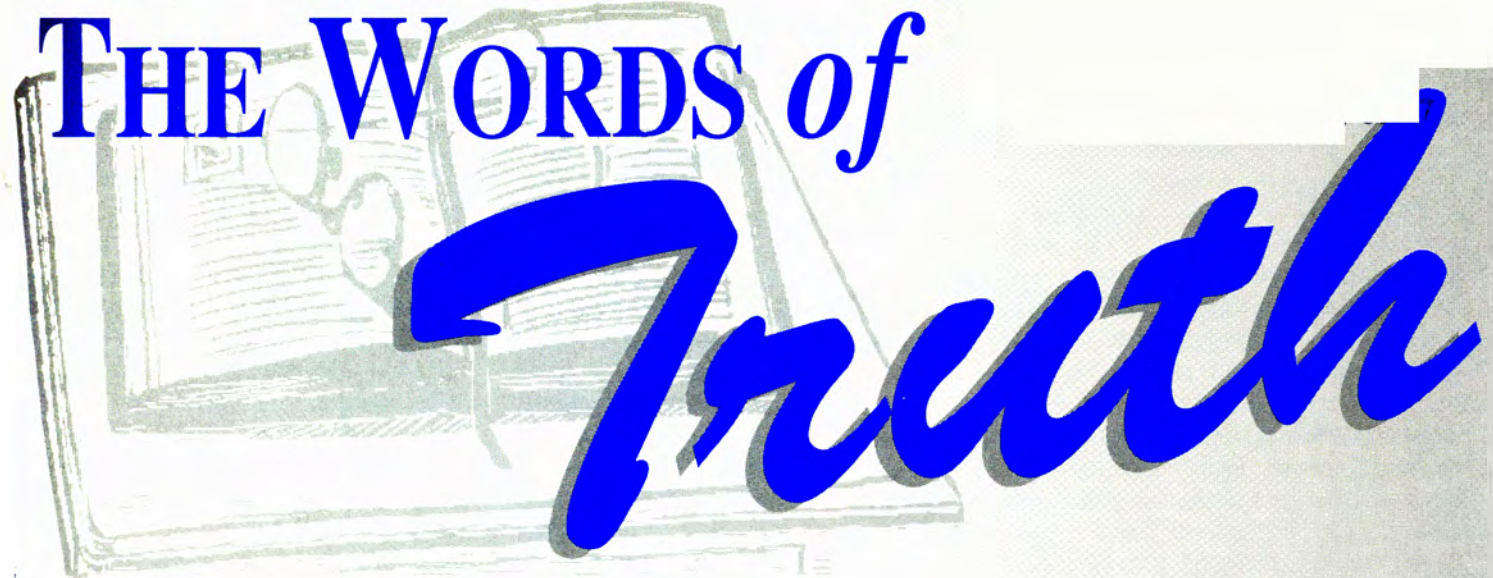
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THE WORDS of Truth

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

Vol. 38 No. 2

February 2001

WHY ARE SOME IN THE CHURCH LOST?

Jamie Long, Bear Creek, Alabama

The New Testament is replete with scriptures teaching the importance and essentiality of being a member of the Lord's church. Many say the "church" is not important, or that "I can be a Christian and still please God without the church." Yet, many passages of Scripture teach differently. Jesus is Head of the church which is His body (Col. 1:18,24), and He is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). He purchased it with His very own blood (Acts 20:28). God has taken the Christian out of a world of darkness and has translated him into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). Therefore, church membership is essential if one desires to be saved and go to heaven (Acts 2:38,41,47; 1 Cor. 15:24).

However, just because one has become a member of the Lord's church, even though it is essential, does not mean he has an automatic ticket to heaven. The Lord taught a parable pertaining to the citizens of the kingdom (Mt. 13:36-43). In it He warns them that "once saved always saved" is a false concept. The child of God then must examine himself to see whether or not he is in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Paul, in this verse, is writing by

inspiration to the church at Corinth. He states that the Corinthian brethren should examine themselves lest they come to the end of this life and be found worthless.

The Bible teaches there are various reasons why some in the Lord's church are lost:

Some are lost because of unbelief.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12,13). This inspired author is writing to Hebrew Christians. The result of an evil heart of unbelief is a departure from the living God. It takes faith to overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:4), and faith comes by hearing and also obeying the word of God (Rom. 10:17; Jam. 1:22). The Lord's promise of eternal life is a result of the Christian's living faithfully (Rev. 2:10).

Some are lost because of neglect.

Neglect is a most dangerous poison. If a student neglects his studies, he will fail. If the farmer neglects his farm, there will be no harvest, etc. Jesus

taught in the parable of the talents that God expects every Christian to meet various opportunities with his several ability (Mt. 25:14-30). The one who does not is considered "wicked and slothful." Certainly there are many responsibilities in becoming and being a Christian.

Some are lost because of a failure to bear fruit.

The Christian is to be fruitful in every good work (Col. 1:10). The Parable of the Vine and the Branches teaches fruit-bearing as a way of life for the child of God (Jn. 15:1-8). What is the purpose of the fig tree? Naturally it is to bear fruit (Lk. 13:6-9). On one occasion, when the Lord came to a fig tree that was not bearing fruit, He cursed it (Mt. 21:18,19). A Christian in like manner is expected to bear fruit and, according to John 15:8, is to bear "much fruit."

Certainly there are other reasons why some in the church are lost, but these seem to be some of the more relevant. Just because one is a member of the Lord's church does not mean he will go to heaven. It is the way he lives his life as a member of the Lord's church that determines it. *WOJ*

WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?

Chuck Webster, Editorial

A little girl went to her mother and asked, "Where do babies come from?" The mother was simply unprepared to handle the dreaded question, so she told her daughter an elaborate story about how the stork brings the baby. . . . The girl then went to her grandmother, then her great grandmother, both of whom told her variations of the same story. At school the next week, the girl said to her friend, "You know, there hasn't been a normal delivery in my family for three generations!"

All levity aside, where *do* babies come from? The *true* answer is, *directly from the hand of God:*

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate (Psa. 127:3-5).

Throughout the Bible, children are synonymous with God's blessings. When Esau gestured to Jacob's children and asked, "Who are those with thee?", Jacob answered, "The children which God hath graciously given thy servant" (Gen. 33:5).

1 Chronicles speaks of a Levite, Obadedom, who had eight sons. Why so many? From our American twenty-first century perspective, we suspect poor Obadedom must have been simply ignorant, or was woefully lacking in self-control. The biblical explanation will be surprising to our 2.5-children-per-household minds. The reason for his big family? "God blessed him" (1 Chron. 26:4,5). How many of us would say that of a family with eight children (especially all boys!)?! But we see a pattern developing: children are not nuisances, mere obligations, or extra mouths to feed; they are blessings from God!

Hannah recognized this truth and poured out her soul to God, begging for a son (1 Sam. 1). Joseph recognized that Ephraim and Manasseh were sons

which "God had given [him]" in Egypt (Gen. 48:9). Notice how closely children were linked to God's love in His promise to Israel: "And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb. . . . in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee" (Deut. 7:13).

In fact, we often use language such as, "These are *my* children. . . . I have three children. . . ." We must recognize, though, that this language is accommodative; our children really aren't *ours*. Notice carefully God's words in Ezekiel 16:20,21--a stern reproach of Judah's idolatry:

Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto *me*, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, That thou hast slain *my* children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them? (emp. mine, ccw).

Our children are really *God's* children: they are a loan from Him to be used wisely for a few years and then returned. Parents are but stewards of one of God's most precious gifts.

But recognizing that fact stimulates other questions: Why did God choose to give us children? Is it simply a means of procreation--of "replenishing the earth" (cf. Gen. 9:1)? Why did He not, as many baffled parents have wearily asked, simply give them to us already full-grown and mature? The answer displays God's amazing wisdom and foresight.

By giving us children, God teaches us some of life's most important lessons. Some we learn by observation (e.g., humility, forgiveness); our focus, however, will be on those that we learn from the very relationship itself:

Through children God teaches us the depth of a parent's love. God recognizes how deeply we parents love our children: in fact, *He's* the One who gave us the impulse (cf. Rom. 1:31).

Jesus alluded to parents' natural desire to provide for their children when He said that we "know how to give good gifts to [our] children" (Mt. 7:11). What parent among us has not shared David's grief as he wept uncontrollably when he heard that his son was dead (2 Sam. 18:33)?

Our love for our children is unparalleled on earth; nothing exceeds it. Perhaps that fact explains one reason why God chose to set into motion the parent-child relationship: *He wants us to know how much He loves us.*

Jesus, though deity (Jn. 1:1), is described in the New Testament as the *Son* of God the Father. Could one reason behind His becoming the Son be God's desire to illustrate His depth of love for us? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten *Son* . . ." (Jn. 3:16). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten *Son* into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his *Son* to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:9,10). We are reconciled to God by the "death of his *Son*" (Rom. 5:10). God loved us so much that He "spared not his own *Son*, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32).

How could God express His love for us in terms that we could understand? He chose the strongest and deepest love our minds can fathom, and He said, "That's what I was willing to do for you." God gives us children to teach us about love.

Through children God teaches us the meaning of self-denial. One of discipleship's most difficult lessons is for one to "deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow [Christ]" (Mt. 16:24). Yet its importance is seen in the Lord's repeatedly emphasizing it. And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me,

and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple (Lk. 14:25-27).

Of all the relationships on earth, perhaps none requires more self-denial than the ties between parents and children. Leisure time, extra money, a sparkling clean house, romantic dinners--for most parents these are but faint memories.

But the self-denial parents develop goes much deeper than sacrificing life's amenities; it challenges one of our strongest natural instincts--that of self-preservation. Is there any Christian parent who wouldn't willingly draw

his last breath or sacrifice her last drop of blood if in so doing it would save the life of his or her child? Indeed, self-denial is at the very foundation of being a parent.

It is that same attitude that God expects us to have for Him and His Cause. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Mt. 16:25). The language of scripture is clear: if one is to please God, he must learn well the lesson of self-denial.

Is there any school that teaches the subject better than the "home-school" of the parent-child relationship?

Even the best parents sometimes (perhaps often) become bewildered, even frustrated, with the various

challenges presented by parenting. Perhaps we all need to remind ourselves of the abundant lessons we learn in shepherding the hearts of these children.

How much does God love us? Look into the eyes of your children, multiply the feeling in your heart by infinity, and perhaps you've touched the hem of the garment.

What level of self-denial does God want us to cultivate? Think about what you would be willing to sacrifice to save your child's life, and then have that same attitude toward Christ.

Where do children come from? Directly from the hand of God, and through them God teaches us some of life's most needed lessons. *WOT*

THIS OLD BODY OF MINE

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

The aging process of our physical bodies is something worth pondering. Ecclesiastes 12 describes the changes enveloping an old man such as loss of teeth, grey hair, fears, trembling, and so forth. Yet the changes do not begin when we are elderly, they begin before we are born. These changes are an earthly phenomenon, and occur only in this life. That is the point of this article. As the beloved song goes,

I have heard of a land, on a far away strand; 'Tis a beautiful home of the soul; Built by Jesus on high, where we never shall die, 'Tis a land where we never grow old . . .

When a person dies, we lovingly deposit his physical body in the grave, in the silent city of the dead, where it will "sleep" until reunited with the soul on the judgment day (Jn. 11:11-14). The soul, on the other hand, will be immediately carried to a place of bliss or torment (Lk. 16:22-26).

When the judgment day is declared with a "shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God" (1 Thess. 4:16), the slumbering bodies will be reunited with their souls:

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 life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (Jn. 5:28,29).

It is primarily because we know we shall live again that we become Christians in the first place. We are baptized into Christ because we know we will ultimately be raised from the dead: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:29).

Yet here is an example of questions for which we presently have few answers: In what ways will our bodies be changed in order to make them fit for heaven? That they will be changed is clearly told us, and that we will not be flesh and blood is clear. Paul addresses this matter to the Corinthians:

As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God: neither doth corruption inherit

incorruption (1 Cor. 15:48-50).

Though the aging process with all its changes moves slowly in this physical, earthly life, silvering our hair and furrowing our skin, making us purely spirit beings will be rapid:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

What will we look like? No one on this side of eternity knows the answer. Will we be recognizable? There is evidence that we will be, for why else would we have promises of meeting those we know (Mt. 8:11)? Will we be changed so much that we will no longer be ourselves? Certainly not, for if that were true, how could we muster the same passion for right

living--seeing as how it wouldn't really be us enjoying heaven! Will we continue to suffer the struggles, common to mankind, which we endured while in the physical world? No. The heartaches, death, sorrow, crying, and pain will be reduced to our far-away past, and we will forever dwell in a land where nothing defiles

or interrupts the happiness.

To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:4,5).

COUNT THE COST

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

Whatever challenge Christianity brings, whatever the cost of serving Jesus, whatever the tribulation righteousness produces, whatever opposition comes our way because we maintain moral purity--it is well worth the price.

Yes, even if the cost demands the courage needed to practice church discipline in order to keep the body of Christ pure, we must stand up for godliness. Yes, even if the courts of the land and a few weak brethren make light of us, we must be diligent and never compromise. The cost of discipleship is never as high as the eventual price of cowardice and compromise. Who will follow Jesus? Only the valiant. May we be in that number when the saints go marching in! Words so fitting for this finale are found in an old gospel song:

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,

While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas?

Christianity cost heaven its most precious gem; it cost our Savior the precious blood of Calvary; it cost early saints their heads. What are we willing to pay for the honor of such great association? The interest paid on the cost of moral purity provides dividends that never cease and pleasures that never die (Jn. 11:24-26). P.P. Bliss wrote these thought-provoking words:

Moral purity give me

More strength to o'ercome,

More freedom from earth stains,

More longing for home;

We live in an age that has turned its back upon God. Christianity has the ingredients to draw mankind out of darkness and shame into the glorious light of the gospel of the Redeemer (Col. 1:13). May we let the world see in us the beauty of holiness. "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, All its wonderful passion and purity . . ."

We can then give our friends the Bible answer to a burning question in the hearts of sincere folk who desire to know **how to become a Christian** so that they, too, can possess the abundant life! A classic example of conversion in the first century is found in Acts 8:26-39. The secretary of treasury in Ethiopia, upon hearing the gospel message for the first time, confessed Jesus as Lord and was baptized into Christ. He went on his way rejoicing in the knowledge that past sins were cleansed in the blood of the Lamb (Acts 3:19).

O spread the tidings round,

Wherever men are found,

Our Lord is King of Kings!

Living the life of a Christian is carefully chronicled in the 21 epistles--Romans through Jude--in the New Testament.

Those books carefully declare the ingredients of righteousness and demand the best of our efforts in the pursuit of holiness and loyalty to the church of the Lord. These letters to the brethren discuss the value of Bible study (Heb. 5:12-14), the power of scriptural prayer (Jam. 5:16), and the strength that comes from a vibrant

One more thing--with these things in mind, surely we can all see the validity of 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." *WOT*

hope (Rom. 15:13). With such matters comes an anchor for the soul that transcends the concepts of carnal minds. In view of heaven beyond and vibrant living in the present, we should be willing to pay the price of ardent discipleship.

If more people would decide to live for God, for truth and right, we could make our world a paradise instead of hell on earth.

Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house sheds a lot of light on man's free moral agency. Notice these enlightening words of Jeremiah 18:6: "Cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hands, so are ye in mine hand."

When we voluntarily bend and yield to our Creator, our lives will be richer and fuller indeed. To recognize the sovereign power of Jehovah is a tremendous step toward life.

Thou are the Potter;

I am the clay.

Mold me and make me

After Thy will,

While I am yielded and still.

We should decide early in life to put the Lord first in our loyalties (Eccl. 12:1). We should choose to marry a devoted Christian. We need to decide to be honest and honorable in business and faithfully diligent in the church of the Lord. Such monumental choices will determine where we spend eternity. We stand right now in the valley of decision. What will our future hold? *WOT*

RESPONSIBILITY OF STEWARDSHIP

J.C. Choate, Winona, Mississippi

In the process of growing older, I find myself more frequently looking around me at the material possessions we have accumulated through the years and wondering, "When we are gone, what will become of these things? Whose will they be? How will they be used?"

These are questions that each Christian must ask himself and must somehow answer. Some allow them to be only passing thoughts, answering with, "I won't make that decision. I'll let the living divide whatever I leave behind."

No decision? Yes, even in that brief consideration, a decision was made, for good or bad. Perhaps the heirs--all Christians--will even be drawn closer together through the efforts of dividing the inheritance. Perhaps, as Christians, and realizing that they themselves are fairly well established in life, they will want to give much of the money or property to be used in the Lord's work.

But often, not all of the heirs are Christians, or if they are, not all behave as Christians where money is concerned. Far too frequently the matter ends up in court with lawyers and court fees consuming the greater part of what was being fought over. And the heirs? Greed, then enmity, then bitterness separate the family permanently. Those whose Christianity wasn't strong enough to see them through the mess are often lost eternally as a portion of their "settlement."

Sometimes parents have strong desires concerning how they want their money used, and they believe without doubt that their heirs love them deeply enough that they would not think of contradicting their wishes. Sometimes they learn to their sorrow, when bad health or other problems necessitate the turning over of the estate to an heir or heirs for management, that suddenly they have completely lost any authority over their possessions. And they realize when it is too late that their wishes matter not at all.

We should not put these decisions, these responsibilities, these temptations before our heirs. In so doing we are "passing the buck" in perhaps the most harmful way one could shirk one's responsibilities. Why?

First, because of the often very

grievous eternal effect it has on those who shoulder the responsibility in our stead. Parents must hold themselves somewhat responsible when the lack of a clear-cut legal will results in greed, family disputes, unchristian behavior and enmity, all of which will have direct bearing on the eternal destiny of those involved.

Second, each of us is given the responsibility of stewardship over the possessions God blesses us with. Is it good stewardship if a man conscientiously gives 10%, 15%, 20% of his weekly earnings all of his life but makes no will concerning any of his other possessions? Perhaps he bought a house or property years ago, and that property today might be worth 10, 20, 30 times what he paid for it. Is this prospering not also a blessing from God and is he not, in turn, responsible for making provision in his will so that he will be giving to God His portion out of such blessings of increase?

Yes, seldom is such provision made. While struggling along with inflation and unending family expenses, a man may think fleetingly as he writes out his weekly contribution check: "I wish I had a lot to give to the Lord. I wish I could afford it." Sadly, what it was not possible for him to do from his salary, he could have done in his will--but too often that thought is never there.

Jesus once said of a rich man, "But God said to him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Lk. 12:20). We, too, must answer this question because we can't escape the fact that, if we own anything, at our death those physical goods will of necessity become the property of some other human. We can make the choice to settle that question as a responsible steward of God, or we may refuse to do anything and force that decision on others. In that case we have also decided the answer, even though we tried to shun it. Perhaps by our silence we decided:

- 1) That we would deny God any part of the increase He had blessed us with.
- 2) That enmity and bitterness come between our children.
- 3) That souls be lost, for generations yet

unborn, because weak Christians could not handle the trials of dividing the inheritance.

4) That non-Christians inherit our lands and money, enabling them to further indulge in worldly living.

5) That courts and lawyers receive most of the inheritance in payment for their efforts to work out a legal solution to the dispute.

I personally would not want to face God in the judgment, having deliberately chosen to do such a poor job as steward over the gifts He gave me. Would you?

Godly Wisdom

How much better to exercise godly wisdom and set our business in order, to live in a state of preparedness even on this matter.

There can be many wonderful results from exercising this stewardship. After all the outstanding bills have been paid, after whatever percentage you feel is needed and right has been willed to your children, there could still be a sizeable sum left for God's work.

Think what \$1,000 would do, divided up into portions of \$75 for fifteen minutes of radio preaching in India!

Would the average orphanage be thrilled to receive a gift of \$5,000 for clothing or food for its children?

How much Christian education could be provided by supplying a scholarship for Bible hours in one of our Christian colleges if you had \$10,000 to invest?

With \$25,000 you could be responsible for the printing of 20,000 books of Hindi radio sermons, for another 20,000 books on a study of New Testament Christianity in the Telugu tongue, and also for 20,000 copies of "The Church of the Bible" in one of the dialects of the Philippines! That would mean that long after your death, 60,000 messages of truth would still be circulating among people, bearing fruit and having their leavening influence.

With \$60,000 you could sponsor the entire network of radio broadcasts for India for a whole year! There would be many millions across Asia who would hear the gospel because of your gift, and hundreds, perhaps thousands, who would

eventually obey God because of that year of preaching.

And what could be done with \$100,000? The building that is so badly needed in Delhi could become a reality and be put to constant use in the establishing and strengthening of the church throughout that country. Untold good would come from your gift. Here in the States where we have gone to excess in the superfluity of our buildings, many Christians are sickened on the whole subject. But what a different situation exists in most foreign countries where the church is still virtually in the "brush arbor" existence, making a "fly-by-night" impression! They need better than that if they are to convince onlookers that the congregation is a solid, stable thing. Your bequest could have that lasting effect for God's work there.

I've listed only a few of the ways our possessions could be of invaluable service to God. I'm sure you are aware of

many others that would be equally fruitful. My purpose in writing this is not to direct you as to where you use what you have, but to encourage you to exercise godly stewardship over it. We have not, as God's people, been properly educated and trained to think in terms of God's part in our bequeathals. But it is time that we realize that even in this area we have not only a responsibility but a privilege. How wonderful to have something that can be given to Him and can be worth so much in the preaching of His gospel!

All of us need to listen closely to the wisdom of Solomon:

Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the

sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God (Eccl. 2:18-25).

The Christian's soul should receive more good or pleasure from furthering God's work than from any other thing he could do with his goods. WOT

JESUS DIED FOR THE CHURCH!

Barry Grider, Memphis, Tennessee

I still hear the words of the old gospel preacher ringing in my ears, "I would rather be the man who drove the spear into Jesus' side, than to bring harm to the spiritual body of Christ--the church." Such a statement made an indelible impression on my memory, though I was only a boy. Indeed, the church of Christ is precious. She was purchased with His blood. As the hymnist wrote, "From heav'n He came and sought her, To be His holy Bride; With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died."

It is truly sad that our world rejects the blood-bought body of Christ. To do so is to denigrate what Jesus did at Calvary. The Lord promised in Matthew 16:18 to build His one and only church, "... and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." His church had a purchase price; it was His very own blood. Paul, speaking to the Ephesian elders, said, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Again, the beloved apostle wrote, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the

church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Jesus suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane for the church. He endured cruel reproaches during His wicked trial, again for the church. He agonized on the cross, pouring out His blood, that He might bring the church into existence. How could anyone argue that the church has nothing to do with man's salvation?

When man considers his condition outside of Christ (Eph. 2:12) and the necessity of being cleansed in Christ's blood (Eph. 1:7; 2:13), he will want to be in the blood-bought. The only way one can receive the benefits of Christ's blood is to be in the blood-bought. Following Pentecost we read, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Why did the Lord do this? To be cleansed by the blood requires being in the blood-bought church. Salvation, therefore, is to be found in the church and only in the church, which has been authorized, built, and purchased by Christ.

Considering the high cost of the Lord's church, what kind of persons ought we to be? The writer of Hebrews records, "He that despised Moses' law

died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:28,29).

How often do we show disrespect for Jesus' blood? One way we do this is by being cynical or indifferent to the blood-bought body of Christ. Some members cannot respect the Lord's blood enough to assemble with the church on the Lord's day and commemorate His death (Mt. 26:28,29; Acts 20:7). Others disrespect His blood by living unholy lives, which mars the cause of Christ and brings shame to His church.

Friends, if we are not ashamed that Jesus died for our sins, likewise, let us not be ashamed of the church for which He died, either. Let us be members of the blood-bought that we might be saved; and let us never do harm to that divine institution for which Jesus gave His life. Remember, if we do so, we are worse than a soldier who pierced our Lord's side 2000 years ago. WOT

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WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES

Levi Sides, Jasper, Alabama

From the time that Adam and Eve sinned in Eden man has experienced tragedy. It may take many forms, two of the most prevalent being sickness and death. Tragedy affects different people in different ways--some become very emotional, while others remain quiet and calm. Some get over it quickly; others never get over it. No matter whether he is emotional or calm, the Christian is better equipped than anyone else to handle tragedy. There are several reasons why this is true.

The Christian has a host of fellow Christians who come to his aid in time of need. Now I am not referring to the so-called Christian who rarely ever attends any of the services and never participates in the work of the church, but rather to one who is an active worker in a local congregation. It has been my experience that when the true Christian suffers a tragedy he is surrounded by his brothers and sisters in Christ who provide support, sympathy, and whatever else is needed. This is but an application of the command to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

The Christian realizes that his eternal reward will more than compensate for any suffering in this life. He will have the attitude expressed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: "Wherefore we faint not . . . for our light affliction, which is but for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." When we set our affections on things above and seek to lay up treasures in heaven, we are able to say as Paul said, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therein to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

The Christian has the precious promises found in God's word. "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live" (Jn. 11:24). "Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

The Christian has an all-loving and all-powerful mediator, Christ, who is ever living to make intercession for us (1 Tim. 2:5). Our mediator understands our troubles and wants to help us (Heb. 4:5).

Fellow Christian, in time of tragedy, show your faith by having a peace which passeth understanding, a peace which can only come by being a child of God and a joint heir with Christ.

WOT

The Words of Truth

**Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
1501 Sixth Avenue
Jasper, AL 35501**

THE WORDS OF Truth

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The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

If you would like to submit an article for consideration, please send via postal mail or fax, or (preferably) via e-mail or on IBM PC compatible 3.5" disk.

Please send all correspondence to:

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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).

Vol. 38 No. 3

March 2001

THE SEEDS OF THE SANTANA SHOOTINGS

Clyde H. Stimp, Conway, Arkansas

When my wife was in high school in Lewistown, Montana, a classmate across the hall shot a teacher to death at point-blank range. He then turned his gun on others, firing down the hallway, striking the vice-principal and some students. Since then, places like Paducah, Jonesboro, and Columbine have become household names for all the wrong reasons.

Now blood has been spilled in the hallways of Santana high school in Santee, California. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that freshman Andy Williams smiled as he killed two teenagers and wounded 13 others with a .22-caliber revolver.

That was shocking, but I was even more disturbed by the rest of what I read. The headline of the *Los Angeles Times* article by Nancy Wride and Nora Zamichow read, "Suspect Described as Troubled, Puny and Picked-On" (March 6, 2001). He was considered "a scrawny punk, a pint-sized fifteen-year-old openly ridiculed for his passivity, small size and pale

skin." Kids stole the shoes off of his feet and items from his backpack. He had his skateboard snatched away from him . . . twice. For about a month he had been threatening to go on a killing spree at school; when he would boast about it he was mocked and commanded to shut up.

Scott Wilke, a sophomore at Santana, said, "Even the people who got picked on picked on him. He would never defend himself at all. You could take the money out of his wallet, you could take the shirt off his back and throw it in the gutter, and he would just walk away."

You may wonder why all of that disturbs me even more than his gleeful rampage. The reason is simple: at thousands of schools across this nation, the same seeds of festering resentment, seething rage, and deadly revenge are being planted daily in the hearts of the ridiculed and the despised. A bloody harvest remains to be reaped. It is not a matter of *if* but *when* and *where* another

Andy Williams will open fire

Students, faculty, and administrators who are Christians must take seriously the call to be salt and light (Mt. 5:13-16). All Christian parents should prompt their school-aged children to ask themselves honestly:

- Are you, by your words and actions, making others bitter or better?
- Are you lighting fuses or helping diffuse them?
- Are you reflecting the desire of Jesus that we be peacemakers (Mt. 5:9) in this angry world?

We wonder if there is even now, at a school where we have a loved one, some student who is being pushed down the road that will end with a smoking gun in his hand and dead bodies on the ground. We do *not* have to wonder if Christ can use us to make a potentially life-saving difference. Light will always dispel darkness as far as it shines. *WOT*

I CHOOSE DAVID

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Other than our Lord, who is *your* favorite Bible character? Some choose Moses, marveling at his admirable leadership in an extremely difficult situation. Others prefer the amazing faith of the great patriarch Abraham or the endurance of Job. Many wonder at the sacrificial commitment of Paul and smile at the spirit of the tempestuous Peter. Still others take heart in the quiet dedication of heroines like Ruth, Dorcas, and Sarah, or in the exemplary character of relatively unknown heroes such as Micaiah or Epaphroditus.

Though fully realizing the great qualities of these characters, as well as others, *I* choose David.

I choose David, in spite of his notorious blunder with the wife of Uriah that brought shame to his family, disgraced his God, and darkened the course of Israel's history (2 Sam. 11). I choose David, in spite of the fact that he allowed the ark to be transported contrary to God's law, resulting in Uzzah's untimely death (2 Sam. 6). I choose David, in spite of his presumptuous numbering of the people and the consequent plague that killed 70,000 men (2 Sam. 24).

But I choose David not even because of many of his good qualities. . . . not because he had faith enough as a boy to say to King Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of [Goliath]" (1 Sam. 17:32). Nor because of his admirable respect for God's anointed, even when Saul was seeking to kill him without cause (1 Sam. 24:6,10; 26:9,11,16; cf. 2 Sam. 1:14). Nor even because of his burning love for the things of God, earnestly desiring to build Him a house (2 Sam. 7).

Here's why *I* choose David: *I choose David because of how he responded when he fell.* When Adam stumbled he said, "It was the woman's fault" (Gen. 3:12). David's predecessor, Saul, fell and said "It was the people's fault . . . But honor me in front of my elders" (1 Sam. 15:15,30). Aaron fell and said, "The people made me do it" (Ex. 32:22). Even Moses, as great as he was, partially shifted the blame for his sin to the Israelites (Deut. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21).

Not David. After his infamous adulterous act, he was confronted by Nathan, who told him the story of the little ewe lamb, convicting David with the

pointed words, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7). Here is where the distinction between David and the rest is most clearly seen. He could have said, "It was *her* fault--she positioned herself in a place where she knew I'd see her." Or maybe he could have said, "Kings of *other* nations choose whichever women they want . . ." Instead, he bowed his head and stated simply, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13). He soon found a quiet place and tearfully wrote this touching psalm:

Have mercy upon me, O God,
according to thy lovingkindness:
according unto the multitude of thy
tender mercies blot out my
transgressions. Wash me thoroughly
from mine iniquity, and cleanse me
from my sin. For I acknowledge my
transgressions: and my sin is ever
before me. Against thee, thee only,
have I sinned, and done this evil in thy
sight: that thou mightest be justified
when thou speakest, and be clear when
thou judgest. . . . Purge me with
hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me,
and I shall be whiter than snow. . . .
Create in me a clean heart, O God: and
renew a right spirit within me. Cast me
not away from thy presence: and take
not thy holy spirit from me (Psa. 51:1-
4,7,10,11).

No excuses, no justifications, no rationalizations. *I have sinned. I am guilty. Please forgive me.*

When David erred in reference to transporting the ark, resulting in Uzzah's death (2 Sam. 6; 1 Chr. 13), he first became angry (1 Chr. 13:11) and then fearful (1 Chr. 13:12). But he quickly realized his mistake: "we sought him not after the due order" (1 Chr. 15:13). He made the necessary corrections, and the ark was brought to Jerusalem (1 Chr. 15:14ff). No excuses, no justifications, no rationalizations. He consulted God's word, realized his error, and corrected the mistake.

Toward the end of his reign, David evidently placed too much confidence in his armies instead of his God and presumptuously ordered Joab to number the soldiers (2 Sam. 24:2). Again, notice the heart of this great man: "And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said

unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly" (2 Sam. 24:10).

No excuses, no justifications, no rationalizations. *I have sinned. I am guilty. Please forgive me.*

I choose David because he got up when he fell down. He "fessed up" when he "messed up."

What an encouragement David is to us, because, if we're perfectly honest, we probably see more of ourselves in the Bathshebas and Uzzahs of David's life than we do in the Goliaths. We can relate more to David when he's flat on his back than when he's high on his throne. Sometimes we feel more of his "smitten heart" than we do his undivided allegiance.

Maybe it's not adultery, drunkenness, or murder, as in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah, but it's sin nonetheless. Moments when, for whatever reason, we choose to put our will before God's. Decisions made on the spur of the moment that reflect imperfect hearts. Pride, selfishness, covetousness, misplaced priorities, uncontrolled anger.

The crucial moment, though, occurs when we realize our sin. What now? Do we make excuses? Do we rationalize it, softening its edges by referring to it as a "misjudgment" or "mistake" instead of a "sin"? Do we salve our consciences by procrastinating ("If I wait long enough, I won't feel so guilty . . .")?

I choose David . . . because he lets us know that even men and women "after God's own heart" sin. Even those whose hearts God loves violate His holiness.

I choose David . . . because he shows that God can use imperfect people--people like you and me.

I choose David . . . because he shows us what to do when we're lying flat on our backs, thinking maybe God can't use us after all.

I choose David . . . because he fleshed out one of the central aspects of Christianity, and one which we must grasp if we're ever to have the kind of peace Jesus intended us to enjoy: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). ■

DO MIRACLES STILL HAPPEN TODAY?

Todd Clippard, Hamilton, Alabama

Have miracles ceased? The word "miracle" is one which has been used and misused by many in our society today. "It's a miracle!" is a phrase used in nearly any exciting sporting event. The birth of a child is often referred to as a miracle. A man walks away unhurt after a fiery automobile accident--family and friends call his survival a miracle. Someone with terminal cancer or an inoperable brain tumor suddenly goes into remission and fully recovers--"It's a miracle!" they exclaim. Anything not easily explained is often referred to as a miracle. The word is used so often and in so many different ways that its true meaning has become obscured.

What exactly is a miracle? *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* aptly describes a miracle as "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs." Alan Highers, editor of *The Spiritual Sword*, described a miracle as "an event that is above natural law." Note his use of the word "above" in conjunction with Webster's definition. Robert R. Taylor Jr. expanded Highers' definition by saying "Bible miracles were above and beyond natural law; they were supernatural; they constituted God's stepping into the picture and performing what natural law would not and could not produce." To this we would add, when a true miracle was performed as recorded in the scriptures, there was neither room to doubt nor dispute the intervention of God in the matter. Consider the following incident that proves this was indeed the case.

In Acts 3:1-10, Peter healed the lame man at the temple gate. This man was over 40 years old (4:22) and had been lame from birth (3:2). The divine record, speaking of the priests and the Sadducees, says ". . . and beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it" (4:14). In a conference to discuss how to deal with Peter and John, they said among themselves, "what shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it" (4:16).

In Matthew 12:9-14, Jesus healed a man who had a withered hand. Mark's

account of this incident says the Pharisees "watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him" (Mk. 3:2). The fact that Jesus healed the man was beyond dispute and caused the Pharisees to plot against Him how that they might destroy Him.

This brings us to another point that must be considered with reference to the miracles recorded in the scriptures--the type of miracles performed. In Matthew 4:24, the following maladies are listed among those who were healed by Jesus: the demon-possessed, epileptics, paralytics, and those afflicted by various diseases and torments. In Matthew 11:5, Jesus cited the miracles He performed as proof to John and his disciples. Among those were healing the blind, the deaf, and the lame, and raising the dead. Jesus claimed that John's disciples were witnesses to the same (11:4).

This is not what we are witnessing among today's fake healers. In recent weeks I have seen men claim to heal headaches, itchy rashes, and fill cavities, but no one to cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear, or the lame to walk. I've seen men on television come back with claims of doing such, even raising the dead, but it was in the deep recesses of an African or South American jungle. No one ever raises the dead in Birmingham or New York City. Why not? I think we all know the reason--*they can't do it!!!*

Purpose of Miracles

But why did God perform miracles? Clearly the first reason was to confirm the word He commanded the apostles to preach. The verse most commonly cited in defense of this truth is Mark 16:17-20: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming

the word through the accompanying signs" (NKJV).

However, examples of this are seen throughout the Old Testament, most notably Exodus 3-4 and 1 Kings 18. Beginning in Exodus 3, God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. He was reluctant to go and offered to God a number of excuses. In Exodus 4:1 Moses said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" The Lord responded by turning Moses' rod into a snake, giving this rationale: "That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee" (4:5). God then gave Moses the second sign of the leprous hand (4:6-7), saying, "And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign" (4:8). Exodus 4:29-31 speaks of Moses' and Aaron's confrontation with the people. "Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people and the people believed. . . ."

In 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah set himself against the prophets of Baal. He challenged all of Israel to follow the Lord, saying, "'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.'" But the people answered him not a word." The story of the two altars is familiar to all, but we should take special note of the words of Elijah as he prayed to God before the people; "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again" (1 Kng. 18:36-37). After the fire of the LORD fell and consumed Elijah's burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in

the trench, the people responded by falling on their faces crying "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" (1 Kng. 18:40).

In both of these incidents, the miracles were performed to prove the authority of God's messengers, just as we read in Mark 16.

Are miracles occurring today?

In Exodus 4, 1 Kings 18:36-39, and Mark 16:20, the Bible clearly teaches that the purpose of miracles was to confirm the word of God's messengers. The Hebrew writer wrote, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. 2:3-4). Those first-century preachers did not carry a black leather, red-letter edition of the King James Bible when they went out fulfilling the Great Commission. They needed some means to prove to their audiences that they were indeed sent by God, and the miracles they performed testified to that fact.

As miracles were performed in the first century to produce faith in the hearts of the hearers, so the Bible is given for that purpose today: "And truly many other signs did Jesus in the presence of

his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in His name" (Jn. 20:30-31). And again, "For faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

One would do well to note the absence of the miraculous in most of the epistles to the churches. In fact, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 speaks to the limited span of the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit: "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Charismatics try to identify "that which is perfect" as Jesus, and draw an erroneous conclusion that miracles were to continue until the second advent of Christ. However, the language will not allow for such an interpretation. The word so translated is the Greek word *teleios*, meaning "complete, of full age, mature." It appears 19 times in 17 verses and never refers to Jesus Christ. In addition, the word is neuter in its gender; that is, it refers to neither male nor female, but to an object without gender, in this case the scriptures. James described the New Testament as "the perfect law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25).

The Bible completely furnishes us unto every good work; "For all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If the Bible is all we need (and it is), then what possible purpose could miracles serve today? Paul reminded Timothy of his knowledge of the "holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Peter affirmed the sufficiency of the scriptures when he wrote, "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us unto glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). Paul stated that the understanding of the mystery of Christ would come through the reading of his epistle (Eph. 3:3-4). In Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27, emphasis is given again to the reading of the word. Unfortunately, many charismatics care little for what the Bible says, as their religion is completely emotion-driven. The best we can often do is plant seeds of doubt by pointing out the inconsistency of their claims and hope for the best. However, we must be prepared to answer their arguments and claims. May God help us to this end.

WOT

WAY TO GO, EVELYN TUCCI!

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

You will *not* believe what I am about to tell you. I would not have believed it either, but it is apparently true. Evelyn Tucci accomplished the statistically impossible. Playing an unspecified golf course in Pompano Beach, Florida, the lady teed off on the par three, 112-yard-second hole with her trusty four wood. She aced it! A hole in one! Three holes later, she strolled up to another par three. This one was 157 yards, tee box to hole. She decided to use her driver. Guess what?! She aced it. *Two holes in one in one round of golf!* The March, 2000, issue of *Golf Digest* calculated that the odds of doing that are 67 million to one!

Mrs. Tucci is *not* on the LPGA, folks. She usually shoots in the low 100s. But, here's the best part . . . the juiciest part! Evelyn Tucci is 82 years old! I'll never do it. Neither will you. John Daley, Tiger Woods, and Davis Love, III, will never do it (statistically speaking). It took an 82-year-old woman to do what has never, in verified, recorded history, been done.

You know what? Mrs. Tucci's feat is not the most amazing thing a senior citizen has ever done. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 when they parented a child (Gen. 17:17; Rom. 4:19). Talk about headline news! Moses was over 80 years old when he parted a sea and

led Israel across its dry ground (cf. Ex. 7:7). For the next 40 years, he walked miles upon miles through the wilderness (Deut. 34:7). Barzillai is described as "a very old man, eighty years of age" when he provided for David's needs when the king was fleeing from his son Absalom (2 Sam. 19:32ff). Think about the incredible work of Anna (Lk. 2:36-37), Zacharias and Elizabeth (Lk. 1:18), and other senior saints in scripture!

But, look around you today. Look at our senior saints. They are examples of great faith. They are capable of great works--Bible Correspondence work, sending cards, visiting by phone if not by car, praying, knitting or sewing for

those in need, telling small children Bible stories, etc. But, they are capable of much greater.

Consider Edith Cliburn. She's from Franklin, Kentucky, a widow in the golden years of her life, and always on the go. She is always gone somewhere on an evangelistic campaign, and few rival her persuasiveness or her tenacity. She is beautiful and unforgettable.

Then, there is the now-deceased Leonard Johnson. Brother Johnson co-founded Montgomery Bible College with Rex Turner, Sr., in 1942. That school is now Faulkner University. Many went on campaigns with brother Johnson, stateside and abroad. Into his eighties he exhausted all of the college

students who went with him on such trips. His energy seemed endless, belying his age. Eternity alone will reveal how many souls he won to Christ in the social security stretch of his life.

How about Russell Young, long-time elder here at Cold Harbor Road and now active member at Chisholm Trail in Duncan, Oklahoma? I saw him win several people to Christ here when he was well into his seventies. What is he doing now? He is leading the Duncan church to their greatest involvement ever in foreign Bible correspondence work, heading up their World Bible School program. He and Ann also work with the underprivileged in the church's

medical outreach program.

George Jones says, "I don't need no rockin' chair." He's not the only one. The Lord's church is blessed with an endless supply of aged achievers, senior soul-winners, and elderly exemplars. Like the gray-haired men in Rehoboam's day might have preserved that kingdom (1 Kng. 12:16ff), we need the counsel, courage, and common sense of our elderly members today to strengthen the kingdom of God. "Honor the aged . . ." (Lev. 19:32). See their wisdom (Job 12:12). Yes, folks, the *beauty* of old men (and women, too) is the gray hair (Prov. 20:29; cf. 16:31). Thanks for the reminder, Evelyn! WOT

HEALING A FRACTURE

Mike Benson and Harold Smith, Ph.D., Evansville, Indiana

It was obvious that she [i.e., Christ's bride at Philippi] wasn't feeling her "normal" self. Typically, she was a hardworking, energetic, and active (Phil. 1:5-6) lady, but in recent days she was uncharacteristically weak and uncoordinated.

A family member suggested that she set up a doctor's appointment (Phil. 4:3). Her symptoms didn't demand an immediate visit to the ER, but they couldn't just be ignored either (Mk. 3:17). That nagging "ache" served as overt evidence of a deeper, underlying problem. Then too, failure to get treatment might make her more susceptible to other, more serious, ailments which could threaten her entire system (1 Cor. 12:26).

Her doctor, a trusted family practitioner, ran a few tests and confirmed his diagnosis--she had suffered a small "fracture" (Phil. 4:2). As a result, he recommended a combination of therapies and scribbled (Heb. 1:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:16) a prescription on his notepad--Philippians 4:4-7:

Take A DAILY DOSE of joy. "Rejoice in the Lord always" (v. 4). Unlike Paul, who could find joy within the confines of a Roman prison, some members of the Philippian fellowship experienced

despair. They focused on the dispute (i.e., fracture) between Euodia and Syntyche (which in turn, affected the whole congregation). The apostle cautioned against this inappropriate emphasis and suggested that the saints needed to "keep on rejoicing" in view of their relationship with the Lord (Mt. 5:10-12).

EXERCISE gentleness. "Let your gentleness be known to all men" (v. 5a). The word translated "gentleness" means strength under control and referred to the taming of a wild animal. When an animal was brought under control by a trainer, it retained all of its physical prowess, but the trainer controlled the use of it. Euodia and Syntyche, like the other Philippian saints, must have had strong personal feelings, but needed to exercise control over them (2 Pet. 1:6). Losing control of their tempers and/or tongues would only exacerbate this congregational wound (Prov. 29:11).

Remember that THE DOCTOR IS always ON CALL. "The Lord is at hand" (v. 5b). If she really wanted to help mend the fracture (Jn. 5:6), the church needed to remember the nearness of the Lord (Heb. 13:5b-6; Psa. 119:151; Mt. 28:19; Acts 17:27) and that He genuinely cared about this

situation (1 Pet. 5:7; Heb. 2:17). The realization of His present nearness would have a calming and reassuring effect.

Cut anxiety out of your DIET. "Be anxious for nothing" (v. 6). The Greek word translated "anxious" means to draw in different directions. Some church members were pulled apart with worry over the disagreement between their two sisters in the Lord. Even though these women believed the same gospel, stood for the same doctrine, and had their names in the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5), some Christians could only fret (Lk. 10:41). Paul, under inspiration, suggested that this useless (Mt. 6:27) activity needed to be cut completely out of the Philippians' spiritual diet.

Communicate your SYMPTOMS to the Great Physician. ". . . By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (v. 7). The concerns of the saints were to be taken to the throne of God. Even though He was already aware of the Philippian fracture (Mt. 6:8), the church needed to step out in faith and leave this problem in His skillful hands (Dan. 6:10-11).

"There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul." WOT

GOD, CREATION, AND MAN

Donald Lackey, Jasper, Alabama

The most important themes under consideration in all the world center around the subject: "God, Creation, and Man." The only reliable historical information we have about God is in the Bible, and therein we read of the creation of the earth and all things therein; as well as the creation of God's whole universe. The first verse in the Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Continuing through the fifth chapter of Genesis we read more and more about the creation. The earth at first was shrouded in darkness, and God said, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3).

CREATED BY HIS SON

God said "Let there be a firmament," and "Let the earth bring forth," etc. (Gen. 1:11). Here God was talking to someone, evidently unto Christ, just as when He said, "Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26-28). John tells us that God created all things by Christ, who is called the "Word" (with a capital "W"--Jn. 1:1-3). We read later that God has spoken unto us in the New Testament "by his Son," "by whom he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1-2).

MORE THAN SEVEN WONDERS

Scientists tell us that there are many galaxies in the heavens of space. A "galaxy" is a milky way, or island universe. Our galaxy is one of a small cluster of nineteen galaxies. God told us in the early writings of the Bible that the stars are innumerable (Gen. 15:5), but our God is so great that He can count them. David, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says of God, "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Psa. 147:4-5). Our galaxy contains 200 billion stars, the nearest of which is 4.3 light years from us. Light travels 186,000 miles per second, fast enough to go around our earth at the equator about seven times in one

second. It would take a lot of miles to make a year; and many, many miles to make 4.3 light years. All of this in only one of our galaxies!

By the use of modern high-powered telescopes, astronomers and scientists tell us that there are over a million "galaxies," and that our sun is 150 trillion miles from the center of our galaxy. They tell us that the candle, or light power, of only one of these galaxies is equal to the light of 400 million suns like ours. We can truly say with the Psalmist that, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psa. 19:1-3).

As we stand and look at the creation of God, whether it be the sky and stars on a beautiful clear night, or the sunshine, or the rain, or lightning, which is necessary to the production of nitrogen, which is necessary to the life of all vegetation (and without the vegetable kingdom there could be no animal life), we stand amazed and in awe as we think: How great God, the Creator of all things, really is! Even as we try to comprehend a small and minute particle of so great a creation, we want to break forth in singing: "How Great Thou Art!" Whether we are beholding the positive-charged sun holding the negative-charged planets in place; or the positive-charged nucleus of an atom holding the negative-charged electrons in place, we are made aware of the infinite wisdom, power, and grandeur of our GREAT GOD in it!

When we think of the infinite wisdom and power of the Creator of all of these things, even of the inanimate and of the lower order of life beneath man, we are made to ask with the Psalmist, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast

put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psa. 8:3-9). When we go to our limit and think of all that we can conceive of, we naturally ask: Why does such a great and marvelous God care so much about us and our welfare for time and all eternity?

The great creation of God, the heavens and earth, the lower creation of vegetation, animals, etc., all glorify God, as well as man, the highest order of earthly creation. They are all a credit to the Maker of us all, including both man and woman (Gen. 1-2).

God created man and woman in His own image and likeness, created them with intelligence above the lower animals so they could think of, believe in, love, and obey the higher and infinite will of their Creator, and be able to live here upon a much higher plane than the lower animals. The lower creation cannot love and serve God as can mankind.

God created man with a soul or spirit which cannot die--which cannot be killed by man, as can the body (Mt. 10:28). God made man to be a living soul (Gen. 2:7). God has promised that the inward man shall live forever (Psa. 22:26; 2 Cor. 5:6,8; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). God loves His human creation above all else that He created and made. He gave His beloved Son to die for us so we might, through faith in Him, and obedience to His will, have eternal life (Jn. 3:16-17; Heb. 5:8-9). All will be raised from the dead, but only the righteous will have everlasting life (Jn. 5:28-29). The coming of Christ to save us, and all else He did and does for us, is good news or "gospel." The word "gospel" means "good news" or "good tidings." The word "gospel" is from the Anglo-Saxon, from "God" and "spell"--"gospel."

The four gospel accounts--Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John--are not four gospels in number, but *four records* of

the one gospel as taught in these books, presented in action in Acts and in the epistles of the New Testament.

This gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation; that is, it motivates and influences mankind (if we will believe it with all our hearts) to obey it and be saved, as well as to influence us to be faithful Christians and to live the Christian life, and thus lay hold on eternal life (Rom. 1:16; 1 Tim. 6:12).

God created man a free moral agent to choose in the light of God's word whether or not he will love and serve his Maker. God knew beforehand that

man would sin and would need to come back to God and be saved. He, therefore, promised us this wonderful gospel (Rom. 1:1-4; Isa. 29:18; 40:9; 53). God gave His Son, and He gave His all for us (Heb. 2:9). Now He wants us to give ourselves to Him (Tit. 2:11-12; Rom. 12:1-2). He wants us to prepare to meet Him (Amos 4:12). God offers us salvation through obedience to His Son (Heb. 5:8-9; Rev. 22:14). We are now choosing whether to serve God and have everlasting life, or to love sin and serve Satan. We are now choosing heaven or hell, one or the other (Mt.

25:31-46). And let us remember that it makes no difference how long the soul may have been in heaven, it will have much longer to stay than it has been there. And the same is true of hell and the wicked. It makes no difference how long one may have been in everlasting punishment, he will have longer to stay than he has been there, and at any given point he will always have longer yet to stay than he has been there. We are now choosing where we shall be eternally. Let us choose wisely, and scripturally.

WOT

WHAT IS "SPEAKING IN TONGUES"?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

The miraculous gift of speaking in tongues is not frequently mentioned in the New Testament. In fact, there are only three books in which it is mentioned: namely, Mark, Acts, and 1 Corinthians. Due to the prevalence given to tongue-speaking by some religious groups one would think that the phenomena would be predominant on the pages of Scripture. Surprisingly to many people, it isn't. Important questions to consider regarding this subject are: What is tongue-speaking as it is described in the Bible? Is this miracle available to Christians today? What is the explanation for the modern phenomenon of tongue-speaking?

There are three instances recorded in the Bible in which people spoke in tongues. The first involved the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church (Acts 2). It becomes clear from the context that the nature of these tongues was the ability of the apostles to speak the languages spoken by the sixteen nationalities present on this marvelous occasion (Acts 2:6,8,11). This miraculous gift of speaking languages that the apostles had never studied or learned authenticated both the message and the messengers as being from God. The second occurrence involved the household of Cornelius who was an uncircumcised Gentile at the time (Acts 10; 11:3). The Scriptures state that the Holy Spirit miraculously enabled these Gentiles to "speak with tongues, and magnify God" (Acts

10:46). According to Peter's own statement when he later reported to brethren in Judea, the purpose of this miraculous gift being bestowed upon Cornelius was to endorse him as a recipient of the gospel. In order to become Christians it was not necessary for Cornelius and his household to first become converts to Judaism (Acts 11:15-18). That was proved to the circumcised brethren who accompanied Peter to Caesarea when the Holy Spirit empowered Cornelius prior to his baptism (Acts 10:45). In Acts 19 Paul encountered some men who knew only the baptism of John but needed to be taught about the Christ to whom John pointed. After hearing his message these twelve men were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:6).

The apostle Paul plainly stated that the miraculous gift of tongues would cease when "that which is perfect is come" (1 Cor. 13:8,10). That which is perfect (or complete) in this passage is the Bible, the word of God in its written form. Until the completion of the Scriptures in about A.D. 96 there remained a need for miraculous gifts in order to confirm the message preached by the apostles and prophets of the first century (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). Now that the message has been confirmed and recorded by inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21) there no longer remains a need for miraculous gifts, including speaking in tongues. Other

than the three books of the Bible mentioned previously, tongue-speaking is not mentioned in the Bible. Paul wrote the majority of the New Testament, and he mentioned it only in 1 Corinthians. The apostle Peter does not mention the miracle in his two epistles. James, the Lord's half-brother, does not mention it in the book that bears his name. The apostle John, who lived until the close of the first century, does not mention it in his three epistles or in the book of Revelation. Though the book whose authorship is ascribed to him is only one chapter, Jude does not mention tongue speaking. Cleon Rogers stated, "It is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at, or even found in the Apostolic Fathers." The "Apostolic Fathers" were men in the church who lived in the second and third centuries.

People today who profess that they are speaking in tongues do not speak in some known foreign language as was done in the New Testament; rather, they engage in some "ecstatic utterance," a phenomena unheard of in the New Testament. Ecstatic utterances can be paralleled in a number of non-Christian religious traditions, and have been experienced by persons in non-religious settings as well. One should be extremely careful about making the assumption that the early church was simply using ecstatic utterances when there seems to be such strong evidence to the contrary.

WOT

THE TRAGIC RESULTS OF BIBLE IGNORANCE

Duane Patton

So many of us today seem to spend so little time with God's word, the Bible. It's not surprising to find most folk wanting to speak to God *their* way, yet so few wanting God to speak to them *His* way (1 Cor. 14:37; Heb. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:3). As a result many people are led to believe that God speaks to them separate and apart from His written word and are "led away by the error of the wicked" (2 Pet. 3:17). What's worse is that lack of knowledge of God's word only leads to immorality and shame, and, ultimately, destruction from the presence of God (cf. Hos. 4:6).

Bible ignorance is a primary cause for the break-up of many families. Because most do not know what God has revealed concerning marriage, divorce, and re-marriage (Mt. 5:32; 19:9), the divorce rate is at an all-time high. Sadly, however, many *do* know Christ's teaching on the subject but just simply don't care! James made mention in his epistle that God's word (i.e., the "perfect law of liberty") is like a mirror which reflects our inadequacies (Jam. 1:22-25). Unfortunately, billions of individuals neglect to inspect their own moral/spiritual lives before facing the world. The tragic result is that they wind up looking pitiful before God--having entered unlawfully into an abominable marriage. God's word, the Bible, instructs all men everywhere concerning how to live godly lives (cf. Tit. 2:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:3); but it must be learned and heeded before it can work effectively for an individual's greatest good (2 Tim 2:15).

Because immorality prevails due to lack of Bible knowledge there are countless numbers of people who've brought shame to themselves, their families, and, most sadly, to Christ. In many ways the churches of Christ have in the latter part of this century practiced the same error that some were practicing in the first century by allowing immorality to enter and remain in the church (1 Cor. 5:1ff). Because church discipline has become very much an unfamiliar term, shame has "covered the face" of the Lord's bride in the twentieth century. The Lord prayed that the church would be "one" so that the world might believe that He was genuine (Jn. 17:20-21). However, "unity" should not be achieved at any cost. Christians who accommodate sinfulness for the sake of "unity" only do damage to the body and bride of our Lord. Christians must be steadfast in the kind of Bible knowledge that will sanctify, edify, and identify God's people with the Lord and not with the world!

Finally, as the prophet Hosea succinctly, yet sadly, wrote: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). So many are "willfully ignorant" of God's word thus separating themselves from the blessings which God has prepared for "them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). The soul of man is the most precious item that he has in his midst. In order for it to be preserved it must be fed with the kind of nourishment that comes only from God's eternal word, the Bible (1 Pet. 2:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:6).

Christians today would do their souls an eternal favor by studying God's divine plan, carefully heeding its powerful message, and lovingly teaching it to others, for it is the "blue-print" and "compass" of our lives both now and forever! *WOT*

THE WORDS OF Truth

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The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama. It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

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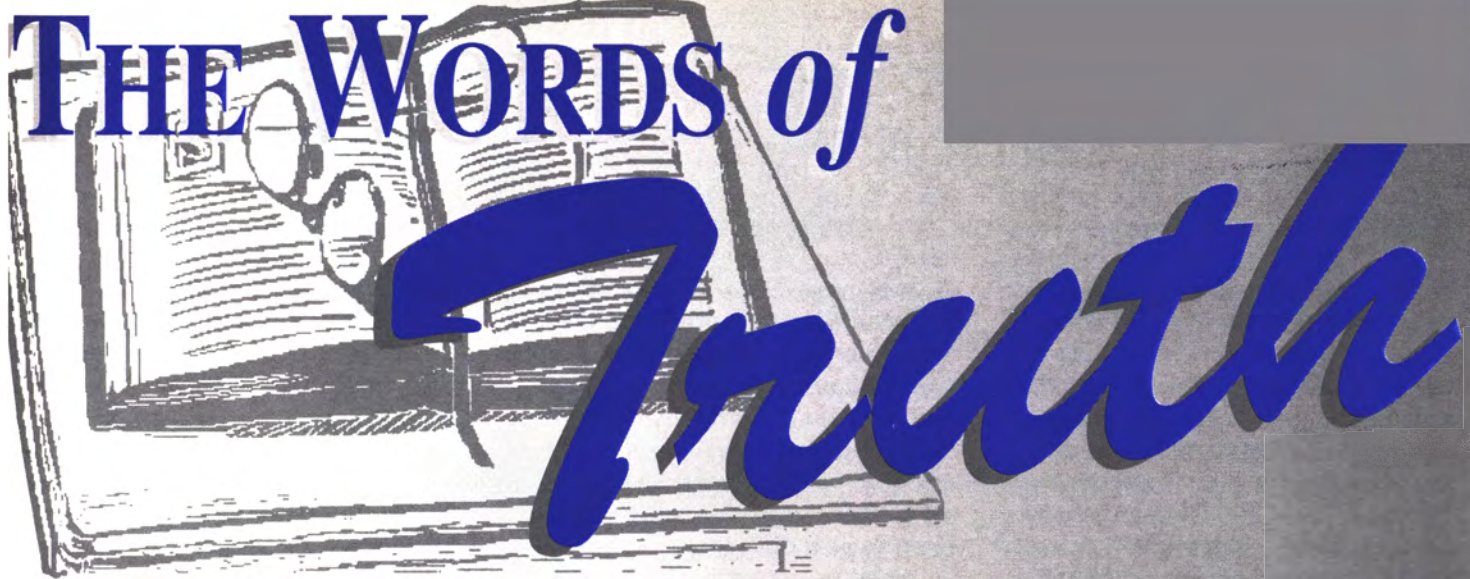
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THE WORDS of Truth

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

Vol. 38 No. 4

April 2001

THE SONGS OF SLAVES

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

When the Jews of Jesus' day declared that they had "never been in bondage to any man" (Jn. 8:33), they made a ridiculous statement. Truth be told, they had been in and out of bondage throughout their history. Beginning with Joseph and his slavery in Egypt, the Bible student can quickly trace the Hebrews in bondage to Pharaoh for four hundred years. From there we see God's people enslaved off and on in the book of Judges. Later the divided kingdom saw bondage to the Assyrians and to the Babylonians. In fact, when the Jews made their "never-in-bondage" statement they were then under the oppressive thumb of the Romans, and deeply resented the intruders on their native soil.

All of us have been shocked by the bitter abuse of slavery in America during our early years. No man has the right to treat another like an animal. Furthermore, Christians in any society must place Christian principles above society's accepted practices. This point is strongly driven home in the book of Philemon. What was a Christian to do when his runaway

slave obeyed the Gospel and then returned home? "... Therefore receive him ... not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved ..." (Phile. 12-16). Can you not just imagine how American slaves found comfort in such passages? One historian wrote, "the sufferings of Christ and of the ancient Jews drew black folk to Christianity. Moses delivering his people from Egyptian bondage, Joseph sold as a slave by his own brothers, Daniel flung by a tyrant into a lion's den--these timeless stories were the agents that evoked a response of faith from the slave community." They would sing, "Go down Moses, 'way down in Egypt land. Tell ol' Pharaoh to let my people go."

Perhaps as slaves you and I would have enjoyed the righteousness of scriptures such as Ephesians 6:5-9 which teach how even in a society in which slavery was practiced, men could treat one another the right way. After admonishing the slaves, Paul wrote, "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master

also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with Him."

Some of the sweetest, most heartfelt songs were written and sung by those American slaves. Ponder the sad plight of these slaves as you read the words to their songs. Every Christian was once a slave. The apostle Paul says we were slaves to sin, but have become the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). Hopefully, our awareness of being former slaves of sin, though now redeemed by our Lord, will help us rejoice in some of these sentiments. We need the Lord Jesus every bit as much as these pitiful slaves in bygone days.

Oh, my Lord!
Oh my good Lord!
Keep me from sinkin' down.
I mean to go to heaven too
I look up yonder and what do I see,
I see the angels beckonin' me.

Oh, religion is a fortune,
I really do believe . . .

WOT

UNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Many can sympathize with the situation of the man who was stranded alone on an island for twenty-five years. Finally, a ship passed by and its captain saw three buildings on the island. The sailor sent ashore saw someone sitting on the front porch of the middle building. He asked, "How did these buildings get here?" "I built them," the man responded. "What's this one?" "Well, this one's my house." Gesturing at one of the other buildings, the visitor asked, "What's *that* one?" "Oh, that's where I go to church," he happily answered. The man, puzzled, asked, "Well, then, what's *that* building?" With a disgusted look on his face, the stranded man replied, "Oh that's where I *used* to go to church."

We might smile at that story, but, quite frankly, division in local churches is no laughing matter. And yet, in spite of its serious nature, congregational division occurs quite frequently. Almost every congregation, if it searches its historical records carefully enough, will find division in its past. Sometimes divisions, of course, are necessary to maintain doctrinal purity (cf. Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5). The vast majority, though, could be avoided if Christians took proper precautions.

How does God feel about unity/division?

Jason Tuskes was a seventeen-year-old high school honor student who was close to his mother, his wheelchair-bound father, and his younger brother. He was an expert swimmer who loved to scuba dive. Jason left home on a Tuesday morning to explore a spring and underwater cave near his home in west central Florida. His plan was to be home in time to celebrate his mother's birthday by going out to dinner with his family that night. Jason became lost in the cave. Then, in his panic, he apparently got wedged into a narrow passageway. When he realized

he was trapped, he shed his yellow metal air tank and unsheathed his diver's knife. With the tank as a tablet and the knife as a pen, he wrote one last message to his family: *I love you Mom, Dad, and Christian*. Then he ran out of air and drowned (*Leadership*). A dying message is something that simply cannot be ignored.

What consumed the *Lord's* thinking during His final hours? If we listen closely to His prayer shortly before He entered Gethsemane, we get a glimpse into His heart: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:20-21). These verses apply in one sense, of course, to the sinfulness of the spirit of denominationalism. But they apply more directly to the preservation of *local* unity--i.e., maintaining a spirit of oneness, thereby avoiding congregational "splits."

Admonitions concerning unity are prevalent throughout scripture. Paul begged the Corinthians: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). He urged the Philippians to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). The church in Rome was to glorify God with "one mind and one mouth" (Romans 15:6).

What happens when congregational unity is not realized?

We see the reason for the abundant persuasive testimony concerning the importance of unity when we consider the results of division:

First, congregational division makes the church a spectacle to the world.

Notice the reason the Lord gives in His prayer: ". . . that they also may be one in us: *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*" (Jn. 17:21; emp. added).

Paul castigated the Corinthians for going to law against one another, but notice this pivotal reason for its sinfulness: ". . . and that before the unbelievers" (1 Cor. 6:6). Paul said, in essence, "You're 'airing out' your problems before unbelievers." The underlying implication for the Corinthians (and for us) is, what kind of impression does this sort of unrest make on the world? Will it encourage unbelievers to embrace Christ? Of course it won't. Dividing Christ's body makes Him a mockery to the world we're commanded to teach.

After the Israelites' rebellion at Kadesh-barnea following the report of the ten faithless spies, God told Moses that He was going to destroy the people and raise up a greater nation from his seed. Moses' response speaks right to the heart of the terrible consequences of division: "*Then the Egyptians will hear it, . . . and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land . . .*" (Num. 14:13-14).

Moses' words still apply . . . How often has a congregation divided and the community in which it was supposed to be a shining light heard of it and told it to the "inhabitants of the land"? Our neighborhoods are watching us . . . The "Egyptians" will hear if unity does not prevail. God forbid that we make the body of His Son a spectacle to the world.

Second, congregational division weakens the church and causes souls to be lost. The May 1987 edition of *National Geographic* included a feature about the arctic wolf. L. David Mech described how a seven-member pack had targeted several musk-oxen calves who were guarded by eleven adults. As the wolves approached their quarry, the musk-oxen bunched in an impenetrable semicircle, their deadly

rear hooves facing out, and the calves remained safe during a long standoff with the enemy. But then a single ox broke rank, and the herd scattered into nervous little groups. A skirmish ensued, and the adults finally fled in panic, leaving the calves to the mercy of the predators. Not a single calf survived.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 that after his departure wolves would come, not sparing the flock (v. 29). Though his warning had its primary application in the first few centuries of the church's history, it is still applicable today. One of those wolves must be the individual who is ruled by a divisive spirit--one who fails to understand the precious nature of unity. Like the single ox who broke rank, he manages, either intentionally or unintentionally, to divert the attention of Christians away from the body of Christ, and once that attention is shifted, the weak are left to fend for themselves.

Only the Lord knows the answer, but reflecting on the following

question ought to frighten every Christian: how many young people have been left by the wayside and will ultimately lose their souls because they grew up in churches with people who were so presumptuous as to divide the body of Christ over inconsequential matters? Will "church problems" cause us to lose more of our children than worldliness, materialism, lethargy, and immorality?

Third, congregational division renders our worship unacceptable. Jesus said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mt. 5:23-24). In other words, worship is ineffectual if it is offered by people who are at odds with their brethren. Can a congregation composed of groups who are continually opposed to one another worship God acceptably? Worship from grudge-filled hearts is worthless.

MORAL PURITY

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

According to Galatians 5 and Colossians 3 the ingredients of genuine morality involve more than abstaining from glaring sensuality. The works of the flesh also include jealousy, envy, strife, and hatred. However, such matters as lust, murder, adultery, and stealing are also sins against God, others, and self. We have a tendency in our day to emphasize social benevolence and kindness in secular society to such an extent that many conclude that we ought to let everyone "do his own thing" as long as "he is a good old boy." In fact, even in the church, we have many members who quickly shout "Judge not that you be not judged" whenever any sin is rebuked from the pulpit or in a Bible class. It is a definite spiritual tragedy that we have become so soft and compromising in regard to overt wickedness that wars against the God

of heaven. More and more we see folks who claim to be Christians who have no conscience or shame regarding worldliness such as immodesty, social drinking, improper language, and sordid entertainment. How can we be morally pure when we feast our minds and eyes on salacious literature, suggestive television programs, and the filth that emanates from the motion picture industry? The Bible still tells us to bring our thoughts under the power of the Lord (2 Cor. 10:5) and think or meditate upon proper values (Psa. 1:2; Phil. 4:8).

Shakespeare had a cogent reminder on the value and power of the conscience: "O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me."

The inspired apostle Paul pungently stated: "I strive to have a conscience void of offense before God at all times" (Acts 24:16).

The Corinthian church was struggling with incipient division--struggles between the rich and the poor. As a result, the Lord's Supper was being abused. Paul flatly stated: "I praise you not" (1 Cor. 11:22).

Does the Lord ever respond similarly to our Sunday songs of praise? Does He ever say "I praise you not" because we harbor ill will toward our brethren?

The words of the highly esteemed Bobby Duncan ought to ring loudly in our ears, "When Jesus died, one of those Roman soldiers had such contempt for him that he took a spear and pierced his side. I would rather be in that soldier's shoes in the judgment than in the shoes of the man who has such contempt for the spiritual body of Christ as to divide it asunder."

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1).

Next month's editorial will consider Paul's directions in Ephesians 4:1-3 for maintaining unity. WOT

Isaak Walton wisely reminded mankind that good health and a clean conscience are two of the greatest blessings.

I believe that far too many preachers have condescended to weak brethren by *not* teaching plainly on moral purity so as to accommodate consciences already "seared as with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:2). In terms of popular acclaim, however, it is true that moral purity does have a high price tag. We would not be telling the truth if we left the impression that Christianity does not cost us something. It is also a lie to suggest that sin is never appealing, for does not Hebrews 11:25 clearly mention *the pleasures of sin*? Satan is not dumb; he knows how to dress iniquity in bright appealing colors. Read the description of the harlot in Revelation 17 for the glitter of gold and the beauty of scarlet! But, long

after the glamour and prestige of worldly pomp has died out (James 5:1-3), the pristine glory of pure Christianity not only endures but magnifies the reward of holding to God's unchanging hand! Praise the Lord for the precious peace the gospel brings.

In Mark 7 Jesus made it very clear that evil proceeds from the inside of man. Unless we purify our thoughts, attitudes, and motives, we will never receive the rich dividends of moral purity. We learn in 1 Peter 2 that malice, guile, envy, and evil speech must be put aside if we would ever

grow spiritually.

A gospel song we ought to be more familiar with tells us:

Purer yet and purer,
I would be in mind;
Dearer yet and dearer,
Every duty find.

Years ago, in my hometown congregation, an old brother would lead this stanza of another hymn:

Break down every idol,
Cast out every foe,
Now wash me,
And I shall be whiter than snow.

Our blessed Lord made it clear in Revelation 3:1-5 that unless members of the church cleanse their garments by purging sin out of their lives they will have their names blotted out of the Lamb's book of life! Heaven demands moral purity. The licentiousness of modern society is sadly parallel to Sodom and the decadent Roman Empire of centuries ago. The world has overflowed into the church. We need to count the cost of such foolishness and pay the price of getting rid of it or the Lord will soon remove the candlestick! WOT

JESUS, PHILIP, AND JOE

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

He sat alone in the right hand corner of the front pew—just left of the pulpit. As I recall, he was a relatively short man in terms of physical stature. He wore thick, black-framed glasses and had a red flat top hair cut. He had a broad smile. He always wore a dark suit on the Lord's Day to the worship assembly. He sang bass—I mean really deep bass. His loud voice would resonate throughout the auditorium during services. I learned to love singing bass largely because of Joe. He sang well, and it was obvious that he loved to lift his gift of praise to the Father.

Joe was my Wednesday night Bible class teacher one year. Always prepared. Very knowledgeable. Concerned about his students. Friendly. Supportive. Personally interested.

One of Joe's classes sticks out in my memory above all others. For some reason, the rest of my fellow students didn't make it to Bible study this particular night, so this evening I was Joe's only pupil. Other teachers might have been tempted to send me to another classroom, since I was the sole student. Not Joe. Like I said, he took a personal interest. To him Bible class wasn't just about imparting information, it was about making connections with people. Nobody had

to "strong arm" Joe to teach the Word; he did so gladly. Well, he sat down with me that night and talked to me about my soul—about my salvation. We didn't go through the Bible class workbook; we just talked about how to become a Christian—what I needed to do to be saved and why. A few days later—May 17, 1972—at age 11, I put on Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:27). Much of the reason I did so was because of Joe Flannary and our little one-on-one Bible study that one Wednesday night at the Overlook church in Dayton, Ohio.

Observations:

Jesus valued people as *individuals*.

He talked one-on-one with Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:10: "... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"). He held a night study with the Pharisee, Nicodemus (Jn. 3:3: "... unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"). He conversed with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:14: "... whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst"). It's not surprising that Jesus gave His attention to individuals like these; He knew the worth of one soul (cf. Mt. 16:26; 10:29-31).

Like his Master, Philip knew the worth of *one*. Remember Philip (Acts

8)? He left his work with many in Samaria (Acts 8:6,12) to speak to just one from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26ff: "... then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him"). It has been suggested by some that the eunuch made his way back home to Ethiopia following his conversion and then, in turn, preached the Word to his fellow-countrymen and spread it throughout the region. I have no way of affirming or denying that proposition, but I do know that even if the eunuch lived and died the only Christian in Ethiopia, it was worth Philip's efforts.

What if only *one* student came to your Bible class this week? Like Jesus, would you give him your individual and undivided attention? Like Philip, would you get in your vehicle and drive a long distance, even if you knew only one person would be present to hear God's message? Like Joe, would you stay with him in class and talk to him about eternity and his soul, or would you send him over to another teacher because you *only* had one student?

Jesus practiced one-on-one teaching. So did Philip. So did Joe. All three were effective. What about you, dear Christian . . . ? Would you be willing to teach just one . . . ? WOT

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AT JERUSALEM

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

Our Lord promised His apostles that He would give them the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 16:19). Those “keys” were employed on the day of Pentecost to “open the doors” of the church (Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:47). Thus began that day the church of Christ in Jerusalem and in the world. Acts 2, the hub of the Bible, brings to fruition much Bible prophecy concerning the work the Lord came to earth to accomplish. A study of the Lord’s church at Jerusalem reveals some marvelous traits that His people today should emulate. In a study involving verses 37-47, at least six such characteristics can be seen.

They were a listening people.

Acts 2:37 states: “Now when they *heard* this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter and the other apostles had been proclaiming the gospel of Christ (vv. 14-36). Although this sermon was quite pointed and withheld nothing concerning their guilt, it piqued their interest to the point that they listened to what was being said. At this point, of course, these had not been obedient to the Lord’s commands and were not yet members of His body. However, their willingness to listen to the truth and be convinced by it characterizes them with the “good ground” spoken of by Jesus (Mt. 13:3-8). These three thousand did not allow prejudiced thoughts, preconceptions, and family ties to keep them from hearing and heeding the truth of God.

As a result of their “hearing” these things, their faith in Jesus was established (as per Romans 10:17). Their knowledge convinced them and their faith allowed them to obey what the Lord (through Peter and the others) commanded of them (vv. 38, 41). They were willing to listen. As a result, the Lord directed them through the words of inspiration given on that day. Today, if men will listen, God will guide them through these same words of

inspiration.

They were a learning people.

Acts 2:41 states: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” They had listened intently to the words the apostles proclaimed. They thus learned of their need to obey the gospel and purify their souls (cf. 1 Pet. 1:22). Of the tremendous multitude present on that occasion, about three thousand listened, learned, and obeyed.

It is interesting to note the reaction of these who “heard this.” They “gladly received his word” and “were baptized” (v. 41). This was in complete harmony with what they had been told to do by these inspired men (v. 38). This command followed on the heels of their concerned question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (v. 37). They were concerned with their souls and their sins. Peter’s response was what they needed. Thus their repenting and being baptized were essential to their salvation, as it is to everyone this side of the cross.

Interestingly, together with the apostles they were referred to as a group as “all that believed” (v. 44). Who were these “believers” then? They were the ones who had obeyed the gospel—they had repented of their sins and had been baptized for the remission of their sins. Who are Christians today? Those who have (in like fashion as they) repented of their sins and been baptized for the remission of sins, based on their faith in and confession of Christ.

Truly, these were a *listening* and *learning* people. To become what they were, we must do as they did. Are you willing to listen to God (through the word He has given) and learn of His will for your life? His commands have not changed since they were given to this august group on Pentecost—nor will they.

They were a lively people.

Acts 2:42 states: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” They were a people “on the move.” They busied themselves in serving the Lord. Specifically, this passage deals with worship. It was in a “steadfast” way that they “continued” in this regard. Four particular areas are mentioned in which they continued in this fashion.

First, they were steadfast in “the apostles’ doctrine.” Jesus had earlier told these men, “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16:19). (What He told them literally was “whatever you bind on earth shall have already been bound in heaven . . . shall have already been loosed in heaven.”) How could this be? Recall that Jesus had told these apostles that the Holy Spirit would “guide you into all truth” (Jn. 16:13) and “teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Jn. 14:26). These men were thus speaking the words of Christ. When these new disciples at Jerusalem continued in “the apostles’ doctrine,” they were continuing in the doctrine of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Jn. 9).

Second, these Christians at Jerusalem “continued steadfastly” in “fellowship.” To be certain, there was fellowship with one other. However, fellowship with God had been attained and was now being maintained through their praise of and allegiance to Him. John reveals “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). The “fellowship one with another” in this passage is fellowship between man and God—vertical fellowship.

Third, they “continued steadfastly in “the breaking of bread.” Along with other references (communion, Lord’s Supper), this refers to the memorial

feast established by the Lord (Mt. 26:26-29) which all of His followers observe in remembrance of Him (1 Cor. 11:24-25) on "the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7).

Fourth, they were steadfast in praying. Prayer is a fundamental Bible doctrine. Every faithful follower of the Lord was a praying individual. Every faithful congregation of God's people was a praying people. It is not an amazing thing then to see that the church of Christ at Jerusalem was a praying group--and "steadfastly" so.

James reveals that "faith without works is dead," just as "the body without the spirit is dead" (Jas. 2:26). The Lord's church at Jerusalem was indeed alive and well, as their faith produced action. Thus, this *listening* and *learning* group was also a *lively* people.

They were a loving people.

Verses 44 and 45 reveal, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

Benevolence has always characterized the Lord's people. The old adage, "No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care" was realized by Christians long before it was ever put into such concise words. Considering what the remainder of the New Testament says about these matters of benevolence, caring, and love, it is no wonder that the first congregation of God's people was characterized by these traits. The phrase "love one another" appears 13 times in the New Testament (cf. Jn. 15:17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Jn. 4:7; etc.). Jesus portrayed love "one to another" as the badge of discipleship when He stated, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:35). Just as being a loving group characterized the Jerusalem church, it must also be a trait found with any faithful congregation of the Lord's people today.

Another item of note connected with this passage is the phrase "all that believed" (found in verse 44). The words "faith," "believe," and "belief" are often misused. Most often when the

Bible uses these terms it is in reference not to mere mental assent, but to trust conjoined with obedience. This is the case in this particular instance in Acts 2. Please notice who these were who were categorized as being "all that believed." They are found earlier in verse 41--"Then they that gladly received his word *were baptized* . . ." Those who had heard, received and applied (through obedience) the words of Peter were those who were described as being they "that believed." To be certain, the same is true today. One cannot be a "believer" who does not obey the words of the Lord (cf. Mk. 16:16; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Jn. 5:3; etc.).

They were a loyal people.

Acts 2:46 states: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." The temple was the center of life in Jerusalem at this time. It was the center of their former lives in Judaism. The sermon on Pentecost had been in this area. Those 3000 who had obeyed "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (v. 42). That would have included the command found in the commission given to the apostles in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The apostles had been taught to teach, baptize, and teach. They taught those who had obeyed in order that they might go and teach others to obey. The genius of God's plan is seen in Acts 8:1 when the disciples were "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria." Because they had been taught, "they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). These went their way sowing the seed of the kingdom (Lk. 8:11).

Further, the gospel's course had been revealed to the apostles by the Lord prior to His ascension. The gospel would begin at Jerusalem and progress through "all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"

(Acts 1:8). This beginning point is clearly noted in Acts 2 (in Jerusalem), and can be traced as the gospel progresses to Judaea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-12) and then throughout the world (Col. 1:6, 23).

The fact that the gospel was taken throughout the world in the first century was due in large measure to the loyalty of these gathered in Jerusalem, as they continued day by day in the "apostles' doctrine." Whenever the opportunity availed itself (in their case, because of persecution), they were prepared to teach others. How does this compare with the Lord's people today? Are you loyal in your service to God? Are you prepared and willing to teach others?

They were a likeable people.

Acts 2:47 states, "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." As seen, they had "favour with all the people." Considering the love they demonstrated for one other and their loyalty to the cause of Christ, it is little wonder that they were highly favored in the eyes of the community at the beginning. This trait, however, was short-lived.

While it is good to be held in high esteem by those around us, it is much more desirable to have the favor of God (Acts 5:29). For Christians in the first century, this favor which they had in the eyes of the world quickly eroded as the world began to see the consequences of truth and thus began to attack its messengers (Acts 8:1). Consequently, it is not surprising to read near the end of the book of Acts these words by "the chief of the Jews": "For as concerning this sect, we know that it is every where spoken against" (Acts 28:22). Now, the church, which at the beginning had "favour with all the people," is spoken of as "a sect" and is "every where spoken against." Neither the people nor the doctrine had changed. The knowledge that the truth condemned the worldly lifestyle of so many of these accusers is what made the difference. As seen in the valiant lives of these Christians, while the Lord's people should certainly seek to be likeable, such approval of the world cannot be maintained at the expense or compromise of truth.

“WHY SHE LEFT . . .”

Bill Burk, Seagoville, Texas

In recent months, a very close relative of mine decided that she and her girls would leave the church of the Lord for the supposed greener pastures of denominationalism. When I received the news I literally felt like the breath had been knocked out of me. The husband of this young woman is one to whom I am also very close. This man has never obeyed the gospel. I have written to him and spoken with him about it in the past but yet he never seemed to be very serious about the matter.

Now, he is also attending this denominational church with his wife and daughters. My fear is that he will determine that he needs to say some sort of “sinner’s prayer” and then be baptized into this denominational body, all the while believing that he has forged a new relationship with God, when in reality, he has only paid obeisance to the doctrines and commandments of men (Mt. 15:1-9).

The title of this article is “Why she left.” In reality, I don’t know why she decided to leave. I suppose some of it had to do with the entertainment this group provided for her children. I suppose some of it had to do simply with convenience in a number of areas. I may not know why she left the church of the Lord, but I do know why she did not leave. Consider . . .

She did not leave because denominational religion provides truth. I understand that those caught up in sectarianism do teach some truth. However, I know full well that they do not teach the whole counsel of God on many subjects (Acts 20:27). In fact, the Bible teaches that division (which is what

denominationalism is all about) is condemned in Scripture (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Will she ever hear in this denominational atmosphere that Jesus only built one church (Mt. 16:16-19; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4)? Will she hear that a person must be a member of this church to be saved (Acts 2:47)? No! Why? Because this truth strikes at the heart of what denominationalism is all about and condemns it.

She did not leave because denominational religion preaches the truth in regard to the plan of salvation. Most Protestant denominations teach that a person is saved at the point of faith without any acts of obedience whatsoever. When the question is asked, “What must I do to be saved?” The response is usually something like this, “Say this prayer with me: ‘Jesus, I am a sinner and I ask Your forgiveness and also that You come into my heart . . .’” It is at this point that most denominational folks will pronounce one saved. However, there is not one single example in Scripture of someone’s saying a prayer to become a Christian. In fact, when this question was asked for the first time, those who inquired were told to “repent and be baptized every one you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Jesus Himself said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16). You will never hear either one of these responses (which teach the same thing) in most denominational environments. A person is not saved by “faith alone” (Jam. 2:24) but by obedient faith which responds to the will of God

(Mt. 7:21-23). The young lady under consideration recently told my mother that as long as she has been attending this organization of men that she has never heard the preacher say anything wrong. I can guarantee this much, at the end of every sermon, when this man extends an invitation so that one can supposedly become a Christian, he has *never* said anything right! I know full well that he urges those there to, by faith alone, ask Jesus into their hearts, teaching all the while that they will be saved at that point. Again, the Bible teaches this nowhere.

Therefore many people are deluded and deceived, still in their sins, because they have never obeyed the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Certainly other things could be mentioned. I know she did not leave because the group she has joined worships in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24). I know she did not leave because the “church” she is now attending is found in the Bible, because it is not. I know she did not leave because this church is scripturally organized, because it is not. I know she did not leave because this group believes the truth about the second coming of Christ, because they do not. Why did she leave? I do not know. But I know this, when people leave the truth of God’s word for counterfeit religion, they leave the Lord (Mt. 15:13). What a shame. I pray that something will transpire that will change her mind. Until then, let us remember the words of the wise man who said, “Buy the truth and sell it not.” Truth is worth the stay (Jn. 8:31-32; 17:17). WOT

TWO PATHWAYS AND TWO DESTINIES

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

"The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" (Prov. 4:18-19).

These words of Solomon place before us a vivid contrast between "the path of the righteous" and "the way of the wicked." They tell us that from God's standpoint there are only two classes of people in the world--the righteous and the wicked.

The righteous are in the minority; the wicked are in the majority. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus stated that there would be many on the "broad way" that leads to destruction in contrast to the few on the "narrow way" that leads to life. Since the fall of man it has always been true that the righteous are in the minority. It was so in the days of Noah, when after 120 years of warning, only eight souls were saved (1 Pet. 3:20). It was true when only a few escaped God's judgment on wicked Sodom (Gen. 19:23-25). After almost two thousand years of Christianity, it is still true that the righteous are in the minority.

The righteous are in the light; the wicked are in a state of darkness. Christians are in the light because their source of light is Jesus (Jn. 8:12). They have been translated out of darkness into light (Col. 1:12-13). But how dark is the spiritual condition of every man who is without Christ (2 Cor. 4:4)! He is following a path that will lead to eternal darkness (Jude 13).

The path of the righteous gets brighter; the way of the wicked gets darker. The experience of the Christian is that of walking in the light (1 Jn. 1:7) which increases in brightness through the years. In contrast, the wicked stumble because they are in the darkness. They stumble through life, hoping for the best, but there is no real anchor or eternal hope (Eph. 2:12). What a bleak experience this is! Our wonderful Guide wants to take our hand and lead us through all the intricate pathways of life until at last we enter into His presence.

The righteous have a glorious prospect; the wicked have a terrible prospect. The righteous await a home prepared for them by the Carpenter of Israel (Jn. 14:2-3). The wicked have a bleak future ahead with no hope of escaping (Mt. 8:12). On which road are you traveling--the road that has a glorious prospect, or the road that has a terrible prospect? WOT

The Words of Truth

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1501 Sixth Avenue
Jasper, AL 35501

Address Service Requested

THE WORDS OF Truth

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The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama. It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

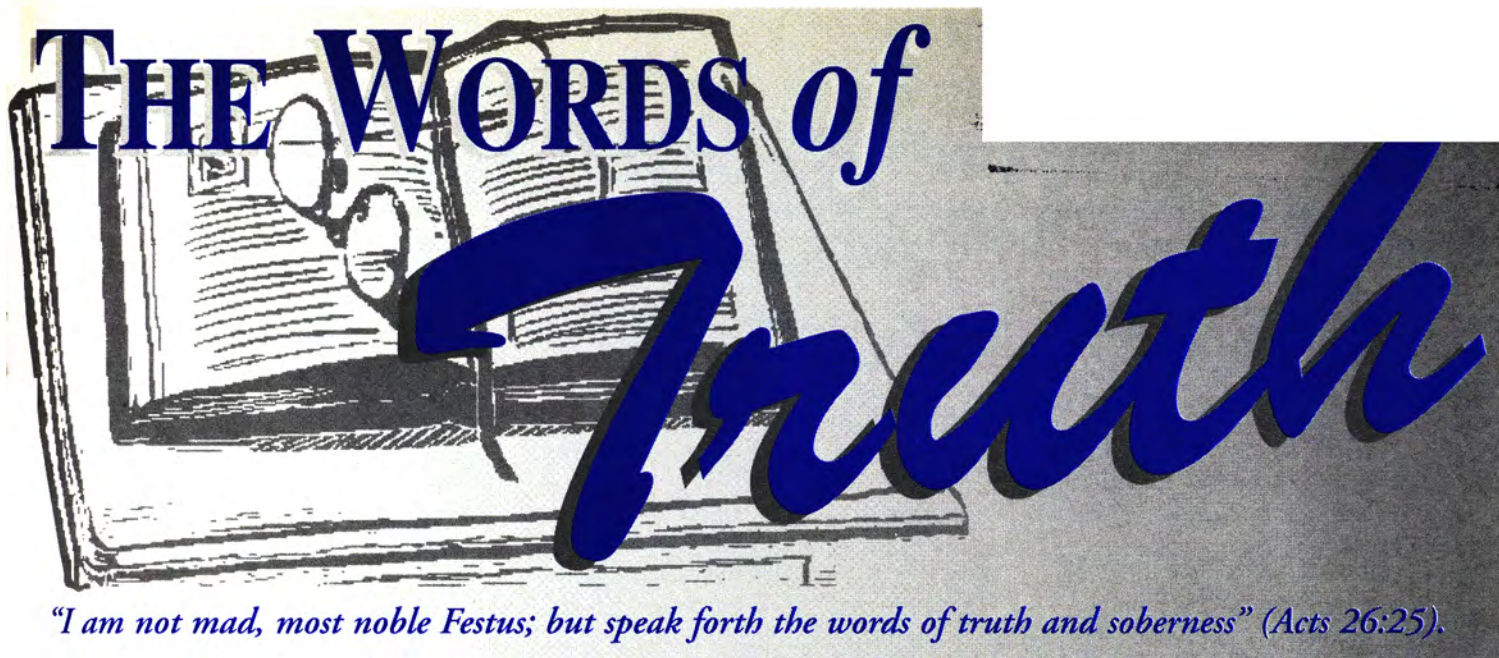
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AGED, GREATLY BELOVED, VALUABLE

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

"While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel . . . being caused to fly swiftly, . . . said, O Daniel, . . . at the beginning of your prayers a word went out, and I have come to tell you, because *hamudhoth* are you" (Dan. 9:21-23).

In God's appraisal, Daniel was *hamudhoth*, which has been variously translated as *very precious, highly esteemed, greatly beloved, and a favorite*. In a general sense all human beings in God's sight are precious and valuable: "Children are the heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psa. 127:3). However, some people to Him are much more valuable and desirable, dependent on their disposition and conduct. Daniel was one of these. In like manner, if Daniel was one of God's favorites, every human being can be if he so chooses, for God made them all, loves them all, and He is no respecter of persons.

The criterion for God's favoritism is not birth or race or wealth, but a

person's love for God with "all that is within" him (Psa. 103:1), with his soul, his heart, his might (Deut. 6:5). "The heart-knowing God" (Acts 15:8) perceived Daniel's deep love for his Maker, which caused God particularly to love and esteem Daniel. Do you have the faith that you can be in God's sight just as *hamudhoth* as Daniel?

Some people have an open line to the heavenly Father. These special people have power to put Heaven into immediate action. Not at the completion, nor in the middle, but at the beginning of Daniel's prayer God commanded Gabriel to fly swiftly from Heaven to Babylon so that Daniel would not be kept waiting for an answer. But, again, God's being no respecter of persons (no "face receiver"), prayers of all righteous people put Heaven into action. Prayers, not merely by Daniel, nor merely by miraculously endowed first-century elders (Jam. 5:14), but by twentieth century Christians operate powerfully (Jam. 5:16).

If Daniel's space-borne petition from Babylon to Heaven was in "the first year of Darius" (Dan. 9:1), then Daniel had been in Babylon 68 years (606-538 B.C.). If he were a lad, say of 16, when he was deported from Jerusalem to Babylon, then at the time of his attention-getting prayer he was quite an old man, 84 years. Of how much value to the empire was a weakened and fragile person? But spiritually he was the most valuable asset in all the Medo-Persian Empire. Jeremiah had commanded the Jews to pray for the city of Babylon when they were carried there (29:7). Daniel had read the book of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2), even making specific reference to Jeremiah 29:10. The prayers then of the aged Daniel for the peace of the nation had an audience in Heaven. By the same token, this writer has rejoiced in the knowledge that a Christian widow for 15 years, from age 75 to her passing at 90, never missed one day praying for his work.

UNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

PART 2 OF 2 - EPHESIANS 4:1-3

Chuck Webster, Editorial

One of Aesop's fables illustrates the danger of congregational division: A ferocious lion once prowled around a field in which four oxen grazed. On several occasions he attacked them, but whenever he came near they turned their tails to one another, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by a pair of deadly horns. At last, however, the four oxen began quarreling among themselves, and each went off to pasture alone in a separate corner of the field. The lion then attacked them separately and soon had destroyed all four. . . . Such is the sad consequence of division among God's people as well. Once Satan convinces us that our personal feelings and petty disagreements are more important than the unity of the Lord's body, he attacks us separately . . . and usually with great success.

Last month's focus was on the importance of unity and the tragic results of division. We now consider the attitudes necessary in order to maintain unity. Prior to his setting forth the seven "ones," Paul commands three prerequisites:

Develop a deep sense of our own "littleness" (Eph. 4:2a). Congregations of the Lord's church are composed of people who are *very* different. Our personalities are radically distinct in many cases, a truth that results from many factors:

- We come from different upbringings . . . Many were raised in Christian homes; some were reared by ungodly parents. *All* were reared differently.
- We have varied educational backgrounds . . . ranging, in most congregations, from very little schooling to post-graduate degrees.
- Our personalities are radically distinct . . . Some are quite introverted (quiet, shy); others are extroverted and gregarious. Most of us are somewhere in between.
- Our "genes" are distinct . . . Our environment certainly influences us, and we are free moral agents, but we have certain pre-programmed

tendencies (physical, mental, emotional characteristics).

From our genetics to our upbringing to our educational opportunities to our varied experiences, all of us are uniquely *individuals*. As a result, our congregations are made up of a hodge-podge of backgrounds and personalities, which, in turn, makes conflict inevitable. This conflict arises, more often than not, over matters of opinion and differences in personalities, instead of doctrinal disagreement. Friction of the former kind could virtually be eliminated if we took seriously Paul's command to be characterized by "lowliness and meekness" (Eph. 4:2a).

The word translated "lowliness" (*tapeinophrosyne*) is derived from a word which means *low*. Its verb form means *to bow down, to make low, to humble*. A related noun means *low, flat, bowed down, small, base, insignificant* (W. Grundmann, *TDNT*, Vol. VIII, pp. 1-26). *Strong's* expresses its metaphorical meaning clearly: ". . . a deep sense of one's (moral) littleness."

A deep sense of one's littleness . . . isn't that a central aspect of Christianity? The first words of Jesus' monumental sermon on kingdom-living were "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . ." (Mt. 5:3; all emphasis added). Just after Paul's admonition to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27), he gave the requisite attitude: "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:2-4). The last sentence is also translated, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (NASB). In other words, Paul says, "In your own mind, realize how little you are and put others before yourself."

The New Testament is replete with exhortations to lowliness: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, . . . humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Col. 3:12). We are to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10; cf. Lk. 14:7-11; 18:9-14; Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Paul then gives an example: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). But, we might ask, what kind of mind is that, Paul? He continues, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).

But what does it really mean to be lowly . . . to put others' interests before our own . . . to have a servant's heart like Christ's . . . ?

Other than the cross, here's the most beautiful and memorable answer: "Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, . . . And supper being ended, . . . He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded" (Jn. 13:1-5). What does it mean to be lowly, we ask? Lowliness is getting on our knees and washing the feet of our brothers and sisters in Christ. It's realizing that we don't always have to have our way. It's putting others before self. It is, in essence, doing just what Christ did.

Imagine what effect it would have on unity within congregations if all of us humbled ourselves, if we had a deep sense of our own littleness, if we looked out more for others' interests than our own.

But Paul isn't finished. He instructs

us next to . . .

Love one another (Eph. 4:2b). The aforementioned differences between people and the consequent friction also require that we be “longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:2b). Though Christians are trying to be Christ-like, there are times when all of us are, quite frankly, unlovable, or, at least, hard to love. Perhaps that’s the reason why brotherly love is mentioned so frequently in scripture.

In 1 John, the apostle emphasizes repeatedly the necessity of loving one another (cf. 3:11). Brotherly love is an indication that we have passed from death to life (3:14), that we are born of God (4:7), and that God dwells in us (4:12). We’re motivated to brotherly love as we consider Christ’s demonstration of His love for us (3:16; 4:11). This love is shown through *actions*, not just words (3:17-18). Most directly, the apostle pointedly says that one who says he loves God but whose actions suggest he hates his brethren is a *liar* (1 Jn. 4:20).

Our love for our brethren (or lack thereof) is seen most clearly in our responses when conflicts of personalities and opinions arise. Perhaps that’s why the closely related attitudes of forbearance and longsuffering are mentioned so frequently in conjunction with brotherly love. In his masterful description of *agape* love, Paul writes that “love suffereth long . . . is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; . . .” (1 Cor. 13:4-5). Just before he told the Colossians to “put on love” (Col. 3:14), he instructed them to be clothed with “longsuffering, forbearing and forgiving one another” (Col. 3:12-13).

Loving our brethren appears to be most often associated with two characteristics:

- *Longsuffering* (Eph. 4:2b) translates a word that means “patience, steadfastness, perseverance, forbearance, slowness in avenging wrongs” (*Strong’s*).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . longsuffering . . .” (Gal. 5:22).

“Strengthened with all might . . . unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col. 1:11). “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, . . .

longsuffering” (Col. 3:12).

- *Forbearance* (Eph. 4:2b - “forbearing”) translates a word that means “to hold up, to hold one’s self erect and firm, to sustain, to bear, to endure” (*Strong’s*).

It’s often translated “suffer,” as in Jesus’ criticism, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I *suffer* you? . . .” and also in Paul’s explanation of his reasons for tolerating persecution: “And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we *suffer* it” (1 Cor. 4:12). It is also used to mean “to be patient with, or bear with” as in 2 Corinthians 11:1: “Would to God ye could *bear* with me a little in my folly: and indeed *bear* with me” (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4,19,20). It often has the connotation of *endurance*, as in enduring tribulations (2 Thess. 1:4) or, in a negative sense, those who will not *endure* sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3). These usages might explain Paul’s choosing this word to describe an attitude of Christians toward their brethren. Literally, Paul urges us to “put up with” our brethren. *Be patient with them. Bear with them. Give them a little room for mistakes.* Obviously, Paul is not advocating any sort of doctrinal compromise, but he *is* urging us to *suffer long* with one another.

If we take the crucial principle of brotherly love and view it in terms of being longsuffering and forbearing with our brethren, we arrive at a good understanding of exactly what it takes to maintain unity in our congregations. As fallible human beings, we are going to make mistakes, saying and doing things that are hurtful, perhaps displaying attitudes that are sometimes characterized by thoughtlessness. We will occasionally speak without thinking; at other times we will be silent when encouraging words were needed. Our opinions will sometimes be clouded by emotions and skewed by feelings. Some of us will fall prey to the devil’s snares, being overtaken by faults, stumbling, perhaps even falling.

In view of our host of shortcomings, if a congregation is to be one, eschewing the divisions that have plagued so many churches, we must *suffer long* and *forbear* one another. The arrogant, my-

way-or-the-highway attitude in matters of indifference has divided many congregations (cf. 3 Jn. 9-10). Those of us who cast off, or at least lose faith in, our brethren at the first sign of spiritual weakness have forgotten one of the most fundamental attitudes of Christianity (cf. Mt. 7:1-5). Thank God He has been patient with us! How dare we *not* offer the same longsuffering spirit to our fellow strugglers?

If we’re going to be unified, not only will it take *lowliness*, and a deep *love* for one another, but we must also . . .

Be diligent (Eph. 4:3). “Endeavouring” translates a Greek word that, according to *Strong’s*, means “to hasten, make haste, exert one’s self, endeavour, give diligence.” Another lexicon defines it “to be zealous or eager, to give diligence” (G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 414). *Eagerness* appears to be an integral part of its meaning. In other words, unity won’t happen by accident. As one wise brother said, “Unity isn’t running around the brotherhood looking for a place to happen.” It will take eagerness on the part of elders as they oversee the flock (Acts 20:28), keeping a watchful eye out for signs of divisive attitudes. Preachers should be instrumental in preserving unity, making certain it is placed on a pedestal much higher than their opinions and feelings.

What a precious commodity unity is! The faithful congregation that enjoys oneness will consistently work with more optimism and vigor, will save more souls, and will, as a result, bring more glory to God--our ultimate goal (Eph. 3:21).

Sometime ago, a little child in an African tribe wandered off into the tall jungle grass and could not be found. The tribe searched all day, but couldn’t find the little boy. The next day the tribal members all held hands and walked through the grass together. This enabled them to find the child, but due to the cold night, he had not survived. In her anguish and tears, the mother cried, “If only we had held hands sooner!”

Let us all hold hands *now*, “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” WOT

WHAT DOTH HINDER ME TO BE BAPTIZED?

Todd Clippard, Hamilton, Alabama

This question was asked of Philip by the Ethiopian eunuch as recorded in Acts 8:36. Prior to this, Luke records that Philip had taken Isaiah 53 as his text and preached Jesus to the eunuch. Philip responded by asking for a verbal declaration and affirmation of the eunuch's faith in Jesus, to which the eunuch immediately responded, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (v. 37). Based upon that confession, Philip immersed the eunuch in water for the remission of his sins (vv. 38-39). But what if the eunuch had answered in some other fashion? What if he had said, "While in Jerusalem I saw many Jews being immersed in water, and, though I don't know why, it seems like something I need to do." Or, what if the eunuch had said, "I love God and want my sins forgiven, but I'm not sure about this man called 'Jesus.'" Would Philip have been justified in immersing the eunuch without further instruction on the purpose of baptism or the deity of Jesus? The point I am trying to get at is this—is it ever acceptable to refuse to baptize an individual? Some would say we never have a right to refuse to baptize anyone, but what does the Bible say?

In the Great Commission, Jesus said one must be taught before he can become a disciple—"Go and teach all nations" (Mt. 28:19). Mark's account says the gospel must be preached and believed before it can be properly obeyed (16:15-16). When Peter preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost, only those "who gladly received his word" were baptized (Acts 2:41). Would it have done any good to baptize those who

did not receive (i.e., believe) the message preached? Absolutely not! Thus, one who is not adequately taught is not a proper candidate for baptism.

Acts 18:24-19:5 teaches that one who is not properly taught cannot properly obey the gospel message. An area preacher was in his office when approached by a man who requested to be baptized. Since he did not know the man, he inquired of him as to why he wanted to be baptized. The man replied, "I'm going around to all the churches in the area who baptize to make sure I get the right one. I've been baptized six times already." The man was not interested in knowing what the truth was—he just wanted to have his bases covered. The preacher refused to baptize the man; was he wrong in so doing? Certainly not!

In Matthew 3, John the Baptizer was preaching repentance and baptism for the kingdom of heaven's sake (vv. 2-6). Verse seven says many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John to be baptized by him. What was John's response? He refused to baptize them! But why? Because they had not brought forth "fruits worthy of repentance" (v. 8). Thus, it stands to reason that we are not at liberty to baptize an impenitent person.

Getting back to Philip's message to the eunuch—it would have been quite similar to his earlier message to the Samaritans when he "preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). Acts 8:12 goes on to say that Philip preached to the Samaritans "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ." Now, consider what Jesus said about the kingdom of God:

(1) One must seek it first and foremost in his life (Mt. 6:33); (2) One must do God's will to enter it (Mt. 7:21-23); (3) It is like a treasure hidden in a field and a pearl of great price; one must be willing to sacrifice all he has to obtain it (Mt. 13:44-46); (4) To enter it, one must prepare and persevere (Mt. 25:1-13); (5) Anyone looking back after putting his hand to the plow is not fit for it (Lk. 9:62). Thus, anyone not willing to count the cost is not a proper candidate for baptism.

In past work, I emphasized the necessity of baptism while failing to teach properly the necessity of a lifetime of faithfulness to follow. This is why too many "new converts" failed to last more than a few weeks after their baptisms. Now, before I assist anyone in rendering obedience to gospel of Christ, I make sure he or she understands the commitment which follows the initial obedience. Read Matthew 10:34-38, Luke 14:25-35, and John 6:22-71 and see how Jesus warned his followers about the difficulties that lay ahead. We do people a terrible disservice if we do not adequately and properly teach them about the realities of Christian living. Anyone unwilling to accept the responsibilities of discipleship is not fit for the kingdom of God. In truth, to baptize anyone who is not adequately and properly taught about the demands of discipleship, including the demands of repentance, is to make a mockery of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us resolve never to be guilty of such!

GOD MAKES ME LAUGH

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

I like reading this biblical account (Gen. 17-21). A broad smile moves across my face every time my eyes meet the words of this inspired text—Abraham and Sarah were “expecting” their first child. Nothing special about that; millions of couples have anticipated the same blessing. However, the circumstances surrounding this particular birth were “unique”: 1) God had actually been talking about it for some twenty-five years (Gen. 12:4), and 2) Abraham was one hundred years old (Gen. 17:17; 21:5), while Sarah was ninety (Gen. 18:11-12) when the birth occurred. She had “passed the age of childbearing” [lit., the manner of woman had ceased to be with her].

Beyond the obvious miraculous intervention, one of the things that affects me about this story is all of the laughter. When God broke the “good news” to Abraham (Gen. 17:16), Scripture says that the patriarch “fell on his face and laughed” (Gen. 17:17). When Sarah heard the news, she laughed too (Gen. 18:11). Interestingly, when their son was finally born, Sarah was laughing again (Gen. 21:6) and the infant was named “Isaac” (Gen. 17:19), which meant, of course, laughter. My intent is not to be reverent, but I can’t help but notice that when God was talking, people were laughing. Perhaps Abraham and Sarah found it hard to take the Almighty seriously when He had made such an “outrageous” promise.

But as I consider the “humor” of His promise and birth of Isaac, I don’t want to miss the application of this narrative to my life today. Observe: God’s **time**. God actually started

talking with Abraham about his “seed” two and a half decades before Isaac’s birth (that’s a long time to wait for a baby!). As promised, the son was born “at the SET TIME” of which God had spoken (Gen. 21:2; 17:21).

Is it just me, or do you tend to grow impatient with the Almighty too? I want Him to work now—on my schedule, at my time. “Give me a microwave answer, Father!” I want to go through the “drive-through” and get my blessing. I want high-speed Internet access to the promises of heaven. Yet, the story of the promise of Isaac reminds me that deity moves at a different pace than I do. I’m on CST—Central Standard Time; God is on EST—Eternal Sovereign Time. I think in terms of seconds and minutes; He thinks in terms of years and decades. I need to learn to let God work things out on His time table. I need more patience (Jam. 1:4). Sound familiar?

God’s **word**. God blessed Abraham and Sarah with a son despite their advanced age—just as He had said He would. Note: “For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which GOD HAD SPOKEN to him” (Gen. 21:2). God said it and it happened. But do you remember what Sarah did when she first heard the promise? That’s right—she laughed (Gen. 18:12). Moments later, when God asked her why she laughed, she denied doing so (18:15a). My guess is that laughter was Sarah’s way of expressing doubt. Folks well into their retirement years don’t start having children.

Are you ever **tempted**, like Sarah, to doubt God’s word and His promises? “With all of my past sins, will He really save me?” “When I sin, will He really forgive me?” Be assured, dear reader, that He will (Psa. 89:34-35; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 10:23; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Pet. 3:9). God will do exactly as He has promised (Acts 2:38; 1 Jn. 1:9; cf. Heb. 6:18). Do you need to increase your faith (Heb. 11:11) . . . ? Read, study, and then trust God’s word (Rom. 10:17; Prov. 3:5-6).

God’s **power**. The bodies of Abraham and Sarah were miraculously rejuvenated (Gen. 18:10; 17:16). Abraham was “young enough” not only to father Isaac, but also six other sons by his second wife Keturah, after Sarah passed away (Gen. 25:2). Sarah was “young enough” again, not only to bear Isaac, but to nurse him (Gen. 21:7).

Now consider, if God could take a 100-year-old man and his 90-year-old wife and produce a son, then imagine what He’ll do with our mortal bodies at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35ff; 1 Jn. 3:2; Jn. 11:25)! This Old Testament story reminds me of God’s awesome power (Gen. 18:14; cf. Rom. 15:4; Psa. 68:35)!

Every time Abraham and Sarah spoke their son’s name, they would remember how they had laughed (in surprise and doubt) at God’s promise. Every time I read about Isaac, it prompts a joyous smile and a little laugh too—for God’s masterful control and manipulation of time and events, for His trustworthiness, and for His incredible might. WOT

WHAT OBEDIENCE IS ALL ABOUT

Henry J. Machado Jr.

We sing with passion, “Oh, how I love Jesus!” And then we step out and light a cigarette on the way to the car. We join in the chorus of, “Send the light!” Yet, we shrug as the collection plate is passed our way. We close our eyes and lift our voices to God, “Swiftly we’re turning life’s daily pages . . . Into our hands the Gospel is given.” When was the last time we spoke to someone about Christ? “Oh, how I love Jesus!” Yet, wasn’t it Jesus who said, “if you love Me, you’ll keep MY commandments”?

Obedience is about truly loving the Lord. That means dying to our sinful pasts and living each day for Him. Should there be a word uttered from our lips that doesn’t in some way praise God and promote the cause of Christ? No! Is there any activity in which we should be engaged for which we cannot give thanks to the Father? Not a chance! Obeying Christ is loving Christ, and

living FOR Him, IN Him, and THROUGH Him.

But oftentimes we have a slanted view of obedience. We’ve been baptized, we show up for worship at least once a week, and maybe even more! My ticket is punched! I’m a Christian, and the Lord is sure lucky to have me on His side! No, I don’t have time Saturday to help knock doors—I’ve got a golf tournament that day. What’s that? No, I can’t make it to Bible class Wednesday night. The job keeps me away late. And if by chance I do get home in time, well, I’ll be too tired. Sunday morning? Yes, I’ll be there. But not for class. It’s too early, and Sunday is the only day I have to sleep in. I’ll wander in just before they pass the bread . . . gotta have my ticket punched, you know. Sunday night?! I was already there for almost an hour Sunday morning! What else do you expect!? I’ve got a life—bills to pay, a

family to take care of. What song are we singing? “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! Sweetest name I know!”

Is this your view of the obedient, faithful Christian life? Is this what you feel is pleasing to Christ? It doesn’t please Him; on the contrary, it breaks His heart.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, left Heaven above and took on the form of man, the form of a servant. He lived the perfect sinless life that is to be the pattern for ours. He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross, so that you and I could live . . . for HIM! “If you love Me, you’ll keep MY commandments.” Not your desires, your appointments, your will, or your life . . . But HIS!

“Who will follow Jesus? Who will make reply? I am on the Lord’s side! Master, Here am I!”

WOT

HOW YOU SAY IT

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

Great movements in history were sparked and promoted by clear statements of purpose which others could hear and ponder and then follow. Such was the case with the restoration movement. In his little book *Up to Bethany*, a book about the restoration movement for the church of Christ, Howard Winters wrote, “The return to the original pattern meant that it would be mandatory to go back to the Bible as the complete and only authority in all matters religious—back to the Bible for every article of faith and every act of conduct. This concept had been well stated by Thomas Campbell even before Alexander came to America. Thomas Campbell, who was a well-respected Presbyterian preacher, had seen the evils of division and responded to it by

writing what is known as the Declaration and Address, in which he set forth the biblical principle of unity and the means by which it could be attained. A few rallied to his support. Robert Richardson, the biographer of Campbell, says that a special meeting was called by them in order to elicit a clear and distinct statement of the principles they had accepted and were advocating. Thomas Campbell proceeded to rehearse all the progress that had been made up to that time and then concluded his remarks by saying, “That rule, my highly respected hearers, is this, that where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” This became the slogan of the movement because it stated precisely and concisely the Restoration Plea—the plea to go

back to the Bible as the only divine source of faith and practice and to restore the church just as it was in apostolic times.

What a profound goal. To “speak where the Bible speaks” was simply to suggest that they should let God do the talking when it came to deciding what they would do in their religion. There were other similar “slogans” which gradually surfaced, such as, “Do Bible things in Bible ways, and say Bible things in Bible terms.” For this short article let’s focus on this one, and especially the last half. What is the value in our saying Bible things in Bible terms? That is, when we preach and discuss where we stand with reference to the particulars of Christian living and pleasing God, what is the value in using

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specific terminology straight out of the Bible?

Why should we say Bible things in Bible ways?

1. It puts our teachings most clearly in line with Bible teachings.

Many have become comfortable with the delusion that preaching can be good with little or no quoting from the Bible. It simply isn't true. In fact, sermons which contain little or no scripture are somewhat dishonest. By calling them sermons we imply that this is guidance from God. However, without the scriptures the sermon is not from God.

Furthermore, even if what we are teaching is in agreement with what the Bible says, we clarify that teaching when we refer to and quote the specific passages involved. Whatever else we say, we should make sure to clearly speak the passage.

2. It is a way to let the Lord speak through us.

Brother Gus Nichols once chastened a young preacher by saying that in his sermons he wasn't letting the Lord get a word in edgewise! That makes a strong point. Whether in our private discussions regarding spiritual matters, or in public teaching, saying Bible things in Bible ways by quoting the scripture lets the Lord speak through us.

3. It motivates us to be more accurate and honest with our application of the scriptures.

This is simply and obviously the case. It is much more difficult for a man to pervert a doctrine when he is quoting the passages of scripture relative to that subject. Of course he can quote and pervert at the same time (The devil does that, Mt. 4:6-7), but it takes more deliberate and deceitful strategy.

All who week-to-week prepare sermons and classes should be dedicated students of the Bible, and should pray often before study, "Father, help me to learn exactly what this passage is teaching so I may teach it to others."

4. It often makes it easier for communication to take place.

The best way and clearest way, according to the apostle Paul, to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" is to "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2).

It is appropriate of course for preachers to read a passage of Scripture and then in his own words give the context and practical applications. In Nehemiah 8 Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood and "Opened the book in the sight of all the people." Verse 8 says, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." It is right to "give the sense." Yet, we must never forget that simple statements directly from the Bible are the most important tool to help illuminate the minds of our listeners to what God wants from them.

5. It reduces the tendency for people to rely on a particular preacher instead of the Word.

Preacher Peter told a kneeling Cornelius to get up, saying, "I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:26). Then Peter went about to teach them "all things that are commanded thee of God" (Acts 10:33).

Although we may not like to admit it, a church tied to its preacher more than to the Word is a grievous sight indeed. It is right to love and appreciate the preacher (I'm glad for that!), but when he leaves them through moving or death, though they are sad, their faith shouldn't be hurt one bit. Saying Bible things in Bible terms builds faith (Rom. 10:17). That faith will stand and be renewed every time they read the Bible (Rom. 12:1-2), regardless of the individual who happens to be preaching that word.

6. It creates the circumstance in which other Bible believers can quickly correct our errors, thus benefiting us and our students.

We hear a lot today from religious teachers, who, though they are very educated, claim they have been frequently misunderstood in their

sermons and writings. While we have all found times when we are misunderstood, this is suspicious. Words mean something. Consider please that when we speak the "oracles of God," Bible things in Bible terms, we are clearly conveying thought. We may be wrong in our application of that passage of scripture, but even that misapplication would be clear because we had pointed to a specific scripture and claimed that we were teaching truth based on that. If our application is right we are right. If it is wrong, we are wrong. Either way, we speak clearer when we affirm that the Bible is truth, quote from the Bible, and then make the application.

7. It shows an appreciation of what our Master said in John 8:32, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

This statement from Jesus ought to motivate every preacher and teacher of the Bible to say Bible things in Bible terms. In the truth is where lies freedom from sin and destruction. And the purest form of truth is the Word of God. Every word is important. Jesus wouldn't have been pleased with statements today which promote a more laid-back approach to the Bible—statements like "The Bible is not a blueprint or pattern for our lives; it is a love letter." Jesus said, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4).

The word of God is truth (Jn. 17:17): "Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth." 1 Timothy 2:4 says, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Without truth people won't be saved, and how can they hear without a preacher to teach that truth? "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? . . . So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:14,17).

It is best to say Bible things in Bible terms.

WOT

CHANGIN' TIMES

Chuck Webster, Jasper, Alabama

Sometimes the rate of change around us is staggering, isn't it? Advances in technology during the last fifty years have completely modified the American cultural landscape. The pervasiveness of the media has shortened our attention span, decreased our family time, and revolutionized the political world. The Internet has changed, to a certain degree, the way we read the news, communicate, and even do business. Developments in cloning have created concerns about the wisdom of "experimenting" with life. For various reasons the traditional family is falling by the wayside. Where will it all stop? Are we on a never-ending downward spiral? When will we have time to do life's really important things? Do you ever find yourself wishing for the "good ole days" when everything was simple, when families found time for Sunday afternoons at Grandpa's house, when . . . well, when everything wasn't quite so advanced, so complex?

What we as a people are searching for is stability . . . in our country, our cities, our homes. Living on the ever-shifting sands of cultural transition, we need to return to the Source of stability: the unchanging Creator and His Word. In a world of change, Jesus is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). He is the "spiritual rock" (1 Cor. 10:4), the "chief corner stone" of the church (1 Pet. 2:6). He made certain that His inspired Word was preserved infallible, inerrant, and complete (2 Tim. 3:16,17). It, with no additions or subtractions, has everything we need to live the best life on earth, the Christian life, and one day to go to heaven. It alone offers the stability that we crave. WOT



Note to our readers: The elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ are looking for an associate evangelist to work with the Sixth Avenue church. All interested men should send their résumés to:

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
Attn: Elders
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The Words of Truth


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**THE WORDS
OF
Truth**

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The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama. It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



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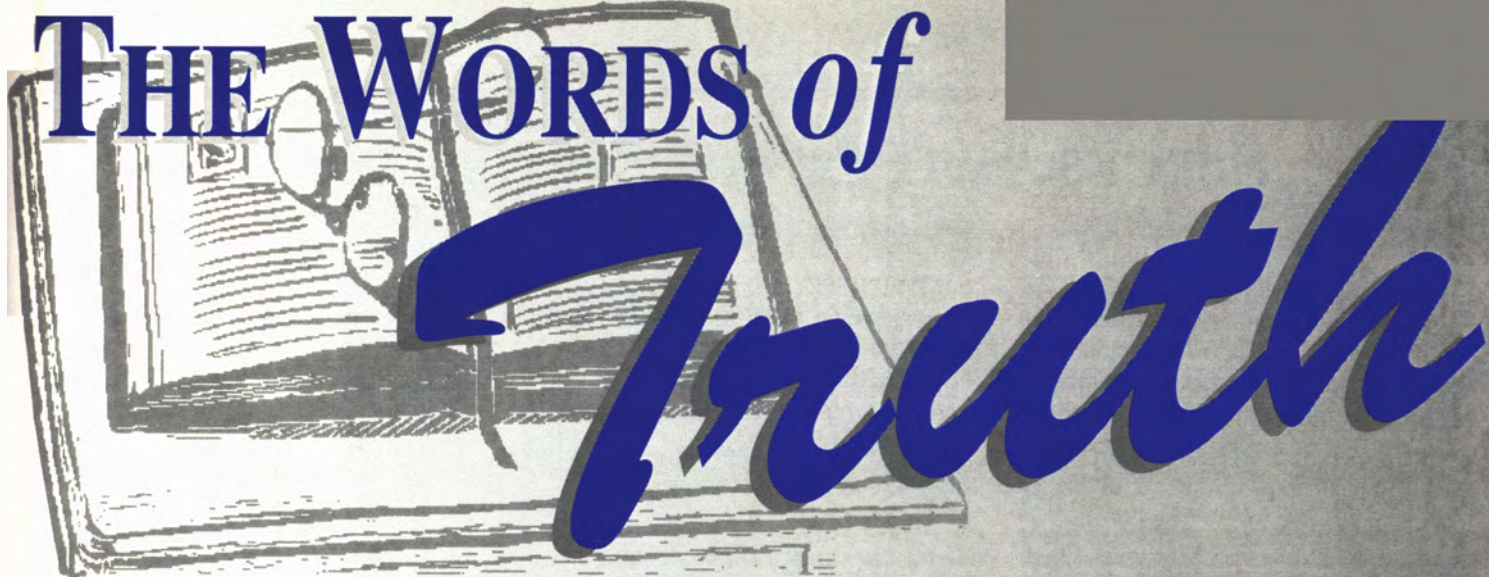
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THE WORDS of Truth

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

Vol. 38 No. 6

June 2001

DIVORCE AND THE GUILTY PARTY

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

[See The Christian Courier's excellent web site--www.christiancourier.com--for other exceptional articles]

Every now and then it pops up again. I speak of the notion that when a marriage has been dissolved by a biblically sanctioned divorce, i.e., on the basis of fornication—Mt. 19:9, the "guilty party" has as much right to remarry as the innocent victim. After all, it is alleged, if the innocent party is released from the guilty culprit, it stands to reason that the guilty is also severed from the innocent. Sound reasonable?

Superficially it may; actually, it isn't. In this brief article, let me provide some reasons as to why this theory is without merit.

The notion that the "guilty party" may remarry contemplates a union that is without scriptural authority. The New Testament grants the right of marriage to: (a) the never-married-before person (1 Cor. 7:2); (b) the widowed (Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:39); (c) the innocent victim in marriage breached by adultery (Mt. 5:32; 19:9).

Where is the authorization for the guilty fornicator to remarry? There is none.

Some are asking: "But where does the New Testament explicitly forbid the guilty party to remarry?" That's like

asking: "Where does the New Testament explicitly forbid two 'gay' people to marry?" Nowhere—in those precise words. The issue is: Where is the divine authority for such a union? It does not exist. What is authorized excludes what is not! To act outside the bounds of Christ's authority (Col. 3:17), is to act presumptively.

Furthermore, the idea that the "guilty party" is free to remarry is illogical. There is a principle in logic that suggests that any proposition implying an absurdity is itself false. The guilty-party-may-remarry view falls into this category.

For example, Matthew 19:9 clearly reveals that the person, in a divorce action, who is granted the right of remarriage, is the same individual who is granted the right of initiating the divorce. If it is the case that the guilty person is free to remarry, then it is equally clear that this unfaithful person is likewise granted the right to file for the divorce.

Here is the consequence of that reasoning. A man might desire to be rid of his wife. But she has been loyal to him, hence, he has no "cause" for

divorce. Never mind; according to the theory under review, he may commit adultery, then, on the basis of his own transgression, file for divorce.

Subsequently, then, he could—if he so chose—find a new companion. Has there been a more fanciful position? This view actually rewards fornication!

Too, consider this point. Jesus made it clear that any divorce for a non-biblical cause, i.e., no fornication is involved, prohibits either party from entering a new union. A man who grows weary of his faithful wife, and divorces her, cannot remarry; if he does, he commits adultery.

On the other hand, according to the "guilty-party" theory, if the gentleman who desires his freedom will just commit fornication, he will have the necessary justification for obtaining a divorce and entering a new marriage. Does this make any sense? None at all.

Divorce and remarriage are allowed only within the scope of divine authorization. All other sexual unions are prohibited. While this generally is viewed as a "hard saying," it is a necessary restriction for the ultimate benefit of society as a whole. WOT

SPECKS AND PLANKS: ON JUDGING (1)

MATTHEW 7:1-5

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Two extremes concerning the biblical prohibition of judging prevail. One is the common view that the Lord prohibited *all* judgments: “You can’t tell me that my actions were wrong because the Bible says ‘Judge *not* that you be not judged . . .’” Every person, it seems, no matter how biblically unlearned, can quote Matthew 7:1; many use it to condemn any sort of criticism, no matter how biblically based. The other extreme is that held by the hypercritical—those self-appointed judges who hold everyone to an impossible standard, one that even *they* cannot reach (though they typically overlook that fact). What, then, *does* the Bible teach? As so often occurs, the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes above.

The text under consideration reads: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Mt. 7:1-5, NKJV).

The Lord is *not* prohibiting all judging. As indicated above, the text is often misapplied to refer to *any* kind of criticism. How many elders, in trying to restore the erring, have heard Matthew 7:1 used to “condemn” their actions (e.g., “You can’t tell me I’m lost—Jesus Himself said that judging is wrong . . .”)? Yet making the Lord’s

words apply to *all* actions of identifying sin is absolutely ludicrous. At least three types of judging are not only allowed by God; they are *commanded*.

1. *We must judge sin in the church.* A blanket application of Matthew 7:1-5 would make Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 5 meaningless: Notice carefully Paul’s words: “I have **judged** already . . . **deliver** such an one unto Satan . . . [refuse to eat with a brother who is a] **fornicator**, or **covetous**, or **idolater**, . . . do not ye **judge** them that are within [the church]? . . . put away from among yourselves that **wicked** person” (5:3ff; emp. added). How, without making certain judgments, could the church “deliver” someone to Satan? . . . determine that a person was a “fornicator,” “covetous,” or an “idolater”? . . . “judge” fellow Christians? . . . determine that someone was “wicked” so that he could be “put away”? The fact is, it would be impossible to obey the Bible, both in this text and elsewhere, without judging.

2. *We must judge personal sin.* When the Lord dealt with personal offenses, which He frequently did. His instructions required making certain judgments. If a brother has “trespassed” against us, we are to go and tell him his “fault” (Mt. 18:15; cf. 5:23-24). Such a process would be impossible if there were no way for us to determine that he had indeed “trespassed” and committed a “fault.”

3. *We must judge the fruit of teachers.* The Bible repeatedly warns of false teachers (cf. Acts 20:29-31; 2 Pet. 2:1-3), and in almost every instance we are instructed to make a judgment:

▶ “Beware of false prophets, . . . Ye

shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Mt. 7:15-20). The only way to determine the quality of “fruits” is to “taste” (i.e., “judge”) them.

- ▶ “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). The word “try” translates a Greek word which means “to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals, to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy” (*Strong’s*). In fact, the word is sometimes translated “examine” (1 Cor. 11:28), “prove” (Lk. 14:19; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 8:8; et al.), “approve” (Rom. 2:18; 1 Cor. 16:3; et al.), and “discern” (Lk. 12:56). Is there not a hint of judgment implied?
- ▶ Elders must be able “to exhort and convince the gainsayers,” stopping their mouths (Tit. 1:6ff). In order to do this, they are forced to make certain judgments in order to identify the “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers” (Tit. 1:10).

Clearly, as the above cases illustrate, the Lord is not prohibiting *all* judging. Lest we be guilty of weakening His intent, though, we must admit that Christ *was* prohibiting something. That will be the focus of next month’s editorial—the conclusion to this brief study.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

"It's All About Me." That's the saying on the car tag frame I see nearly every day. You know, I would love to shake the hand of whoever came up with that one. In fact, I'd like to shake the rest of him, too, in the hope that I might shake some sense into him.

Is that really the message America needs? Aren't we self-centered enough as it is? Truly, the man who lives only for himself runs a very small business. What a bankrupt business it is, at that.

According to the Bible, it's hardly about the individual at all. In fact, the Lord makes a strong point of it to call our attention to others. Paul says, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). "Selfish ambition" is condemned in scripture (Phil. 1:17; Gal. 5:20). In fact, James says, "For where envying and strife (literally, "selfish ambition") is, there is confusion and every evil work" (Jam. 3:17).

That is both provable and measurable. Abortion is a horrid, evil practice—the most literal way one

sheds innocent blood (cf. Prov. 6:17). What is at the heart of the commission of every such abomination—whether one pleads inconvenience or hardship or brutality (as in rape)? Self-interest is. Selfishness is putting self above others, in this case taking another human life to protect selfish interest.

Adultery is a contemptible crime, ripping families apart and giving what may be the most intimate heartbreak a human is capable of experiencing. What compels someone to lie to God and others (breaking vows and covering indiscretions)? What drives one to fill physical and emotional needs (read: wants) in ways that fly in the face of God's holy, written Will? Selfishness does!

Every New Testament writer roundly renounces false teaching (Matthew—Mt. 7:15; Mark—Mk. 13:22; Luke—Acts 13:6; Paul—Gal. 2:4; Peter—2 Pet. 2:1; John—1 Jn. 4:1; Jude—Jude 4ff; James—Jam. 5:20). Untold millions of people will lose their souls because of false doctrine. Hell will be populated with followers of false teachers (cf. Mt.

7:21-23) and the teachers themselves (cf. Jam. 3:1). The New Testament gives insight into some common motivations that drive men and women to teach false doctrine. The motives are so often selfish. Jude says of them, "Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (Jude 11). Greediness propels folks to "practice every kind of impurity" (Eph. 4:19). What is the problem? Too often it's unmixed, shameless selfishness.

I will never make it to heaven if my attitude is that "it's all about me." It is not all about me. It is all about Him. It is about Jesus—serving Him, obeying Him, and imitating Him. It is about the lost—loving them, teaching them, and winning them. It is about the church—helping it, strengthening it, and supporting it. Selfishness is unattractive, howbeit common. Remember, the one who lives for self alone usually dies the same way. *WOT*

NEEDS OF CHILDREN

Ben Wright, Carbon Hill, Alabama

The pediatrician to whom we take our young son is a good doctor, one who always takes time to explain to us the amazing development of our child, Braden. At every visit we receive a paper which includes his length and weight, among other things. One feature it contains is entitled "Things Baby Needs"—a list of several things that parents must provide in order for children of his age to grow and develop properly. They are very basic points, but things that are so vital for the growth of every child. It's interesting to notice that, in a spiritual sense, our heavenly Father has provided everything on this list for *His* children.

Talk to them. Communication from parents to children is vital in helping mold them into adults.

In a similar way, we need our Father to talk to us—a need which He has graciously provided in His inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Throughout all stages of history God has talked with His chosen people in various ways (Heb. 1:1-2). He speaks to us now through His Word, and He wants us to listen to Him daily. How would we, as parents, feel if we went days without talking to our children, or if we talked, but our children didn't listen? It would certainly be a terrible feeling. It must also hurt God tremendously when we rarely take time to listen to Him speak to us.

Listen to them. I love listening to my young son. I cannot understand anything he says, but he still tries to communicate to me.

God wants to listen to *His* children. Many passages illustrate God's desire to hear us (1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Jn. 3:22; Lk. 18:1). He has even promised that anything we ask will be given if it is according to His will (1 Jn. 5:14-15). How would *we* feel if our children would not speak to us for extended periods of time? It must certainly hurt God when we, out of negligence or apathy, fail to speak to Him. **Hold them.** There is not a greater feeling for parents than to hold your children up close and feel their warmth and realize how much you love them and they love you.

For children of God, we are held in His hand, and no one is powerful enough to remove us (Jn. 10:28-30). It is shameful that this passage has been

so distorted and misinterpreted by those who teach that one can never fall from grace. This passage in no way teaches this incredibly false doctrine. It does, however, show us the great love God has for us, and His desire to keep us protected from Satan and all his worldly charms. The only thing that can remove us from God's hand is *our* desire to leave. All parents cringe when they hear about a child who leaves home prematurely. It is terrible to think about a child's separating himself or herself from the loving care of parents. How

sad it is for children of God to give up the love and protection of the Father for the things of this world.

Love them. What a travesty it is to hear about those who neglect their children. Children must be loved in order to develop properly.

God loves us *so* much (Jn. 3:16), demonstrating His care so vividly that we must recognize there is nothing He could have done to have shown it more clearly. He wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and has done everything to make

that possible. Hearing stories about the way some people treat their children is heart-rending. There is no greater crime that one could commit than to abuse a child. God loves us all and desires the best for each of us.

God truly cares for us—His children—providing everything that healthy children need. The decision, now, is *ours*—we must choose whether or not to take advantage of these provisions.

WOT

SEVEN TRAITS FOR BIBLE TEACHERS

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

Nothing is more vitally important than properly communicating the Holy Scriptures. The most valuable moments of life are spent studying and teaching and living the sacred text of the Bible. God's word furnishes us completely unto every good work and will ultimately judge us in that last great Day (Jn. 12:48). Those who teach the good Book must evince deep respect for its contents, strive to live by its precepts and manifest a keen desire to constantly improve in knowledge, ability, and presentation of the revelation of God to man. Let us now carefully consider seven special attributes of teachers who desire to excel in heaven's sight as they share the message of eternity with their students.

Courage. Teachers who agree with every thought expressed regardless of how bizarre the comment are not good teachers but cowards. Issues that need to be met head on will take valor and the willingness to take unpopular stands for the sake of truth. If every member of the church were as uncertain as some Bible class teachers we would be in for "a heap of trouble." Teacher, manifest the courage it takes to defend the truth at all times!

Christ-likeness. In Ephesians 3:17-21 we are challenged to deepen into the image of our blessed Savior. Elsewhere the New Testament demands that we have the mind and spirit of Christ. When those who teach the Bible fail to be like the Master, our words will die out in the air. Hot tempers, sharp words, and vindictive attitudes will nullify the value of the classroom.

Contriteness. Humility was one of

David's greatest virtues. A reading of Psalm 51 proves that. An ability to sincerely confess faults is a mark of spiritual power and not a sign of weakness (Jam. 5:16). Teachers that portray a "know-it-all" attitude will not be well received by students. An ability to laugh at self endears any leader to his friends. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul admitted that it was by the grace of God that he was able to do anything worthwhile.

Common touch. A teacher that comes across to the class as arrogant and out-of-touch with the average student will not be listened to very well. In Mark 12 we learn that the common people heard Jesus gladly. Jude wrote concerning "the common salvation." Our Lord was the ideal Teacher because "he knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:25). Great teachers use understandable words that comprise a vocabulary that truly communicates.

Compassionate. Empathy is a tremendous quality but hard to find in many people. Unless a Bible teacher reaches out in loving concern a lot of students will never be blessed. In 2 Corinthians 10:1 we read of the meekness and gentleness of Jesus. Even toward those who were determined to be His enemies, Jesus prayed for their conversion (Lk. 23:34). In Matthew 9 our Redeemer looked upon the lost with compassion because they had no Shepherd. He also manifested love for little children. I have never known an effective Bible teacher who had a disdain for children.

Conversant with God. No man or

woman could ever be a successful Bible teacher who failed to study and know the Holy Scriptures. We cannot teach what we do not know. We cannot serve the One we do not know (2 Tim. 1:12). Teachers are also failures unless they converse with the Father via the powerful avenue of prayer. When we talk to God in prayer and allow Him to talk to us through the sacred text we become more valuable assets as teachers.

Cheerful giver. No one will ever ardently speak of a cause he is unwilling to generously invest in. The essence of Christianity is giving. God so loved that heaven gave the best it had. Christ so loved that He gave Himself at Calvary (2 Cor. 8:9; 9:15). A great Bible teacher is one that cheerfully gives time, effort, talent, and money to the cause of the Lord. When such people teach the message of the cross students listen with open hearts, ears, and minds. Unless we love to teach our pupils will hate to learn. A stingy person will not be able to fully and freely communicate the glad tidings of redemption. *Give of your best to the Master; Give of the strength of your youth; Clad in salvation's full armor; Join in the battle for truth.* When we truly love the Scripture (Psa. 119:97) the classroom will be more vibrant as our hearts burn within us (Lk. 24:32) as we purpose fervently to cleave to the Lord (Acts 11:23). *I sought to hear the voice of God; I climbed the topmost steeple; but God declared, "Go down again"; I dwell among the people.* The joy of teaching the Bible ought to be the magnificent obsession of every Christian.

WOT

KEEPING MARRIAGES HAPPY

Neil Richey, Lynchburg, Virginia

Moses penned these words, "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him . . . Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:18, 24). God's purpose for this marriage relationship was and is for procreation, companionship, and to avoid sexual immorality (Gen. 1:28; 2:18; 1 Cor. 7:2). Furthermore, God intended that the marriage relationship be a happy one. Before we can *keep* marriages happy, we must first *make* them happy. The old adage says, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Those who are contemplating marriage need to know how to make a marriage happy. First, keep yourself pure from sexual immorality. Save yourself for your mate. Second, know what the Bible teaches concerning marriage. Third, know the person you want to marry. Fourth, consider the counsel of those who are older. When you make a marriage happy, you can then work on *keeping* it happy.

Keep your marriage happy by connecting with one another. Married couples need to spend time together. Couples should complete tasks together. Couples need to travel together. Get out of the routine and daily grind. Try not to be like the couple who says, "We haven't been on vacation together for ten or fifteen years." Couples should be intimate with one another. Why did you date the person who is now your mate? Was it because you desired to have an intimate relationship with him or her, not only sexually, but physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially? Couples should share meals together. Decide that you will sit down on at least one meal a day together. Wives, be sure that the meal is ready at that time. Husbands, be there. Make that mealtime pleasant. It should not be a time for arguing. Couples should

share entertainment and recreation together. Husbands, share in the activities that your wife enjoys, and vice versa. Couples should share in things of an eternal nature. Husbands and wives, never forget your Creator. Study the Bible together, pray together, and worship together. Married couples were made by God to do things together.

Keep your marriage happy by communicating with one another. Married couples need to take time to talk to one another and to God. Oftentimes, those in the marriage relationship who have the most difficult time communicating are the men. Husbands, one of the greatest things that you can do for the happiness of your marriage is to carry on a conversation with your wife. This does not mean that every conversation is to be a deep philosophical one. It can be simple "chit chat." Have conversations that pertain to the spiritual growth of your souls. Talk about your children and their future. Above all, communicate with God. Half of that communication is Bible study, and the other half is prayer. How many marriages have landed "on the rocks" while the couple practiced daily Bible study and prayer together?

Keep your marriage happy by correcting the little problems. Married couples need to take time to solve the little problems, because every problem is potentially a great one. Don't play with problems; don't minimize them; don't suppose that the passing of time will automatically take care of them. Solomon said, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes" (Song 2:15). Little problems are often more dangerous than big ones. They are more numerous. They are harder to keep out of marriage. It is harder to recognize little problems. They quickly grow and multiply. And

too, they frequently have a destructive ability that exceeds the glaring, larger problems. Paul reminds us to take care of our problems, ". . . let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph. 4:26).

Keep your marriage happy by confessing your faults and seeking forgiveness. Married couples need to take time to confess their wrongs and seek forgiveness. James said, "Confess your faults one to another . . ." (Jam. 5:16). When you say or do something wrong, do you ask forgiveness? For that matter, are you even willing to confess that you were wrong? Some husbands and wives are so bull-headed that they will not apologize for offending their mates. Do away with your pride and seek the forgiveness of your spouse.

Keep your marriage happy by seeking competent help from time to time. Married couples need to take time to seek *competent* help (with an emphasis on the word *competent*). There are well-meaning friends to whom you should not turn for counseling. There are some quacks in the marriage counseling field. There are some physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and preachers who do not share your respect for the Bible, belief in the reality of sin, and the sacredness of life. You are only inviting more trouble when you turn to these. Couples, at times, must seek an objective party to help them identify a problem so that the unity of that relationship can be maintained. This could be a good elder, preacher, or even professional. On the other hand, it is not often the best to go to parents, in-laws, or even friends, though there can be exceptions to the rule.

In all of these things, both the husband and the wife have a responsibility to God and to each other to make an honest attempt at keeping their marriage happy. May God bless the Christian home.

FIVE KINGDOMS

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

As God's prophet, Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar about a gigantic "statue"; its "brilliance" was "extraordinary," and its "appearance was frightening" (Dan. 2:31, NRSV). The head of the statue was of "fine gold," representing Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (Dan. 2:32, 38, NRSV). The "chest and arms" were "of silver," pointing to another "kingdom" arising after Nebuchadnezzar's (Dan. 2:39, NRSV). The "middle and thighs" of the statue were "of bronze," pointing to a third kingdom ruling over the whole earth" (Dan. 2:32, 39, NRSV). The legs were "of iron mixed with clay," pointing to a "fourth kingdom, strong as iron" (Dan. 2:33, 40, 43, NRSV).

Then "a stone was cut from the mountain not by hands" which "struck" and "crushed" the statue (Dan. 2:34, 45, NRSV). "But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35, NRSV).

As the stone "crushed" the statue, so a fifth kingdom "set up" by "the God of heaven" would "crush" the four "kingdoms," and would "stand forever" (Dan. 2:44, NRSV).

Daniel had revealed a word picture of unfolding history. Isaiah had already called Babylon "the golden city" (14:4, ASV), and now Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the head of "fine gold" is "you" (Dan. 2:32, 38, NRSV). Historians date his empire as lasting from 606 B.C. to 536 B.C.

The "chest and arms of silver" (Dan. 2:32, NRSV) on the statue pointed to the silver ornaments that would be worn by the soldiers of the Medo-Persian Empire (536-330 B.C.).

The bronze "middle and thighs" (Dan. 2:32, NRSV) pointed to Alexander's Greek Empire (330-65 B.C.), with soldiers having armor of bronze.

The legs were of iron, and the feet were of iron "mixed with clay" (Dan.

2:43, NRSV), pointing to the Roman Empire (65 B.C.-476 A.D.). The Roman emperors wore crowns made of iron.

Unfortunately, the *Interpreter's Bible* tries to eliminate Rome as being Daniel's fourth kingdom. But if the Medo-Persian Empire points both to the silver and the bronze kingdoms, then what Daniel said that God would do in the days of the iron empire—set up an indestructible kingdom (Dan. 2:44)—did not come to pass.

The error of this interpretation can be seen in three points: (1) It is clear that the Medes and Persians are counted as one kingdom. "The ram which thou sawest, that had the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia" (Dan. 8:20). (2) The fourth kingdom is stronger than any of the three preceding kingdoms. It has the strength of iron as opposed to gold, silver, and brass. This was not true of Alexander's empire but it was true of the Roman Kingdom. (3) The consummation of these things is to take place in the latter days (Dan. 2:28; 10:14). The New Testament writers identify the latter or last days with the time of the Roman kings and not Antiochus Epiphanes (Acts 2:16-17; Heb. 1:1) [Glen Mayfield, *Gospel Advocate*, November 24, 1977, p. 739].

After Daniel had described four kingdoms made with hands, that is, with physical military might, then he described a fifth kingdom made "without hands" (Dan. 2:44-45, ASV). It would become a reality in the "latter" or "last" days (Dan. 2:28). While Rome, the iron kingdom, was very much in control, Jesus carried on Daniel's teaching, announcing that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15).

The establishment of that kingdom which Daniel had promised was, in fact, so close "at hand" that Jesus said some bystanders would live to see the

kingdom of God "come with power" (Mk. 9:1). That power came on the day of Pentecost, Sunday, May 28, A.D. 30 in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4).

On that day, for the first time came the announcement that Jesus had gone to heaven "to sit on" David's throne (Acts 2:30). David's throne had now become spiritual, a kingdom made "without hands," without military might. As distinct from Rome's kingdom, Jesus' kingdom "is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36).

As distinct even from David's kingdom, Jesus' kingdom is invisible, yes, "inside" (*entos*, Lk. 17:21, FHV) of all its citizens (Lk. 17:20, FHV). Essentially it is in no way external, but wholly inward, a kingdom of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

At the very moment penitent believers in Jesus are "buried with him in baptism," they are "transferred" into "the kingdom of God's beloved Son" (Col. 1:13; 2:12, NRSV). Their "citizenship" is "in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), but they are recognized in this world as "God's family" (1 Tim. 3:15, FHV), commonly called "the church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15, NRSV).

The church is the fruition of "the eternal purpose" of "the only wise God," the realization of "things into which angels" had longed "to look" (Rom. 16:27; Eph. 3:10-11; 1 Pet. 1:12, NRSV). It is glory to Him and joy to the angels when they look down from heaven and see lost sinners born again and saved, and added to his called-out people, the church (Lk. 15:10; Eph. 3:21; Acts 2:47).

Virgil (B.C. 70-19 A.D.), a pagan Roman poet, envisioned the fulfillment of Daniel's prediction about the last days in his poem "Eclogue":

The last age, decreed by Fate, is come: And a new frame of all things is begun, A holy progeny from Heaven descends. Auspicious be his

birth! Which puts an end; To the iron age! And from whence shall rise, A golden state glorious through the earth!

Not only a pagan Roman poet, but also a learned British historian understood Daniel's iron age to refer to Rome:

The arms of the republic, sometimes vanquished in battle, always victorious in war, advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and the ocean; and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome (Edward Gibbon, 1727-1794, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, IV, ch. 38, p. 104, *apud* H.N. Sargent, *The Marvels of Bible Prophecy* [London: The Covenant Publishing Co., Ltd., 1938], p. 123).

The effect of Daniel's stone cut out of the mountain is vividly seen in Edward Gibbon's truly objective summary of Christianity, especially since he personally was a skeptic:

While that great body [the Roman Empire] was invaded by open violence, and undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphal banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol.

Nor was the influence of Christianity confined to the period or to the limits of the Roman Empire. After a revolution of thirteen or fourteen centuries, that religion is still professed by the nations of Europe, the most distinguished portion of human kind in arts and learning as well as in arms. By the industry and zeal of the Europeans it has been widely diffused to the most distant shores of Asia and Africa; and by means of their colonies has been firmly established from Canada to Chili [sic], in a world unknown to the ancients . . .

Our curiosity is naturally prompted

to inquire by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth (Edward Gibbon, *The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, edited by J. B. Bury [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958], pp. 1-2).

Then Gibbon listed five reasons for the triumph of Christianity: (1) zeal; (2) the doctrine of immortality; (3) alleged miracles; (4) pure and austere morals; and (5) church organization.

Flavius Josephus (37-95 A.D.), the famous Jewish historian, along with Gibbon, was a reader of the book of Daniel:

Daniel did also declare the meaning of the stone to the king; but I do not think it proper to relate it, since I have only undertaken to describe things past or things present, but not the things of the future; yet if any one be so very desirous of knowing truth, as not to wave such points of curiosity, and cannot curb his inclination for understanding the uncertainties of futurity, and whether they will happen or not, let him be diligent in reading the book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings (*Antiquities*, 10, 10, 4).

The editor of the above copy of *Antiquities* added a footnote:

Of this most remarkable passage in Josephus concerning the "stone cut out of the mountain, and destroying the image," which he would not explain, but intimated to be a prophecy of futurity, and probably not safe for him to explain, as belonging to the destruction of the Roman Empire by Jesus Christ, the true Messiah of the Jews, take the words of Havercamp, ch. 10, sect. 4: "Nor is this to be wondered at, that he would not now meddle with things future, for he had no mind to provoke the Romans, by speaking of the destruction of that city which they called the Eternal City."

Isaiah (2:2) and Micah (4:1) had preceded Daniel in writing that "the mountain of the Lord's house" would

become a reality in the "last days." Their prediction coincided with Daniel's announcement that a stone "cut out of the mountain without hands" would itself become "a great mountain" and would fill "the whole earth," and that this would occur in the "latter days" (Dan. 2:28, 35, 45, ASV).

The phrase "latter" or "last" days has become a description of the time span of Christianity. Peter quoted Joel as saying that what happened on the day of Pentecost (when the kingdom, the church, was established) was in "the last days" (Acts 2:17). Later, Peter wrote that what Jesus did on this earth was "in these last times" (1 Pet. 1:20).

Also, the inspired author of the book of Hebrews wrote that "in these last days" God speaks to us by his "Son" (1:2). If he meant the last days of Judaism up to 70 A.D., one wonders how God has spoken to us since 70 A.D., and one wonders how 1900 plus years can be after the "last day."

Furthermore, the phrase "the end of the world" in Hebrews 9:26 cannot mean anything but that Christianity is the last religion. Similarly, the phrases "the ends of the world" (KJV), or "the completion of the ages" (1 Cor. 10:11, FHV), refer to a time that had already arrived in Corinth in 57 A.D., which means those phrases point to the entire time span of Christianity.

The fact that Jesus will be with His apostles "to the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20, KJV) tells us that the phrase "the last days" describes all the time from "the beginning" of Christianity until the world is "burned" (Acts 11:15; 2 Pet. 3:10-11).

Finally, Daniel's fifth kingdom is distinct, not only because it was (1) made without hands, and (2) is not military, and (3) is invisible, but also because it is indestructible. Even "the gates of Hades" cannot prevail against it (Mt. 16:18). Indeed, Christians have received a kingdom that "cannot be moved" (Heb. 12:28). It is established "with judgment and with justice henceforth even forever" (Isa. 9:7). God has determined that "it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44).

SHE JUST CAME ONE TIME

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

I still remember the anticipation I felt when she agreed to come to worship with me. We were both seniors and had been friends through twelve years of school. It was the first time she had shown spiritual interest, and I was hopeful it would bloom.

Bible class was excellent that Sunday morning. My friend was intelligent—the valedictorian of our class—and the teacher was bringing out some thought-provoking insights. The only problem was that the talking going on behind us distracted her. A boy and a girl in the youth group were disrupting the class, and I noticed that she kept glancing back at them with obvious irritation. Afterward all she said was that those two “sure did talk a lot during class.”

I still held out hope for worship. The preacher still had a good chance to plant some seeds and his topic was right on target. She never heard that sermon, though. I could tell she was trying to listen, but three of the young people behind us were talking so much that she got angry. I tried repeatedly to get them to be quiet. They would glare hatefully at me and quiet down for a few minutes. Before long they were at it again, giggling and whispering. She left with a memory of a bad experience and never came back.

How many times could this story be repeated in congregation after congregation? To borrow the language of James, “My brethren, these things ought not to be this way” (Jam. 3:10b, NASB). In context, James was highlighting the use and misuse of the tongue: with it we bless God and curse our fellow man (3:9).

When we come to worship, let our mouths be so busy blessing God that no one around us will be cursed. Oh no, we would never directly curse anyone in worship! But would we do so indirectly? Someday someone very much like my friend will come to hear a word from God and will sit down within earshot of you. If you bless God it will in turn bless that seeker. Please, oh please, do not curse a precious, seeking soul by a misuse of your tongue. WOT



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The Words of Truth

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THE WORDS OF Truth

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The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama. It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



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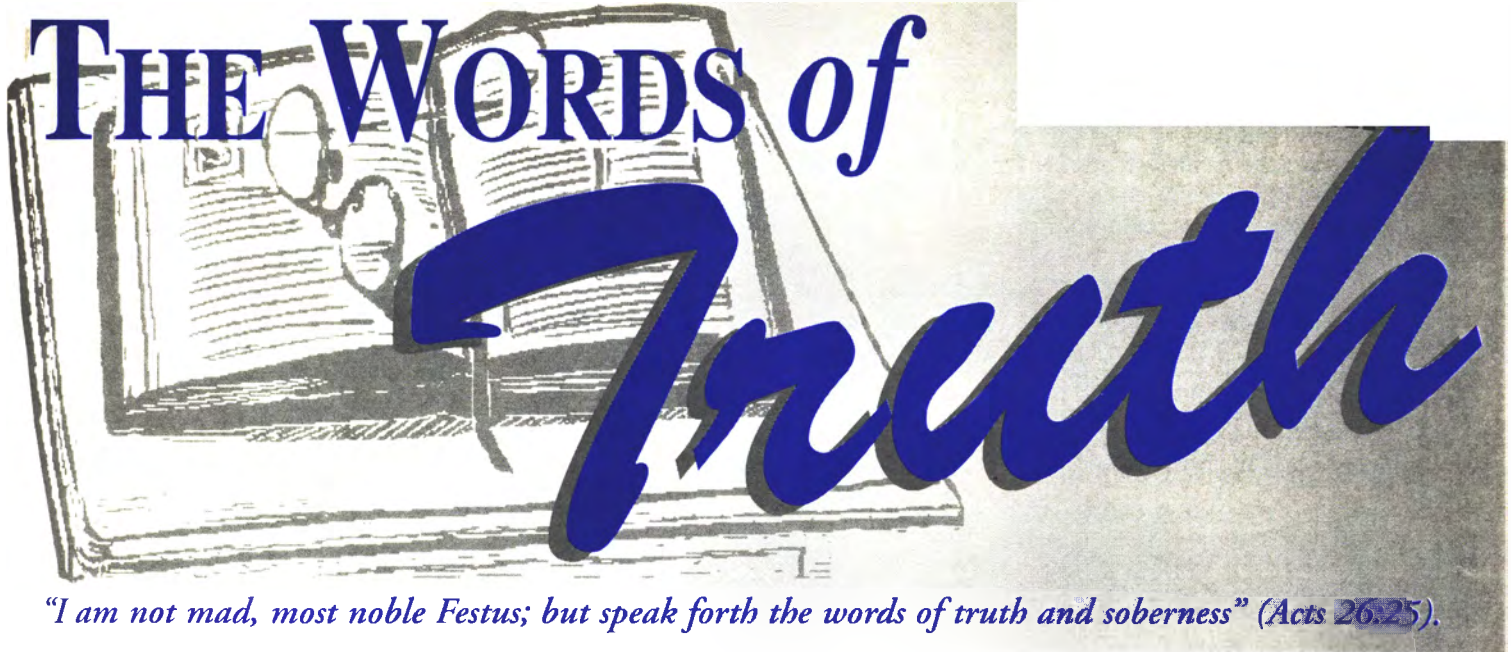
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ARE YOU A “MIMIC”?

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

It is likely that every parent has heard his child complain about a sibling or other child “mocking” him. It is likely that every child has been on either the giving or receiving end of such harassment. In such a situation the mockery is done in a teasing and often hurtful fashion. It is not a pleasant thing to be mocked after this manner. However, there is a way in which imitation is commanded of those who are Christians. To be certain, it is not to be done in the fashion in which children often do it. This form of imitation is governed by God’s word and commanded of His people.

The Greek word *mimeomai* is used on four occasions in Scripture. It has as its root the word *mimos* (from which we get the English word “mimic”), and is translated “follow” or “imitate.” Thus, it is commanded on these four occasions that those addressed be “mimics,” “imitators,” “followers” in some fashion. Notice these instances and the fashion in which we are to “mimic” others.

The first two uses of this word are

found in 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9. Paul said, “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow [*mimeomai*] us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you” (v. 7); and, “Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow [*mimeomai*] us” (v. 9). Under consideration in these passages (as the context reveals) is the fact that Paul and his companions labored when they were among the Thessalonians. They literally worked with their hands to provide for themselves. Thus, Paul stated to these people “that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (v. 10). Therefore, we are to follow Paul’s example and mimic him in our willingness to labor and provide for our necessities.

A third use of this word is found in Hebrews 13:7. The passage says, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow [*mimeomai*], considering the end of their conversation.” Those designated as the ones who “have the rule over

you” are elders. Those of us who serve under them in the local congregation are to “mimic” their faith. The only way this can be done is if their faith is an active faith. The only way we can be imitators of such is by having an active faith. Elders have a tremendous responsibility to lead. Members have a tremendous responsibility to follow (mimic, imitate).

A final use of this word is found in 3 John 11. Here the Bible states, “Beloved, follow [*mimeomai*] not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.” Jesus stated, “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (Jn. 3:20). In order to be God’s “mimic,” we must imitate that which is good.

Are you a follower of those who labor physically, those who lead fearlessly, and of that which is labeled faithful? God demands your imitation of that which is right. Are you a “mimic”?

SPECKS AND PLANKS: ON JUDGING (2)

MATTHEW 7:1-5

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Last month's editorial considered what the Lord *did not mean* in His oft-quoted prohibition of judging in Matthew 7:1-5. We now direct our attention to the kind of hyper-critical spirit He had in mind.

In a Connecticut city, fifty-three residents of a certain neighborhood signed a petition to stop reckless driving on their streets. The police set a watch involving two squad cars parked inconspicuously at different locations. A few nights later five violators had been caught . . . *all five of them had signed the petition!* (Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, p. 165). Perhaps some of us have been guilty of similar inconsistencies, and it is precisely this attitude that the Lord was condemning. Some judging is wrong:

1. Hypocritical judging is wrong. The Lord's speck and plank metaphor is at once both humorous and, because of its sober implications, serious. Imagine the laughable image of a man with a "plank" (NKJV: KJV—"beam"; NASB—"log") embedded in his eye trying his best to clear from his brother's eye a "speck" (NKJV, NASB; KJV—"mote"). Yet the humor is clouded somewhat by the stark realization that such deluded people are numerous. In a similar vein, Paul convicted the Jews with pointed questions: "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" (Rom. 2:21-23, NKJV). His conclusion preceded the questions: "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things" (Rom. 2:1).

Because elders must shepherd the

flock—a duty that sometimes demands loving correction—the Lord expects them to be blameless (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6-7). This qualification is given, in part at least, to silence (or at least quieten) the oft-heard response from those being chastened: "How can *you* correct *me*? You're guilty of similar sins . . ." For *all* of us, though, the Lord's admonition is relevant: *examine self first . . . then, if necessary, correct your brother.*

2. Judging based on appearance is wrong. Thomas Edison was expelled from school on the basis that he was "too dumb to learn." Alfred Tennyson was given ten shillings by his grandfather for writing a eulogy for his grandmother with the following "encouragement": "There, that is the first money you ever earned by your poetry, and take my word for it, it will be the last." Benjamin Franklin's mother-in-law hesitated at letting her daughter marry a printer. There were already two printing offices in the United States, and she feared that the country might not be able to support a third. We scoff at such obvious prejudice, but have we ever been guilty of the same?

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment," the Lord said (Jn. 7:24). We must never let one's appearance influence the way we treat him (Jam. 2:9: "If you show partiality, you commit sin, . . ."). But how many of us have been tempted to prejudge someone by the color of his skin? By the quality of her clothes? By the accent in his speech? By the ghastly skeletons in her closet? We continue to struggle with the vestiges of racism—believing that race somehow excuses our treating people of one race with a different set of standards. We sometimes look down our moral noses at the depravity of the world. We often place too much emphasis on appearance—clothing, attractiveness, possessions. The Lord,

however, was unconcerned with one's physical race (Lk. 10:30-37; Jn. 4). His favorite company consisted of vile sinners (Lk. 7:36-50). He scorned social customs by talking to women in public (cf. Jn. 4). He was, quite simply, unconcerned about appearance—something in which so many people today place such great confidence.

3. Judging without being fully informed is wrong. When someone approaches us with a potentially damaging story about another person, how do we respond? We should, of course, follow biblical principles and refuse to believe it unless there is evidence beyond this person's testimony (cf. Mt. 18:15-20). But that isn't our natural inclination. Following our instincts, we greedily hunger for every detail, perhaps even subconsciously add a few of our own (to make it more interesting), and then share it with others with a quick preface: "Keep this between us, but did you hear . . . ?" Remember one of the characteristics of agape love? It thinks no evil and does not rejoice in iniquity, Paul says (1 Cor. 13:5-6). Peter admonishes us to have "fervent love" among ourselves, "for love shall cover (not "spread through gossip"—cw) the multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). The next time we hear something awful about brother so-and-so, refuse to believe it. Be skeptical. Go to the accused and get the facts. After all, isn't that his right?

4. Judging hearts and motives is wrong. Though the Lord says that a "good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Mt. 12:35), we must still be extremely careful in making judgments about someone's thoughts and motives. Christ was able to know people's thoughts (Mt. 9:4; cf. Mk. 2:8) and make statements about the nature of their hearts (Mt. 13:15; 15:8). God knows our hearts (Jer. 11:20; 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chron. 28:9; 29:17; Psa.

7:9) and will one day “make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5) and will “judge the secrets of men” (Rom. 2:16; cf. 14:12). We, on the other hand, are incapable of looking into people’s hearts and knowing their motives. And yet we’re so often tempted to think, *I know that’s what he said, but what he meant was . . . The reason she did (or said) that was . . .* The fact is, we need to be careful about making judgments about people’s hearts and motives. Using God’s word as our guide, we can make judgments about *actions*, but let’s leave the heart-judging to God.

5. *Judging harshly is wrong.* Perhaps

the point to which Jesus spoke most directly in Matthew 7 is the tendency of many of us to judge others more critically than we judge ourselves. If I think impure thoughts, it’s an aberration; however, if *you* do it, it reflects an evil heart. If *my* children are aggressive and rambunctious, they’re “just being kids”; *yours*, on the other hand, are “wild and unruly.” If we’re not careful, we’ll have one set of standards for us and our families, and another one—a much more difficult one—for everyone else.

Notice the result of this kind of double standard: “For with what judgment you judge, you will be

judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” In other words, if we judge others harshly, holding them to an unreachable standard, God’s mercy will also be withheld from us.

Is it *wrong* to judge? Yes. Is it *right* to judge? Yes. The distinction, as we’ve seen, is in the *way* we judge and *what* we judge. Perhaps the best rule of thumb is a slightly modified version of the time-honored principle which the Lord stated in the immediate context: “The kind of standard and attitude you want others to use in judging you, use the same with them . . .” (cf. Mt. 7:12).

WOT

THE PILGRIM MENTALITY

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

1 Peter 2:11: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul . . .”

Some church members really wrestle with commitment. They simply cannot conceive of their involvement in the Lord’s church at any higher level of importance than most of the other clutter swirling around them every day. When they choose to not support the work of the church in worship assemblies, evangelism, benevolence, and edifying the young and old, they simply reason in their hearts, “I was just too busy.” Some have convinced themselves of the value of the statement, “I’m involved in so many things that I have little time left for church involvement.”

In the verse which begins this article, Peter beseeches, or *begs*, Christians to abstain from activities which would hurt them spiritually. He, like the Lord, loved people and their souls, and didn’t want them to be hurt here or in the hereafter. But observe how he wanted them to see themselves: strangers or pilgrims. Do you see yourself this way? Until you do, there’s little chance you will be permitted to walk those pearly gates after judgment.

Let’s define terms. The word

“stranger” is found also in Ephesians 2:19 where it is translated “foreigners.” It describes one who is without the rights of citizenship, one who is a sojourner. It means that Christians are not citizens of this world, but of another. The word “pilgrim” describes one who travels to a distant place from his own country to visit. A traveler. A tourist. It means that Christians are to realize that they are not here permanently, but are just passing through. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and not here on earth. We will be in heaven forever, yet here only for the time it takes a vapor to dispel into the air (Jam. 4:14). We live here for now, but we are not citizens here. Our eternal home is heaven (Eccl. 12:5).

Think of the implications of how Peter has described us:

- ▶ We should not *think* of this earth as our home.
- ▶ We should not seek to acquire permanent possessions here as if we are to remain here.
- ▶ We should not allow ourselves to form any attachments or arrangements which would impede our journey to our final home. We should steadily pursue our journey. Some, it seems, are just too busy and attached to die and go to

heaven—“*There’s just too much to do here.*”

- ▶ Even while engaged here in the necessary activities of life—our studies, our jobs, etc.—our thoughts and loves should be on other things. A man in a strange land would naturally think much of his country and home. Even though he might busily carry out his duties, his heart would be somewhere else.
- ▶ We should not encumber ourselves with so much of this world’s goods that it becomes impossible for us to make the journey to heaven. A traveler or pilgrim who brought too much luggage would be so burdened under the weight that he would never make his destination. We make the best progress when we are least encumbered on our way. Possessions are blessings if they make our Christian walk to heaven easier, but are curses if they make our walk more difficult.

Spend some time looking into the mirror of God’s word (Jam. 1:25). Take a good look at yourself and the way you view the priority of your soul’s best interest. It will change you for the better and make you even more valuable in the greatest cause on earth.

WOT

EXORCISM, DEMONS, WITCHCRAFT, ASTROLOGY

Dave Miller, Bedford, Texas

Demons

Where did demons come from?

Many theories have been advanced to account for the origin of demons. Some say demons are the offspring of angels cohabiting with women (Gen. 6:1-4), but angels are sexless beings who are incapable of such unions (Mt. 20:30). In Genesis 6, the term "sons of God" and "daughters of men" is an idiomatic expression for the intermingling of good people with bad people. Some say demons are the spirits of wicked dead men whom God permitted to leave the Hadean realm to indwell some people in harmony with His divine purposes. Still others say demons are fallen angels who were allowed to escape their confinement (cf. Jude 6) to accomplish some divine purpose. The fact of the matter is that the Bible simply does not tell us where demons came from, so there is no point in dwelling upon the matter.

Bible descriptions of demons. The Bible does tell us many things about demons. For example, demons were spirits (Mt. 8:16; Lk. 24:39). Demons are always depicted as unclean, evil, and malevolent since they are always associated with Satan's influence (Mt. 9:34; 12:24, 43, 45; Lk. 11:15).

Demons are also shown to be conscious, intelligent entities. They possess true knowledge of God and Christ. In Mark 1:24, a demon spoke to Jesus and said, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." Demons exercised volition and locomotion (cf. Mt. 12:44-45).

Demons frequently caused physical

and/or mental illness. For instance, in Matthew 9:32, the victim of demon possession experienced the inability to talk. Such illnesses were distinguishable from the demons themselves (Mt. 4:24). Some say demons have actually never existed and that the Bible account of demons is simply the superstitious, pre-scientific explanation of epilepsy and other physical or emotional disorders. However, in the New Testament a clear distinction is made between demons and illnesses which a demon might cause. Some demons had super-human strength (Mk. 5:4; Acts 19:16). No reason is given in the New Testament for why certain individuals were singled out for demon possession. Men (Mt. 9:32), women (Lk. 8:2), and even children (Mk. 7:30) experienced demon possession.

What was the purpose of demons and what was their relationship to God? It is clear from the Bible that God had ultimate control over them. For example, in Luke 10:17 we read that the seventy disciples of Jesus returned from their preaching tour and reported, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us through your name."

A careful study of the New Testament will disclose the fact that demon possession was divinely permitted to show the *supreme authority* of Christ and His inspired representatives. During His earthly stay, Jesus demonstrated His power over (1) nature and the created order (Mk. 4:31), (2) disease (Mk. 1:32-34), (3) material things (Jn. 2:9), (4) death (Jn. 11:44) and (5) the spirit realm and Satan (Mk. 1:27).

This supreme authority and manifestation of power set the stage for the establishment of His kingdom.

In Luke 11:20 Jesus said, "But if I with the finger of God cast out demons, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (cf. Jn. 12:31; Eph. 2:2; 4:8; Col. 2:15; Acts 10:38; Lk. 10:17-20; Mt. 12:28-29). We should pay attention to John 3:8 which teaches that "he that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." Tie that verse in with Hebrews 2:14: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

These passages show that when Christ effected His death, resurrection, and kingdom, Satan's power was dealt a blow which resulted in a measure of limitation. He is restrained to the extent that direct influence over a human being is excluded. Just as the ability to *expel* demons has ceased (Mk. 16:17; 1 Cor. 13:8-10), so the ability of demons to possess humans has ceased. When direct miraculous ability gradually ceased, as the apostolic age drew to a close, so demonic activity also ceased.

Differences between the Bible description and today's claim. The above description depicts the Bible picture. How different it is from the claims being made today regarding demon possession and Satanism. In the New Testament, Jesus expelled evil spirits *publicly* and before multitudes of people (Lk. 4:36), but the work of so-called "exorcists" today is hidden, and only reported second-hand.

In the New Testament, expulsion of demons was effected by a *word*, with immediate results. “And Jesus rebuked the demon, and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour” (Mt. 17:18; cf. Acts 19:12). But exorcism today is a long, drawn-out process in which multiple attempts are made. In the New Testament, demon possession caused the malfunction of otherwise healthy body traits. You simply do not find anything resembling the claims made by some today who supposedly are demon possessed—fire coming from the mouth, bulging eyes, transparent teeth, green slime-spewing, and electricity emitted from the fingers.

Another significant difference between the New Testament and today’s claims is that in the New Testament account of demon possession, the demons were respectful of Deity and acknowledged Jesus as the “Holy One of God” (Mk. 1:24; 3:11). Demons knew that Jesus would ultimately banish them to torment (Mt. 8:29). They did not blaspheme Deity, but claims today include curses and blasphemy directed against God.

In view of these biblical facts, what must we conclude? Demons do not possess people today. The Old Testament predicted that demon possession would cease in the first century:

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land (Zech. 13:1-2).

The occult and the Bible

In addition, the Bible everywhere condemns those who practice spiritualism, sorcery, witchcraft, astrology, and all other forms of divination. Listen to Moses’ warning to the Jews as they were about to enter Canaan:

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. You shall not be blameless before the Lord your God. For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so (Deut. 18:9-14, NASB).

You see, to God all of these “magical” arts are an abomination. Isaiah declared that all of Babylon’s sorceries and spells would be unable to avert the punishment that God would inflict against her (Isa. 47:8-15). Indeed, the Bible repeatedly portrays all those who claim sorcerous powers as fakes and counterfeits (see Gen. 41:8; Ex. 7:10-12; Dan. 2:2-11). Read about Simon in Acts 8 and Elymas in Acts 13. All these sorcerers and astrologers were fakes and had no *real* power, although they fooled a lot of people

into thinking they did.

All such devotion to supposed “power” is condemned by God because it presents itself as a substitute for God—the one and only *True Power* of the universe. No wonder that witchcraft is listed as a work of the flesh in Galatians 5:20. No wonder the Bible states that “sorcerers . . . shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

The Bible speaks decisively and definitely on the subject of demon possession, witchcraft, astrology, sorcery, divination, enchantment, and wizardry. With a united and concerted voice, God’s word condemns it and pronounces it false. People could be possessed by demons for a brief period of time in the first century—but this phenomenon has ceased. Those who wish to be Christians—those who wish to be pleasing to God—will give no credence to such claims today. Oh, I suppose many of us like to break open that fortune cookie at the Chinese restaurant and read the note inside. We might even occasionally glance at our horoscope in the newspaper. But such should be *only* a source of amusement, because there is absolutely no validity to it. The moment a person puts trust in it, and thinks that the future is determined by such—he or she is trusting in something other than God, and is condemned.

The only reliable guide is the Bible. It is “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path” (Psa. 119:105). The word of God is living and active, quick and powerful (Heb. 4:12). It is “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). By that word we will one day be judged (Jn. 12:48). May we set aside all other claims to guidance and rely solely and strictly on the Bible, the wonderful words of life—the word of God.

EVIDENCE OF LOVE

Gus Nichols (1892-1975)

Let us think seriously about love. However, someone is ready to say, "Why think about such a dry theme? Why not consider something important and timely?" Well, love is the most important and timely theme in the Bible. It is the very hub of the wheel of the gospel (Jn. 3:16). Paul declares that love is greater than faith, important as faith is, and that it is more important than hope, and we are also saved by hope (1 Cor. 13:13; Rom. 8).

We must love God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds, and all our strength (Mt. 22:37-39; Lk. 10:25-37). This means we must love God with all the powers of our being—love God supremely and put Him first in our hearts and lives.

We must also love Jesus, the Son of God, and make a total commitment unto Him (1 Cor. 16:22). All mankind should and must love God and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Christ also loves us, and the love is so deep that He died for us when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:5-12; Col. 1:20-22; 2 Cor. 5:12-16). It is no strange thing, therefore, that we should be required to love Jesus in order to be Christians.

What are the evidences?

But how may we know that we love God? What are the certain and unmistakable evidences of our love for God and for His Son? We cannot know just by our feelings, for feelings are often deceptive. Some of the most wicked and rebellious characters known unto us are deceived in this matter. They will say, "Why, of course, I love God," while right then they are in the depths of sin and shame. As a rule all sinners who believe in God would claim to love Him, and the same is true of backsliders. With their lips they claim to love the Lord. They say they love Jesus, and they claim to be friends of God and friends of Christ. But do they really love Him? Are they His friends?

Jesus says, "Ye are my friends if ye

do whatsoever I command you" (Jn. 15:14). Are you keeping the commandments of Jesus? Have you obeyed the gospel of Christ (1 Pet. 4:17; Rom. 10:16)? Are you now keeping the commandments of Jesus? He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). Again, someone may say he loves Jesus but has not gotten around to keeping His commandments. But Jesus again says, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (Jn. 14:21). Someone may say, "I know I love Him, and I am not even trying to keep His commandments." But this is a deception on our part. Jesus says again, "If a man love me he will keep my words" (Jn. 14:23). "Well," says one, "I know I am not keeping His commandments, but somehow I know in my heart that I love Jesus." But hear Jesus again, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (Jn. 14:24).

It follows, then, that none love Jesus except those who are faithful Christians and who keep His commandments. Those who refuse to obey the gospel don't love Jesus. Neither do church members who refuse to attend the services of the church. Nor, those who fail to worship as it is written. And no backslider loves Jesus who wants to be restored and forgiven without confessing his sins before the church which knows of his sins of negligence, and willful refusal to worship and help to build up the church. One of the Lord's commandments is to attend the services of the church (Heb. 10:25; Acts 11:26; 1 Cor. 14:23).

Of course, God does not require those physically, or mentally, unable to come to do so. But God knows the difference in mere lying—excuses—and in real inability to attend. God knows who wants to attend and cannot, and those who do not want to come and worship, and are offering excuses instead of loving obedience. God

knows those who are unable to sing, and unable to give, and unable to read the Bible, and those unable to teach others, and those unable to invite and bring others to the services, yes, and God knows the other crowd, too.

Some other evidences:

1. We love to think of those we love—and often cherish lovely thoughts about them. It makes us happy to think of them. Does it make you happy to think of God and His Son? Or, are your thoughts of God and Christ a sort of terrifying experience? Do you entertain the thoughts that God is angry with you, and is chalking up all your sins against you, and perhaps just seeking some sort of a pretext to damn you in a devil's hell forever? Do you love to think of God? Do all your thoughts of God make you happy?
2. We also seek to please those whom we love. The loving husband seeks to please his wife in all that is right and scriptural (1 Cor. 7). And the wife seeks to thus please her husband. Yes, and all who love God seek to please Him. Even Christ did not please Himself, but the Father, even to the giving of His life for us (Rom. 15:1-3; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Pet. 3:18-21). Those who love God seek to please the Lord. "Will the thing please the Lord?" (Mic. 6:6-7). Are you a member of the church which pleases the Lord, or one seeking to please the people, regardless of the will of God? (Gal. 6:10; Mt. 7:21; 1 Jn. 2:17). Jesus came to do the will of the Father, not His own will (Jn. 6:38). He loved his Father. Do we love Him? Do we seek above all things to please God? His will is in the New Testament.
3. We are happy to be with those whom we love. It made you happy for the children to come during the holidays, and you enjoyed being with them, for you love them. Do you love to be with the Lord? Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Mt. 12:30). God is with us only so long as

we abide in his doctrine (2 Jn. 9; Mt. 28:20). Do we love to meet with the Lord in worship? He is never absent from scriptural worship (Mt. 18:20). 4. We love to listen to those whom we love—we like to hear them talk. We do not stop our ears when they want to say something to us, as in the case of sweethearts. We love to hear every word. Do we love to hear God talk? He only talks to us in the Bible (Jn. 3:16; Heb. 1:1-2; Neh. 9:30; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). Do we love to read the Bible and to hear God talk? Do we listen? 5. We also love to talk to those whom we love. Do we love to talk to God in prayer? There is no other way for us to

talk to Him (Eph. 3:14-21; 1 Thess. 5:17-18). Are we on speaking terms with God? Do we pray? Often? Do we love God?

6. We have an abiding concern for the things of those whom we love. We are interested in their interests. Are we concerned about the church and the things of God? Do we care whether or not His gospel is preached unto every creature in the world? Do we love the things of God? Are we interested in His Cause? Do we care whether or not the church grows and prospers? Jesus loved the church (Eph. 5:25; Acts 20:28). Do we love it? Are we Christ-

like?

7. We love those who are loved by one whom we love. Do we love the children of God? John tells us that if we love God who has begotten His children, we will love those also who are begotten of Him (1 Jn. 5:1-14). Do we love our brethren, begotten of God? (Jam. 1:18; 1 Cor. 4:15). Do we love them enough to wish to be with them in worship? DO WE LOVE GOD? DO WE LOVE JESUS? If not, we are in sin and lost and should be greatly alarmed concerning our lost condition. Remember, love is the greatest thing in the world (1 Cor. 13:13). *WOT*

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, WA

Since all responsible human beings are sinners (Rom. 3:9,23), and “since all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10), everyone, along with the Philippian jailor, should ask, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Paul and Silas replied to the jailor, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and your household will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is the plan of salvation, the whole of it. But believing, faith, is a package word, beginning with a mental conviction, but also including other commandments. Mental conviction alone, faith only, will save nobody, for even an “unclean spirit” told Jesus, “I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mk. 1:24). Also many “among the rulers believed in” Jesus, but “they were not confessing, lest they be expelled from the synagogue. They loved praise from men rather than praise from God” (Jn. 12:42-43).

Though salvation is not achieved by what sinners do, salvation being “not of works” (Eph. 2:9), yet “faith without works is dead” (Jam. 2:26). Even the mental conviction itself is a human work required by God, “that

you believe in the One whom he has sent” (Jn. 6:29). Salvation is “not by works of righteousness which we have done” (Tit. 3:5), but only by what Christ has done “through his blood” (Eph. 1:7).

But a mental conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is the starting place, and so, though it was “midnight” (Acts 16:25), Paul and Silas did not wait until daylight to outline the remaining steps in the plan of salvation: “They spoke the Lord’s message to him, and to everyone in his household” (Acts 16:32).

The jailor and his family were listening, and in “the Lord’s message” had heard that believing in the Lord Jesus Christ leads to repentance (cf. Lk. 13:3; 24:46-47; Acts 2:38; 3:19). So we are not surprised that the jailor took Paul and Silas “at that hour of the night,” and showed repentance, because he had put them in their jail cell bloody, not washing their wounds from the “many blows” that had been “laid upon them” (Acts 16:23), and he had “secured their feet in stocks” (Acts 16:24).

Other requirements included in the package word “believe,” besides a mental conviction and repentance

were brought out by Paul and Silas as they “spoke the Lord’s message to” the jailor and to “everyone in his household” (Acts 16:32). The third requirement was a personal confession by each one from his or her own “mouth” (Rom. 10:9-10) “that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37; 1 Jn. 4:15), just as Jesus Himself made “the confession” before Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13).

The fourth requirement included in the package word “believe” was baptism, and it was not delayed until morning. The jailor “and everyone in his household were immediately baptized” (Acts 16:33).

Thus God’s plan of salvation (believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized) had been followed exactly, giving assurance to the jailor and every family member that nothing else was needed. Accordingly, the jailor “and all of his household rejoiced” (Acts 16:34), and, though it was after midnight, the jailor and his family, “having believed in God” (Acts 16:34), served Paul and Silas a meal. The phrase “having believed” thus included a mental conviction, repentance, confession, and baptism. *WOT*

CAN YOU SEE?

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

How can anyone *not* believe in Jesus? There is so much evidence that proves Him to be the Son of God. Consider but one piece of evidence from John 9.

Jesus encountered a man who had been blind since birth (v. 2). Scripture indicates that the beggar was a well-known figure in the community (v. 8).

Jesus then healed him. The Lord spat on the ground, made a clay, and then applied it to the man's eyes. He then instructed him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam (v. 7). The blind man found his way to the pool and washed as he was told. His obedient response brought about the bestowal of his vision. John simply—and wondrously—says, “he came back seeing” (v. 7b).

Now note the reaction to this miracle:

- The neighbors asked, “How WERE your eyes opened?” (v. 10).
- The Pharisees asked, “How can a man who is a sinner DO SUCH SIGNS?” (v. 16; cf. 10:21). “The reality of factuality of the miracle was not under question. The question concerned how it was done and what the character was of one who would do such a work on the sabbath” (Homer Hailey, *That You May Believe*, p. 108).
- The parents admitted, “We know that is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means HE NOW SEES we do not know . . .” (vv. 21ff).
- The man himself affirmed, “Though I was blind, NOW I SEE” (v. 25).

Friends, this cumulative testimony demands a verdict—the miraculous healing occurred just as John through inspiration described it. It therefore serves as certification of the fact that Jesus is the promised Messiah (cf. Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7)—the Son of God (Mt. 16:16). “. . . Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22).

This miracle was recorded in order that we might believe (Jn. 20:30-31)? Do you believe in Jesus? Can you see (Jn. 9:39)? WOT



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for an associate evangelist to work with us. All interested men should send their résumés to:

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THE WORDS OF Truth

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The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



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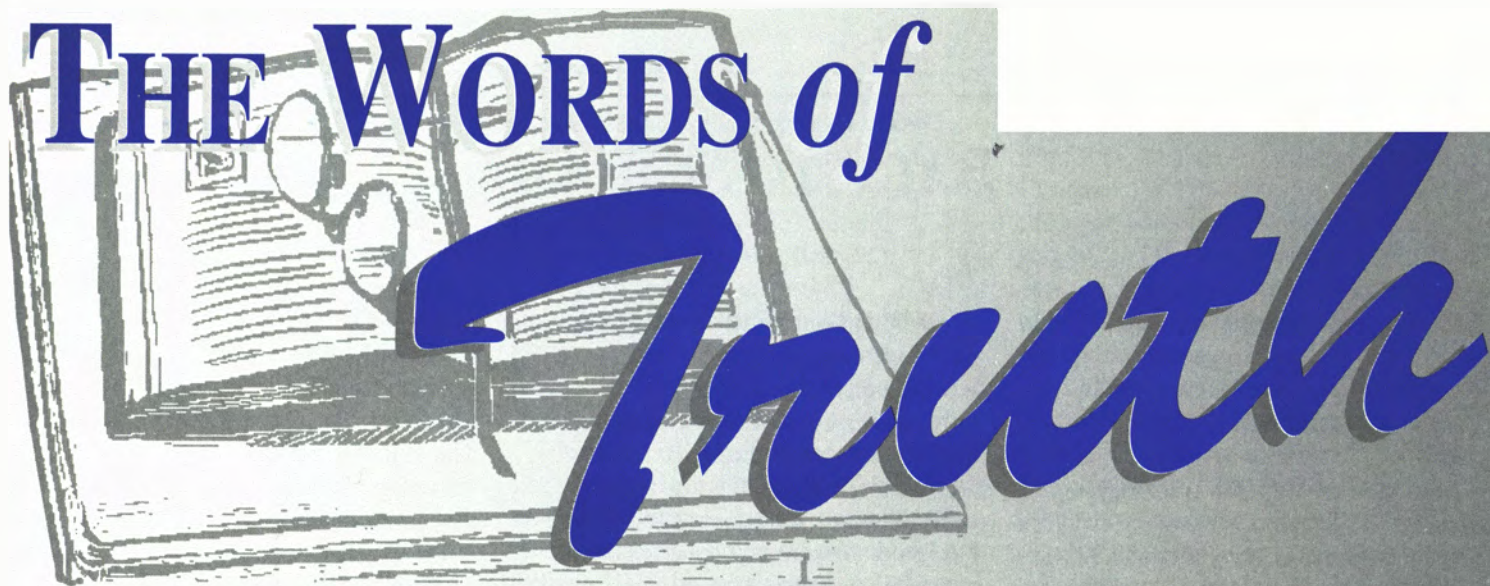
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

Vol. 38 No. 8

August 2001

GOOD I HAVE SEEN THE BIBLE DO

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

St. Paul's Bay (where Paul was shipwrecked, November, A.D. 60) is on a small island south of Sicily which Luke called by its Latin name, Melita (Acts 28:1). Today it is called Malta. The official religion is Roman Catholicism. The population (350,000) is 99% Roman Catholic. It is difficult to imagine the political, social, professional, and family pressure exerted on any dissident from the "Mother Church."

But "the word of God is not bound" and is "quick and powerful" (2 Tim. 2:9; Heb. 4:12). This writer has been privileged to see good resulting when the unadulterated Bible touches a good and honest heart.

George Ebejer, a Maltese who has never been off the island, was brought up to believe that the Roman Catholic Church is "the true church of Christ," but (he writes) "when I reached the age of 18, I began to feel cold about religion . . . For about 14 years I was without any religion; I even began to doubt the existence of God."

In the Lord's providence, one day he found a slip of paper with an invitation to take a correspondence course with the offer of a free Bible to those completing the course. He writes:

I am very fond of books and I spend a lot of money buying books. I never thought of buying a Bible. So I said to myself, "I will take the course to receive the Bible and add another book to my library." That was my only intention for taking the course, to receive the

Bible—which for me was just another book with less importance than any of the others.

The course, plus film strips and much Bible reading, led him to be immersed into his Lord December 30, 1976. Soon, his wife, Carmen, did the same thing. "We were both very proud to be just Christians."

Six months later two missionaries, Elmer H. Bell and Jene Van Noord, "were told by the government officials to leave the island in a week's time." When they left, there was nobody to preach to the little group each Lord's day. George, a school-teacher, and now with less than a year of Bible study, was forced to do the preaching.

He and the little church have endured bitter persecution. Roman Catholic landlords do not want to rent worship quarters. When one agreed to rent them a garage, they placed on the door a small sign, "Church of Christ." Before Sunday morning somebody had painted it to read, "Church of Satan."

He has been called before "the Public Service" disciplinary board because he answered students' questions about religion. "The priest did everything in his power to make me lose my job. I was given a reprimand and told not to speak on religion to my students."

His mother-in-law was much upset because he refused to allow his six-year-old son to receive his first holy communion, and brought a priest to talk to

George. When George read verses showing the Bible is the authority in religion (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), the angry priest called him a fool and left. George's mother-in-law then told him that if the parish priest goes to hell she was prepared to go with him.

Later, the mother-in-law wrote George and her daughter, Carmen, a letter telling them not to visit anymore and that "we are no longer their children . . . She told us that she had taken us out of her will."

With ever so many troubles, the Bible to George and Carmen is a pearl of great price. George now uses every spare moment to work on translating excellent American tracts into the Maltese language. When he distributes an English tract people "throw it away," but if it is in Maltese, "at least these will read it." He obtained permission from Leroy Brownlow to translate *Why I am a Member of the Church of Christ*. George himself has authored a tract on *The Deity of Christ* in Maltese, and Guy V. Caskey has caused the North Davis Church in Arlington (Texas) to print a supply for the use of the Malta Church.

A visit in George's home is an inspiration. Though steadfast and unmovable, he needs help—morally and financially. But the impact of the Bible on his heart is solid. He is determined to stand like Noah for what is right against heavy opposition. Take time to pray for him and Carmen.

WOT

BACK TO SCHOOL

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Education has changed considerably in the last 125 years or so, as the following set of **Rules and Regulations for Teachers in 1872** will testify:

- Teachers each day will fill lamps, clean chimneys, and trim wicks.
- Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and scuttle of coal for the day's sessions.
- Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.
- After ten hours in school, the teachers spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.
- Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.
- Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intentions, integrity, and honesty.
- The teacher who performs his labors faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of 25 cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves (via *Thought for the Day*, Alan Smith, Boone, North Carolina).

Some changes are, of course, for the good (e.g., hopefully, today's pay raises are more significant than 25 cents!). Others are not so good (e.g., we wish teachers were still encouraged to "go to church" and read the Bible). One thing, however, has remained consistent through the years: Almost without exception, young people dread the day in late summer when they must don their backpacks and school clothing and trudge off to the classroom. But since it's that time of year again, perhaps some reminders are appropriate.

Study hard. Christians should be, for the most part, better than average students. No, conversion doesn't miraculously raise one's IQ, but it *does* elevate one's

work ethic. Consider the principle set forth in Colossians 3:23: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." The adverb *heartily* is composed of two Greek words, *ek* (from) and *psuche* (heart, soul); it means, then, *from the heart*. Paul's admonition is for servants to work with all their hearts. The principle for the servant-master relationship is consistent with biblical admonitions elsewhere, suggesting that whatever God's people do, we should do to the best of our abilities. Hezekiah was commended because ". . . every work that he began . . ., he did it with all his heart" (2 Chron. 31:21). The wise king's well-known counsel remains applicable today: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; . . ." (Eccl. 9:10).

These principles certainly apply to all of us, including young Christians as they return to school. The biblical instructions are clear: Students, do your best in your studies. Remember that you're turning in your tests and homework, as it were, to God, not human teachers.

This is not to suggest that all Christians will be top students; too many factors are involved. The point is, Christians will work hard with their God-given abilities, regardless of how great or small these talents are.

Don't follow the crowd. This expression may have been used so often that it has become a cliché, but its truth is undeniable—Christians must forge their own paths, rather than mindlessly following the lead of a godless world. Perhaps in no other setting is this temptation greater than in our public schools. Young people typically find great comfort and security in being like everyone else (i.e., conforming). This mindset is evident in clothing styles, language patterns, and, most importantly, behavior.

This follow-the-crowd mentality is seen, for example, in the practice of smoking. Few would suggest that one's first smoking experience is pleasant; in

fact, most would agree that it is quite distasteful. Why, then, are numerous young people ignoring the prominent health warnings and embracing the habit? The most feasible explanation is that "everyone is doing it." They want to project a certain image or "hang out" with a particular crowd.

From the Israelites' request to have a king like all the other nations (1 Sam. 8:5,20) to Peter's wilting to Jewish peer pressure (Gal. 2:11-14), the temptation to conform has always been strong. Perhaps that is why God warned against it so frequently and sternly:

- "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment" (Ex. 23:2).
- "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mt. 7:13-14).
- "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2).
- "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4).

Young people, remember that you have been bought not "by corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). As Christians you cannot "fashion yourselves according to the former lusts" (1 Pet. 1:14). In other words, remember that you must be different . . . different in dress, different in speech, different in behavior. You are God's special possession (1 Pet. 2:9 - "peculiar people"). Remember *who* you

are and *whose* you are.

Choose your relationships carefully.

Fifteen years from now, young people will remain in close contact with few, if any, of their current circle of friends, but the impact of these associations will last forever. A familiar refrain from the parents of wayward children is, "He was a good kid, but he just got with the wrong crowd . . ."

One of the most crucial decisions a young person makes as he progresses from elementary school to middle school to high school is his choice of friends. Many "good kids" begin their journey into sin with the single choice of an influential, ungodly friend.

Amnon's restraints of conscience and propriety were removed by the counsel of his friend Jonadab, pointing him in a

direction that would ultimately cost him his life (2 Sam. 13:1ff). Paul warned, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'" (1 Cor. 15:33, NKJV). Christians must "not [be] unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14).

The most influential relationships are usually chosen in our youth. We choose a close-knit circle of friends that will mold our thinking and shape our behavior. Quite often we choose a spouse—one who, above all others, will bring us either closer to or farther from God and will influence the eternal destiny of subsequent generations.

Young people, choose your

relationships carefully. Let your closest friends be Christians. Date only Christians, and one day you'll find a Christian who loves the Lord as much as you do, and the two of you can help each other get to heaven. These relationships will determine, to a great extent, where *you* spend eternity.

It's an exciting time of year. The coolness of fall is close at hand, and the sounds of marching bands and football Fridays will soon fill the air. New friendships are forming in hallways as eager minds are soaking up reams of information in classrooms. With all the excitement and optimism, though, let's never be distracted from the fact that we are Christians first . . . we are owned by Christ!

WOT

DO ANIMALS HAVE SOULS?

Sam Estabrook, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama

If you ever owned a dog, a cat, or any other kind of animal to which you grew attached, you may have wondered whether or not that animal had a soul. Men and women through the ages have pondered the same question. Animals—whose vast numbers stretch into the millions—are ubiquitous as our co-inhabitants on planet Earth. They serve as an unpaid, ever-dependable, and quite invaluable work force as they help the farmer plow a rough field or the blind person cross a busy city street. They account for a considerable portion of the world's food supply for humans. They provide joy and companionship for young and old alike. They are an undeniable boon to mental health, especially for sick children and the infirm elderly. Surely none among us would doubt the many benefits that accrue as a result of the presence of animals among us.

But do animals possess souls? And if they do, is their soul the same as the human soul? That is to say, is it immortal—will it eventually inhabit either heaven or hell?

The English word "soul" derives from a number of different words in the Old and New Testaments and is used in the Bible in a variety of ways. First, it is employed as a synonym for an actual person. Moses wrote: "All the souls that came out of the

loins of Jacob were seventy souls" (Ex. 1:5; cf. Deut. 10:22). In legal matters, the word "soul" was used to denote the individual. The Lord told Moses: "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, 'If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done'" (Lev. 4:2). When Jacob was speaking of himself in Genesis 49:6, he used the expression, "O my soul"—which meant simply "me." In each of these instances, actual people—individually or collectively—were under discussion.

Second, the word soul can be used to describe the physical form of life that both men and animals possess and that ceases to exist after death. In their *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver, and Briggs noted that the word "soul" (Hebrew *nephesh*) often is employed to mean "life principle" (1907, p. 659). In Genesis 1:20,24,30, God spoke of the *nephesh hayyah*—literally "soul breathers" or "life breathers" (often translated as "living creatures" or "life"—cf. Lev. 11:10). The writer of Proverbs observed in regard to animals: "A righteous man regardeth the life (*nephesh*) of his beast; But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (12:10). Hebrew scholar

Hugo McCord therefore suggested:

Then the translators realized that the first meaning of *nephesh* is "breath," and so Genesis 1:20,24,30 and Genesis 2:7 all fit together in understanding Moses as saying that all animals and man too are breathers. Breathers, coupled with *hayyah*, "living," the translators thought, would be well translated, in the case of animals, as "living creatures," and in the case of man as a "living being" (1995, 23[1]:87-88).

Third, the word soul can be used to describe something that is immortal and thus never dies. In speaking of Rachel's death at the birth of her son, Moses wrote: "And it came to pass, as her soul was departing (for she died)" (Gen. 35:18). While Elijah was at the house of a widow in the city of Zarephath, the woman's son died. But Elijah "cried unto Jehovah, and said. . . , 'O Jehovah my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again'" (1 Kng. 17:21). Hezekiah celebrated the fact that the soul survives the death of the body: "But thou hast in love to my soul (*nephesh*) delivered it from the pit of corruption" (Isa. 38:17). Centuries later, the Lord Himself warned: "And be not afraid of them that

kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10:28) When the apostle John was allowed to peer into the book “sealed with seven seals” (Rev. 5:1), he “saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God” (Rev. 6:9). Each of these passages is instructive of the fact that there is within man a soul that survives the death of the body.

The question therefore becomes: Can the word “soul” be used correctly in referring to animals? The first definition obviously cannot apply to animals since animals are not persons. But the second definition most certainly would apply to animals. Compare the following passages. In Psalm 78:50 we find an example of the usage of “soul” as “life” when the writer said in speaking of the people of Egypt (who tried in vain to prevent the Israelites from leaving their country’s slavery) that God “spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence.” In this instance, the word “soul” (Hebrew *nephesh*) is used to denote the physical life of humans. But in Genesis 1:20,24, the identical Hebrew word is employed to speak of animals as “living creatures” (Hebrew *nephesh hayyah*). In this sense, then, yes, it is correct to say that animals do have “souls”—since the word soul means only physical life. In answering the question, “Do animals have souls?,” McCord wrote: “Yes, when the word soul, *nephesh*, only means ‘breath,’ as in Genesis 1:20 (ASV), ‘Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures,’ *nephesh hayyah*, literally, ‘living soul’” (1999).

But can the third definition be applied to animals? Do animals possess immortal souls that one day will inhabit heaven or hell? In this era of evolutionary fervor and an increasing fascination with all kinds of “rights,” we constantly are reminded that man shares a “kinship” with members of the animal kingdom that absolutely must not be overlooked. Michael Fox wrote:

There is indeed a kinship in the present diversity and evolutionary continuity of all life. . . . It is more important today than ever before for human beings to be aware of their kinship with all life. It is essential for our survival that we have a strong reverence for all forms of life as our kin . . . (n.d., p. 121).

Those who do not believe in God or accept the Bible as His Word (and thus deny the existence of an immortal soul) nevertheless perceive animals as man’s equal in almost every aspect. Thus they often refer to animals as being not one whit behind humans in regard to how they should be viewed or treated. For example, in his book, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Tom Regan acknowledged that each human is “the experiencing subject of a life, a conscious creature having an individual welfare” (1987, p. 59). But he likewise viewed animals as “the experiencing subjects of a life, with inherent value of their own” (p. 59), and so he asked:

What could be the basis of our having more inherent value than animals? Their lack of reason, or autonomy, or intellect? Only if we are willing to make the same judgment in the case of humans who are similarly deficient. But it is not true that such humans—the retarded child, for example, or the mentally deranged—have less inherent value than you or I. Neither, then, can we rationally sustain the view that animals, like them, in being the experiencing subjects of a life have less inherent value. All who have inherent value have it equally, whether they be human animals or not. Inherent value, then, belongs equally to those who are the experiencing subjects of a life (p. 60).

This type of thinking—that men and animals both possess “inherent value equally”—has set the stage for those who do profess a belief in God to set forth their claim that animals do indeed possess immortal souls. In his book, *All Creatures Here Below*, Frank Hoffman stated:

. . . if the animal sacrifice is the precursor, or type, of the final sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, which is a mainstream Christian teaching, **is God’s Word not also telling us that animals do have souls?** . . . Now then, why are we reluctant to accept the fact that animals do have souls? Because we are still trying to hold on to some of our pride, and perhaps our greed. If we do not accept the fact that animals have souls, then we may have a self-acceptable excuse for the way we treat the rest of God’s creatures, which is not in accordance with God’s desire, but ours? (1998, emp. added).

The position advocated by such writers is completely at odds with the teaching found in God’s Word. First, man and animals **do not** share kinship—all the claims of evolutionists (and those sympathetic to them) notwithstanding. The apostle Paul addressed this very point in 1 Corinthians 15 when he wrote: “**All flesh is not the same flesh:** but there is one *flesh* of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes” (v. 15, emp. added). As Stuart Walker correctly commented: “Genesis 1:26-30 and 2:7,21-25 clearly state that man was a special creation with no phylogenetic relationship to any other creature. Thus, there is a phylogenetic **discontinuity** between man and animals—we are **not physically interrelated**” (1991, 5[2]:21, emp. added). As Adam previewed the animals in the Garden of Eden for a mate and went about naming them (Gen. 2:18-20), this “discontinuity” became clear. Among all the animals that God had created, there was none that corresponded to him. Not one sufficed to remove him from his personal isolation of being “alone” (Gen. 2:18). As Walker went on to note:

Thus, we share in the life principle, but it is not the life principle itself that is precious. . . . Ontological continuity cannot be established upon the experiences of life, the intrinsic value of life itself, or physical parallels between animals and humans; rather, **we are separated from the animal world by an impassable gulf—a chasm of essential difference in who we are** (1991, 5[2]:22, emp. added).

Second, man was commanded to “subdue and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). The Hebrew word for “subdue” (*kabash*) is described in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* as meaning “to tread down,” “to bring under subjection,” etc. The same word is used in Numbers 32:22,29 and Joshua 18:1 where it is used to describe the subduing and pacifying of Israel’s enemies. To *kabash*, therefore, is to “face that which opposes us and is inimical in its present state to our goals and well-being, and bring it into conformity with our needs—completely pacifying it . . .

. Thus it can be inferred that when God gave Adam dominion over the creative order, He was describing a pre-emptive authority which man would wield over the creation as he interpreted the cosmos and manipulated its functions to man's benefit . . ." (Walker, 1991, 5[2]:25).

Man's "pre-emptive authority" over the creation, including the animal kingdom, was demonstrated quite forcefully in a single stroke when God granted mankind permission to kill and eat animals for food (Gen. 9:3-4). Interestingly, however, within the same context God specifically forbade manslaughter "for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:5-6). If man "shares kinship" with animals or if animals possess immortal souls, why would God permit men to kill his own kin—relatives whose souls are no different from his own? As Neale Pryor commented: "Animals also have a *ruach* [a Hebrew word for "breath" or "life"—SE] (Gen. 6:17). Killing one who has a *ruach* or *nephesh* would not necessarily constitute murder; otherwise animals could not be sacrificed or slaughtered" (1974, [5]:34). God's prohibition against murder carried over even into New Testament times (Mt. 19:18). At the same time, however, God broadened the list of animals that men could kill and eat (Acts 10:9-14). Why was it that men **could not** kill other men, but **could** kill animals? The answer lies, of course, in the fact that animals were not created "in the image of God."

Third, although it is true that at times the Bible uses the same terms to refer to the life principle/force in both humans and animals (e.g. Gen. 7:22), and although it is true that those terms may be used to refer to the immortal soul of humans (Eccl. 12:7; Mt. 10:28), they **never** are employed by Bible writers to refer to an immortal soul in animals. In their *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Keil and Delitzsch observed:

The beasts arose at the creative word of God, and **no communication of the spirit is mentioned** even in ch. ii:19; the origin of their soul was coincident with that of their corporeality, and their life was merely the individualization of the universal life, with which all matter was filled in the beginning by the Spirit of God. On the other hand, the human spirit is not a mere individualization of the divine breath which breathed upon the material of the world, or of the universal

spirit of nature; nor is his body merely a production of the earth when stimulated by the creative word of God. The earth does not bring forth his body, but God Himself puts His hand to the work and forms him; nor does the life already imparted to the world by the Spirit of God individualize itself in him, but God breathes it directly into the nostrils of the one man, in the whole fulness of His personality, the breath of life, that **in a manner corresponding to the personality of God he may become a living soul** (1982, 1:79-80, emp. added).

Man alone was created "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen. 1:26-27)—something that may not be said of any animal. Walker therefore asked: "If the putative parallels either do not exist or are insignificant before God, what then is the critical essence of man that distinguishes him from all of creation, and what are the ramifications of this distinction? The key is found in Genesis 1:26-28, 2:18-25, and 9:5-7; it is that **only man is created in the image of God**" (1991, 5[2]:22, emp. added). Gary Anderson addressed this same point when he wrote:

Man's concepts of spiritual values, his recognition of morals and his universal acknowledgement that he is responsible for his own behavior set him far apart from the animal world. That is to say, they have no immortal soul, as the following point documents. The spirit of man returns to God who gave it when one dies (Eccl. 12:7). Such is not said of the animal! Adam is called the son of God in Luke 3:38, obviously by creation. **What animal is called the son of God or offspring of God?** (1989, p. 76, emp. added).

Nowhere does God's Word indicate that animals were created in God's image. As Philip Hughes commented:

Only of man is it said that God created him in his image. It is in this charter of his constitution that man's uniqueness is specifically affirmed as a creature radically distinguished from all other creatures. In this respect a line is defined which links man directly and responsibly to God in a way that is unknown to any other creature. Nothing is more basic than the recognition that being

constituted in the image of God is the very essence of and absolutely central to the humanness of man. It is the key that unlocks the meaning of his authentic humanity (1989, p. 30, emp. added).

Do animals, then, have souls? Yes, animals may be said to possess a soul—if the word "soul" is used as the Bible employs it in discussing members of the animal kingdom (i.e., to describe only the physical life force found within all living creatures). But if the word "soul" is used to refer to an **immortal** soul that one day will inhabit heaven or hell, then no, animals may not be said to possess a soul. This is the only conclusion that can be drawn, respecting the instruction on the subject found within the Word of God.

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“BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT”

Sam Willcut, Munford, Tennessee

Moses made this statement in Numbers 32:23 to the tribes of Reuben and Gad who wanted to inhabit the land on the east side of the Jordan River. He warned them not to stray from God’s commandments, or they would face dire consequences. We need to understand this principle, since we can vividly see it in other Biblical examples.

Adam and Eve learned this lesson (Gen. 3). When Eve was deceived into eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, she gave some to her husband, Adam, and he ate also. Both of them transgressed God’s command (Gen. 2:17). Because of their sin, they experienced guilt. They did what so many people try to do—run and hide. They made for themselves aprons of fig leaves, and hid among the trees when they heard God coming in the garden of Eden. Yet there was nowhere to run and hide—their sin found them out. They brought sin into the world, which consequently brought death, and they were banished from the beautiful garden.

Achan and his family learned this lesson the hard way (Josh. 7). When the Israelites defeated Jericho, God previously gave a command not to keep the spoils for themselves (Josh. 6:18-19). Yet one man named Achan did not obey God—he took several items and buried them under his tent (Josh. 7:21). Did he get away with his sin? No, because when Israel went to defeat Ai, they were in turn defeated. When Joshua inquired of God why they were defeated, God told him of the transgression within the camp. When Joshua and the Israelites caught Achan, he and his family were stoned.

David and Bathsheba learned this lesson (2 Sam. 11-12). When David saw Bathsheba, he coveted her through lust and took her to be his wife. To hide his sin, he had her husband, Uriah, killed in the battle. Nevertheless, God sent the prophet Nathan to expose David’s sins with the parable of the little ewe lamb. From this parable and its interpretation, David’s sins were

uncovered, and he suffered the consequences of his sins.

Ananias and Sapphira learned this lesson (Acts 5). They sold a portion of land for benevolent reasons, but kept back a portion of the profit for themselves, and in the process, lying about the matter. Peter confronted Ananias and exposed his sin; God in turn struck him dead instantly. Later, when his wife Sapphira came in, Peter questioned her about the matter. She then lied to cover up what they had done, unaware of her husband’s death. She died consequently in the same likeness as her husband.

We may think we can get away with sin. Just because no one sees us, or we commit sin privately, does not mean we can get away with it. We might even be able to escape human judgment on earth, but God has “an all-seeing eye watching you.” Take this principle to heart—“be sure your sin will find you out.”

WOT

I LOVE MY FATHER

Jason Jackson, Stockton, California

Being a father is great. Before I became one, friends would tell me, “There is no way to describe how it feels. You just have to experience it for yourself.” They were right. But, if you had to put into words what being a father is like, what would you say?

A father loves. When I saw Natalie, our daughter, for the first time, I was overwhelmed with love for her. She had never said, “Hi, daddy”; she had never said, “I wuv you, too.” But, from the moment I saw her little squashed face, I loved her without reservation.

A father provides. Clothes, food, shelter—we want to give our children the best we can. We often say, “I want my children to be better off than I was.” Naturally, as parents, we want to give them what they need, and a little more.

A father protects. Do you know why men are often concerned about the lighting around the house, the locks on the doors, and other things? It seems that we are often

overly concerned about “trivial” things. Maybe it is not the case with all fathers, but I would speculate that most are concerned with things that pertain to the family’s safety—almost to an obsession.

Did you see the commercial for a mini-van with movable seats? A father is driving his teenage daughter and her male friend to an event. The father says, “I hope you guys have a good time,” to which the young boy responds, “Don’t worry. I know how to treat my ladies.” The father immediately swerves over, orders the boy out, and moves the seat over so there is plenty of space between the youngsters. I laughed when I saw the commercial. I could not help but wonder what I would do in that situation as the father. Move the seat?

A father corrects. Some children heard their parents say, “This is going to hurt me more than it does you.” The kids thought, *yeah, right!* Discipline, however, does not come easy for the parents. It takes more than affection for a father to correct a

child—not scream, ridicule, or humiliate—but correct.

Deep love demands that I must teach my daughter what is right, make my expectations clear, follow through with what I have told her, and punish or reward her appropriately. I must look down the road, seeing my little girl as an adult, realizing that the goal of all discipline is self-discipline.

A father forgives. Children make mistakes; they disobey sometimes. Fatherhood should not be a synonym for harshness. Children don’t need a macho dad. They need a forgiving father; therein, the child will learn that when they are sorry for doing wrong, their father will run to meet them. The child will learn the fact that, in reality, we all need forgiveness from our heavenly Father, who runs to meet us when we repent and return (cf. Lk. 15:20).

I love my father. He taught me by example—day in, day out. While affection

for a child comes naturally, he and my mother taught me to love Natalie's soul. They taught me to provide for her spiritually and protect her from evil. They showed me the value of discipline—and I mean more than just spankings. And they showed me forgiveness, and I sure needed it often, although not as much as my sister and brother.

But the best thing a father can do is to be like John the Baptizer. We are directing

our children to Him who is our heavenly Father. "We must decrease, but he must increase." What an awesome responsibility! If, by our examples, our children develop a view of the Father, what would they think the Father is like?

God is, in the gospel of John alone, referred to as "Father" 107 times. Jesus Christ called God "my Father," excluding everyone else. In that sense, Jesus stressed the unique relationship that He, the Son of

God, has with God the Father. But Christians are "children of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). While God is the Father of all humanity by creation, He is only the Father, redemptionally, of those who obey Him. If we could show others His love, providence, protection, correction, and forgiveness, would they not love Him in return? WOT

SERVANTS OF SATAN

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

The apostle writes, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3). Although serving the Lord should be a joy, we read of some who "could not endure that which was enjoined" (Heb. 12:20). Serving the devil has no ultimate end but "the lake of fire" (Rev. 21:8). Allegiance to Jesus as Lord has promise of life eternal (1 Pet. 1:13). It has been well observed: "It is better to live for Christ than to wish later that you had." Satan has had many loyal servants through the ages. Some dedicated themselves to decades of hellish activities, while others mightily contributed to his nefarious ways, schemes, and devious tactics in a momentary but strategic manner. Some of those in bondage to this diabolical demon were overwhelmed by his subtle power, while others were willing pawns in Satan's onslaught against purity and sincerity.

Sanballat heartily opposed Nehemiah in the important work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after captivity in Babylon (Neh. 2:19; 4:1-9). Balaam succeeded in compromising Israel into idolatry and immorality that led them away from God (Num. 22; Rev. 2:14). Cain violated the trust of God and showed utter disdain for his brother (Gen. 4). Clearly, these unholy three marched in cadence to Satan's drumbeat and so found themselves fighting against Jehovah (Acts 5:39). Herod enjoyed the applause of the people while he plotted against the apostles (Acts 12). One of his relatives earlier surrendered to the whims of a motley crowd and killed a great preacher named John (Mt. 14:9). Flattery and insincerity have been the tools of the devil for centuries. Someone wisely

wrote: "Beware of those who fall at your feet. They may be reaching for the corner of the rug."

Jeroboam, "who made Israel to sin" (1 Kng. 12), ardently worked for that old serpent as he divided the people of God. King David, by selfishness and in the pursuit of sensual pleasures, caused the enemies of God to blaspheme (2 Sam. 12). Elymas, the sorcerer (Acts 13:8), contributed to the plans of hell by withstanding the oracles of God. He has lots of kinfolk around today! We are on earth to glorify God by our submission to His divine mandates, and never to encourage evil. In a powerful hymn we sing:

Content to let the world go by
To know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross.

Jonah was an active friend of the devil, although he was supposed to be serving the Almighty. Tragic is the truth that many today have defected into the tempter's camp. Abraham's seed, the sons of Jacob, in selfish arrogance, sold their own brother Joseph as though he were cattle or a toy. Thankfully, however, Jehovah caused their evil to turn out for the good of both Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 50:20).

Jezebel is the epitome of evil. Very few little girls have been given that name. That wicked ruler served the devil in many ways and, as a result, always hated the prophets of God. When people do not love the truth, they plot against those who teach it plainly. Jehoiakim could not tolerate rebuke and exhortation, and tried to mutilate the

Scriptures (Jer. 36); he has many relatives today. But, out of the burning embers of his diabolical scheming arose the wrath of the Creator against a puny man! Earthly rulers rise and fall, empires come and go, but **TRUTH NEVER DIES!** Amos ran into a foe of heaven in the high priest who is mentioned in Amos 7. If Satan ever had a servant it was that spineless character who invited the fearless prophet to leave Israel and go somewhere else to preach. Sounds familiar, does it not? According to Ezekiel 34 and Acts 20:28-32, elders over the house of God can be some of the devil's greatest contributors. How sad it is to contemplate that those who should assist the Savior actually oppose His precious work.

Preachers who refuse to preach boldly the word of God (Acts 14:1-3; 1 Pet. 4:11) and directly rebuke error (Phil. 1:17) serve the devil while pretending to be soldiers of Christ. When the final day of judgment peals forth, their compromising spirit will be exposed! Let us never allow the enemy of righteousness room in our lives to launch his evil deeds: "Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). Instead, we should always "resist the devil" (Jas. 4:7) and cause his friend to "tremble" (Jas. 2:19).

The fight is on, O Christian soldiers,
And face to face in stern array,
His banner streaming, the armor gleaming,
The right and wrong engage today.

Satan and his servants need to be constantly aware of the fact that they shall not win. The battle is pitched and we are ready! WOT

KEEPING JESUS TO OURSELVES

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

He could have stayed right there with those people. That is certainly what they urged him to do. They wanted to keep Jesus to themselves: "Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them" (Lk. 4:42, NKJV).

But Jesus moved on. He said no to their desire and yes to the divine mission: "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent" (Lk. 4:43).

What about us? We live in the glow of the Savior's love. We bask in amazing grace and can recite the promises that come with our adoption as saints. We are part of the family of God.

With the abundant blessings and privileges of being in Jesus on my mind, I re-read what those people tried to do that day. As I do, one searching question confronts me: "Am I keeping Jesus to myself?" They eagerly searched for Jesus and found Him, but sharing Him was not in their plans.

Is it in our plans? Songwriters Greg Nelson and Phill McHugh penned these challenging words:

*People need the Lord,
People need the Lord;
At the end of broken dreams,
He's the open door.
People need the Lord,
People need the Lord;
When will we realize
That people need the Lord?*

If we have a heart that beats for the lost we will share the message of the kingdom of heaven. His mission must be our mission.

Do we dare keep Jesus to ourselves?

WOT



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for an associate evangelist to work with us. All interested men should send their résumés to:

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Chuck Webster, Editor

The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

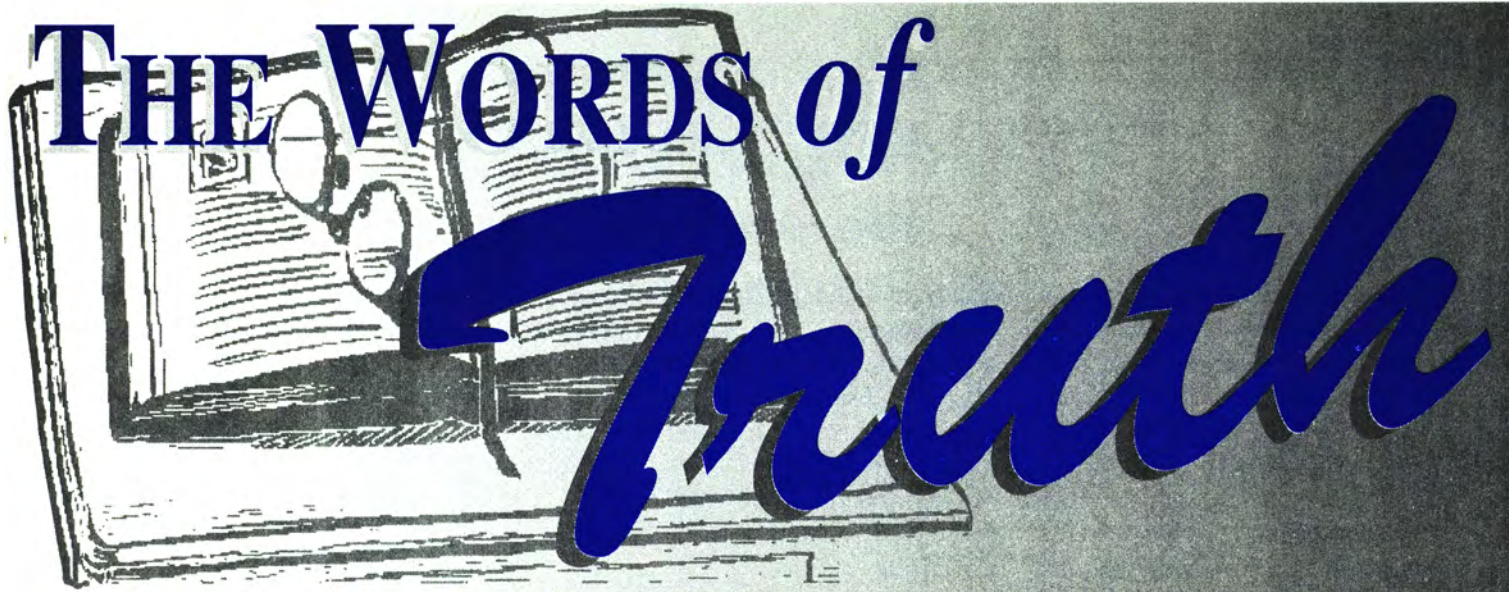
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

SUFFERING

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

The questions began to rain down almost as soon as the debris from the crumbling World Trade Center towers. "Why is this happening?" "Where is God while this is going on?" "Why doesn't God do something about all these innocent people suffering?" Just as quickly as some turned to blame God for the tragedy, others turned to Him for comfort and guidance, even though they had not done so since the last tragic event that struck their lives.

Two catastrophic events about which we have little detail were on the minds of many in the days of Jesus when He spoke to them as recorded in Luke 13. One of these involved the dastardly deeds of Pilate, as he had killed many while they were in the process of offering their sacrifices (Lk. 13:1). The other involved the collapse of a tower in Siloam for reasons unrevealed (Lk. 13:4). Each of these events brought suffering upon both the victims and their families. Jesus was asked about the former event, and then He brought up the latter to further illustrate His point.

Concerning the death of those who had been killed by Pilate, Jesus asked,

"Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?" (Lk. 13:2). Concerning the eighteen unnamed individuals upon which the tower of Siloam had fallen, Jesus asked virtually the same question: "Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" (Lk. 13:4). The answer to both these questions was the same—"No." Specifically, Jesus said, "I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:3,5).

Although suffering sometimes can be directly connected to personal sin (cf. Prov. 23:29-30), such was not the case in these two instances. In the first case (that of those killed by Pilate), it was the result of the sins of another, namely Pilate. In the second case (that of those killed by the falling tower in Siloam), it was the result of their being "in the wrong place at the wrong time." In each of these instances innocent people suffered. These events occurred during the lifetime of Jesus. Where was God? God the Father was in heaven. God the Son was on earth. Yet, these tragedies still took place. Why? Because men

made choices. Pilate made the choice to kill those unnumbered worshipers. Someone, at some point in time, made a choice to build a tower. Perhaps it fell because of poor workmanship or shoddy materials. We are not told. But, some law of nature was violated in some fashion so that the tower fell. When it did, innocent people suffered.

Choices were made in the recent tragedies that struck our nation. Men made the choice to exact evil upon their fellow man. As a result, innocent people suffered. Being made in the image of God, we have that freedom to choose. Although God will not step in to violate that freedom to choose, He will one day judge every man based upon how he used that freedom of choice (Eccl. 12:14; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). So, while our choices might not be as tragic to humanity as those made by the terrorists, they can bring about great suffering and will, if unrequited, bring upon us the judgment of God. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15).

WOT

DON'T EVER "GET OVER IT"

Chuck Webster, Editorial

What motivates us to speak to our friends and family about the Lord? When our hands are clammy with apprehension, when we fear both the response and the potential questions, what makes us go ahead and ask the co-worker, "When could you and I sit down and study the Bible?"? When we can think of dozens of reasons why this aunt or uncle or cousin will probably never be interested in the gospel, what makes us break the ice and say, "We're offering free Bible correspondence courses—I'd like to send you one . . .?"

Some overcome their apprehension because they fear that they themselves will be lost if they don't. They understand the "terror of the Lord" and, as a result, "persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). Others are motivated by guilt—"I have had the opportunity to obey the gospel; how can I refuse to teach others?" The stimulus for others is simpler; they evangelize merely because God commanded it (Mt. 28:18-20).

Fear, though good and sometimes quite motivational, is often temporal. Guilt also subsides over time. Obeying God is *always* right, but God has in mind our serving Him with our hearts, not just obeying a certain code of conduct out of a duty of obligation. In other words, there should be more to our obedience than simply "doing it because God said so"—an adequate motivation in many respects, but lacking in the depth God wants our relationship with Him to exhibit.

What, then, *should* motivate us? Though it might sound overly simplistic, the answer is love. When fear and guilt fade, love remains. When the *command* to teach is unappealing, love provides the spark. When all else fails, the element that will make it impossible for us *not* to be soul-winners is love.

The simple fact is, as soul-winners we love the lost, so we want them to be saved. A young preacher stood sobbing

as he overlooked a city street filled with throngs of people. An older preacher asked him, "Young man, why are you crying?" "Look at those people—there are thousands of them, and they're all lost!" The older man consoled him, "Don't worry . . . You'll get over it." "I know," the young man said, "that's why I'm crying."

Have we, perhaps, "gotten over it"?

If we haven't, we'll exhibit the depth of passion the Lord demonstrated as He wept over the city of David: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Lk. 13:34). He repeatedly looked at the Jewish people and "was moved with compassion" (cf. Mt. 9:36; 14:14), causing Him to extend His grace to them. This eternal love for souls led Him to give up heaven's glory (Phil. 2:6-7), be made "a little lower than the angels," and ultimately taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9).

That kind of love overcomes perceived obstacles, such as fear and dread. The Lord's prayer on Thursday suggested His natural desire to avoid Friday's pain, but love trumped apprehension—" . . . nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt. 26:39)—and He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2).

Why? We already know the answer: "For God so *loved* the world . . ." (Jn. 3:16). "But God commendeth his *love* toward us, in that . . . Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "But after that the kindness and *love* of God our Saviour toward man appeared" (Tit. 3:4). "We love him, because he first *loved* us" (1 Jn. 4:19).

If we haven't "gotten over it," we also love souls enough to overcome obstacles to teach them. Did the Lord enjoy the ridicule and scorn, the thorns and whips, the hatred and pain? Of

course not, but He trudged through the anguish because He loved souls.

Won't we do the same? Suppose, for example, that our attempts at soul-winning lead to opposition: doors are slammed in our faces . . . we become known as people who obsess over religion . . . family ties and close-knit friendships are torn . . . How do those obstacles compare to being slapped, scourged, and crucified?

All sinners need friends like the four who carried their handicapped friend to Jesus. Finding the crowds too thick to navigate, they climbed on top of the house, tore through the roof, and lowered him to Christ on a pallet (Mk. 2:1-12). A dozen excuses were readily available: "This fellow is too heavy and awkward . . . The crowd is too dense . . . Whoever owns this house might get mad . . ." Love doesn't offer excuses, though; it just finds a way to get people to the Lord.

If we haven't "gotten over it," we'll likewise bring people to Christ. Why? Out of fear or guilt? Not really. Because God commanded it? Partially, but even if He hadn't, we'd still bring people to Jesus. Love wouldn't let us do otherwise.

Why? Because we love souls with a commitment that finds a way, even when the hurdles seem too great. Because we love souls so much that we'll sacrifice our own conveniences and comforts if need be. Life isn't about accumulating the most toys and having the most fun. It's not about choosing the route of least opposition and greatest temporal pleasures. It's about fulfilling the Lord's mission—saving souls (Lk. 19:10). It's about doing what *He* did. It's about being filled with the Lord's kind of love—a love that tells others what He's done for us and what He'll do for them.

You can't just "get over" that kind of love.

WOT

TERROR FROM THE SKY

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California (www.christiancourier.com)

Perhaps “numb” is the best word to describe the condition of most Americans on September 11, 2001, as many of us sat mutely staring in horror at the events that unfolded before our eyes via television. The petrifying spectacle of “human missiles” being deployed to bomb the World Trade Center, and Washington’s Pentagon, was seen again and again.

News analysts probed the lexicons of their minds to find the vocabulary to describe the situation. Horrific, cowardly, depraved, dastardly, unconscionable, nightmareish, etc., were employed repeatedly. Many remained glued to their television sets, trying to fathom the enormity of this shattering episode.

I am transferring some of my thoughts to writing—perhaps for my own benefit as much as for any edification that others might derive.

A time of prayer

I have been profoundly struck by the human inclination to pray in times of disaster. It reveals that there is a depository of tenderness in the crassest of people. There are occasions so dire when men *can't help but pray*. They may stifle the urge much of the time (if they have an “urge” at all), but cries to God erupt spontaneously when people are in the valley of confusion and despair.

I do not recall ever having heard the words “God” and “prayer” so frequently used by means of the public media in a single day.

Where are the atheists?

As the public wept and prayed, and clamored for the counsel of the “clergy,” I could not but wonder: “Where are the atheists?” Is no one seeking sage advice from them? Is no one asking them to explain their credo that prayers are meaningless because “there is no God,” and religion is but a silly superstition? Does anyone solicit solace from the “Freedom From Religion Foundation” in times that “try men’s souls”?

Do the skeptics step forth to denounce these references to God and prayer? Of course not, for that would be ideological suicide in this climate. They will wait for calmer times; they will exercise patience and influence your children in a more

“academic” environment, where their devious philosophy is protected—while religion is banned.

Who can pray?

Also, however, I cannot but reflect upon the common lack of awareness by the public at large relative to what *qualifies* a person to pray, and how prayer is to be made *effectual*.

Prayer, divorced from personal piety, is meaningless. Prayer, void of a *relationship with God*, is vain. Many Americans want prayer as an emergency “flare,” while at most other times they are scarcely on speaking terms with their Creator at all.

Why can't the children pray?

I was moved to tears when members of Congress reverently bowed their heads for “a moment of silence” (which act was perfectly transparent, though designed to be “politically correct”). And then, those men and women burst into a prayer-song—“God bless America.”

But that emotion of my heart was followed by indignation. I contemplated the fact that if that “silence,” or the “song,” had been enacted in a public school, or at a high school football game, writs would be filed forthwith by the A.C.L.U. And misguided judges and justices would issue prohibitions, under the guise that some atheist’s freedom was being abridged.

In many cases, the American public has become the “dog” that is being wagged by the “tail” of a liberal judiciary and spiritually bankrupt media.

The depravity of man

This bizarre bloodbath is also a vivid reminder of how humankind is able to cultivate brutishness to an incredible degree. How can men be so hardened as to hijack planes containing more than 200 innocent victims, including children, then demand of some of them that they call their families, inform them of the horror of their imminent fate, and bid them goodbye? How can human beings send their fellows to a fiery death simply because they have an ideological or political difference with them? It confounds human reason.

Radical Islam and the “Holy War”

An increasing body of evidence points to the

fact that fundamentalist radicals of the Islamic faith, with perhaps Osama bin Laden as the focal point, are behind this brazen act of terrorism. Bin Laden, who converted to radical Islam some twenty years ago, is a militant advocate of *jihad*, a “holy war” against “unbelievers.” The number-one world terrorist has urged “the deaths of all Americans,” which edict includes men, women, and children.

While no one would accuse every devotee of Islam of this fanaticism, i.e., *physical persecution for those who oppose Islam*, such was a fundamental component of the teaching of Mohammed. Secretary Colin Powell was absolutely wrong when he suggested, in a news conference before the American public the day following the terrorist attacks, that *no religion* would endorse such an outrageous action. The **Qur’an** states:

The punishment of those Who wage war against God And His Apostle [Mohammed], and strive with might and main For mischief through the land Is: execution [cutting off of the head], or crucifixion, Or the cutting off of hands And feet from opposite sides [i.e., right hand, left foot], Or exile from the land: That is their disgrace In this world, and A heavy punishment is theirs In the Hereafter (Sura 5.36).

That “wage war” phrase embraces *any* opposition to Islam. Although these tortures have been abolished in many Islamic cultures, nonetheless, they are a part of the “prophet’s” original teaching (which he claimed was from God) and practice. And while some moderate Arabic states are not as radical as they once were, it is no secret that Christian missionaries are imperiled in lands dominated by Islam.

One must recognize that these Islamic terrorists have been taught that an instant Paradise, with the reward of dark-eyed beauties catering to every desire, is theirs if they die in defense of their religion. That is why they so willingly sacrifice themselves in these suicide missions.

To not acknowledge this fact is to ignore history. Many Americans doubtless have been attracted to Islam unwittingly, without having understood its more intricate

complexities.

Why did God allow this tragedy?

This is a time when many will ask: "Why did God *allow* this horrible massacre?" The Christian must be both prepared and willing to explain, to the best of his ability, that our Creator has honored us with "freedom of choice." That is a part of the heritage of being made in His "image" (Gen. 1:26-27). But this means that men, as finite beings, will have the ability to make evil choices. And this implies that even the innocent will frequently have to pay a price for that freedom.

One must remember that God allowed his own Son to suffer and die for the sins of humanity (1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 5:8-9), at the hands of men who chose to do evil (Acts 2:23). There obviously is an *ultimate divine purpose* involved in humanity's vulnerability to the consequences of sin. And so, we must learn to trust our Maker who always does what is right (Gen. 18:25), though we may not be able to fathom it.

Is this Armageddon?

We can fully expect some of the hysterical "prophet speculators" of "Christendom" to begin announcing that these tragic events are

the commencement of "Armageddon," and an index signaling the "end" of modern civilization.

Jerry Falwell already has suggested, in national interviews, that America must protect Israel from her enemies if she expects to be blessed. That has the fingerprints of "millennialism" all over it.

While one may applaud Israel's democratic spirit, the nation of Israel has no *special favor* in the divine scheme of things today, and the territory between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean is not *sacred* real estate.

Is America invincible?

Finally, it goes without saying that our beloved America will never again have the same sense of security that she has enjoyed in her previous illustrious history. We have imagined that we were invincible. Like ancient Edom, we have rhetorically asked: "Who can bring us down?" (Obad. 3).

While blame is rightly attached to the calloused thugs who have ripped open the heart of our nation, there has been virtually no expression of conscience, acknowledging that perhaps the moral decay of this nation could be a factor in this devastating tragedy (cf. Dan. 9:3ff). We slaughter millions of our

own innocent babes—with legal sanction. We slide progressively deeper into the slime of moral debauchery, legitimizing every form of perversion imaginable—with scarcely a blush (Jer. 6:15). We fantasize that the God whose protection we solicit is oblivious to our wickedness (see Psa. 94:1-11). The Judge of the earth holds *nations*, as well as individuals, accountable for their conduct (Psa. 9:17; 22:28; Prov. 14:34).

Many centuries ago a prominent city was brutally assaulted for five terrifying months by an *abominable* force that ultimately *desolated* it (cf. Mt. 24:15). Buildings were toppled, fire raged, and the human suffering was indescribable. More than *one million people* lost their lives. The city was Jerusalem; the invaders were the Romans. The ultimate cause of this catastrophe was a judgment from God (Mt. 22:7). It apparently never occurs to most Americans that in our own decadence we could be deserving of divine chastisement.

Only God knows when such judgments are appropriate (cf. Gen. 15:16; cf. Rom. 11:33ff). The possibility of such, however, must not be disregarded.

Repentance is always in order. WOT

GENERIC AND SPECIFIC AUTHORITY

David R. Pharr, Rock Hill, South Carolina

The importance of understanding the principle of generic and specific authority is seen in the fact that both liberal digression and also radical extremes have developed out of a failure to respect this concept. Innovations such as instrumental music in worship reflect disregard for the specific instructions of the Bible. On the other hand, it is a misunderstanding of the nature of generic authority that has resulted in the several anti factions that have divided the church.

The concept of generic and specific authority is a common sense principle of daily life. A physician's prescription may, for example, instruct the pharmacist to dispense a specific brand of drug. In such case the pharmacist is authorized to give only the brand of medication specified. To dispense any other drug or any other brand would be a violation of the doctor's instructions. Specification of a certain brand of drug implies the necessity that only that brand be used. The pharmacist would not

argue that the doctor did not tell him all the brands not to use; the instructions for a specific brand would be sufficient to make the doctor's will known.

On the other hand, physicians sometimes write prescriptions for a generic drug. This would allow the pharmacist to dispense any of several brands of the indicated chemical compound. Specific instructions allow only that which is specified. Generic instructions allow choices within the general area indicated.

Coordinate or Subordinate

This simple illustration can serve us further as we define things that are coordinate and things that are subordinate or incidental. The various brands of a certain drug (chemical compound) are coordinate, of parallel rank. Each brand is a specific of that class of drugs. The doctor's authorization to use one of these brands is not authorization to use the other brands. In dispensing the authorized brand, however, the druggist may

put the medicine into a bottle, put the bottle into a bag, and even employ a deliveryman to take it to the patient. He could lawfully do these things even though the prescription made no mention of such things. Why? Because they are incidental to carrying out the instructions in the prescription. The bottle, the bag, etc., are not coordinates of the specified drug. They are subordinate, merely expedients used in doing what is specified.

Bible Simplicity

If this illustration seems too simple and obvious, let us be reminded that the positive instructions of the word of God should be approached with the same simplicity. The Bible gives both generic and specific instructions. Generic instructions authorize everything within the general area named. Specific instructions authorize only the doing of the thing specified, thereby showing a lack of authority for the things of the same class (coordinates), which are not specified.

Noah was instructed to make an ark of gopher wood (Gen. 6:14). There are many kinds of wood, but a certain kind was specified. Thus no other kind of wood was authorized. The only way Noah could do what was commanded was by respecting the principle of specific authority. This does not mean that he could not use a hammer, saw, scaffolding, etc.—incidental expedients—but it does mean that he could not use other kinds of wood—coordinates of the material specified.

Both generic and specific authority are illustrated in the instructions for the first passover lamb. “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats” (Ex. 12:5). Notice that the order was specific in that the lamb had to be either from the sheep or the goats, not other kinds of animals. It was at the same time, however, generic in that it allowed a choice within the area named—sheep or goats. Other specifications were: a male (not a female), of the first year (not of the second or third year), and without blemish (not with blemish).

The importance of respecting the principle of specific authority is also demonstrated in the tragic case of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2). The law specified the fire to be used. These priests “offered strange fire.” The reason their fire was illicit is explained in the last of the verse: “which he commanded them not.” *The New English Bible* translates this more expressly as “fire which he had not commanded.”

Thoughtful students will see the same principle in the elements of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus authorized the bread and the fruit of the vine. No passage says not to use milk, apple pie, or strawberry jam. Such prohibitions are not needed because the proper food and drink have been specified. Specific instructions for the bread, however, do not preclude the use of a plate to pass it—a mere expedient for doing what is commanded.

The New Testament is specific in instructing that believers are to be baptized (Mk. 16:16). There is no text that forbids the baptism of infants, but nonetheless infant baptism is clearly not authorized. It is not authorized because the proper subjects for baptism have been specified.

Specifications—Inclusive and Exclusive
Specifications are by their nature both inclusive and exclusive. A specification requires a certain thing. But at the same time

a specification always implies restrictions, whether the restrictions are stated or not. The specifications on a blueprint, for example, require the contractor to include the items specified, but these same specifications imply that coordinate items are not authorized. If the plan calls merely for brick facing without specifying what kind of brick, the authority is generic; any kind of brick can be used. If, however, red brick is specified, red brick must be used and brown, black, or white brick are not authorized. Still, to keep in mind how the principle applies, the red brick specification would not preclude the use of scaffolding, trowels, etc., as incidentals, or expedients, in carrying out the instructions.

A New Testament Hermeneutic

Applying the principle of generic and specific authority is not an arbitrary hermeneutic, but one applied by the New Testament itself. The writer of Hebrews makes a forceful use of the principle of specific authority. He shows that under the law of Moses there was specific instruction that priests were to be of the tribe of Levi. But regarding any other tribe, “Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.” The writer concluded, therefore, that for Christ (who was of the tribe of Judah) to be a priest, the law had to be changed, because as long as the law specified the tribe of Levi, no priest could come from another tribe (Heb. 7:11-14). Thus the validity of the principle of specific authority is clearly demonstrated by one whose interpretation of Scripture was inspired by God.

Music—Specific or Generic?

Just as there are different specific kinds of wood that fall under the generic of wood, different kinds of animals that fall under the generic of animals, and different kinds of food that fall under the generic of food, so there are different kinds of music that fall under the generic of music. Two kinds of music are instrumental music and singing. They are obviously coordinate to each other because it is possible for each to be performed independently of the other.

If the New Testament had given a generic instruction to produce music in worship, the principle of generic authority would allow either or both kinds of music. But the instruction is not generic; it is specific. As regards kinds of music, a coordinate kind of music is not authorized.

The specification of singing, therefore, parallels the specification of gopher wood

for the ark, a lamb for the Passover, bread and fruit of the vine for the Lord’s Supper, and believers as subjects for baptism—all things required by specific authority. Instrumental music is not specified and is, therefore, parallel to such unauthorized innovations as would have been pine for the ark, a heifer in place of the lamb, jam on the Lord’s Table, and infant baptism—all unauthorized coordinates of the things specified.

Quibbles are sometimes raised regarding the authority for such things as songbooks, but the principle is that things which are subordinate to, or expedients related to, the things specified are authorized. Songbooks are not another kind of music. They are expedient for performing the thing specified. Remember that tools could be used in building the ark as long as the only wood used was gopher wood.

Further, singing is a generic as regards such things as the parts of harmony. One may sing bass, tenor, alto, or soprano. These are subordinates to the generic of singing. But in any case it is still singing. Singing is not generic, however, as regards instrumental music. One might as easily swim by flying, walk by riding, or immerse by sprinkling as he could sing by playing an instrument!

Generic Authority

We have especially emphasized the force of specific authority. Most, if indeed not all, unscriptural innovations would be avoided if the implications of specific authority were respected. There are, however, also problems that arise from failure to respect generic authority. These problems relate to efforts to limit the liberty God has given us. Such is aptly described as “making laws where God has made none.” Disregard of generic authority has been the cause for the anti-Sunday school faction, the anti-orphan home faction, the one-cup faction, and other like things.

Generic authority allows choices within the general area indicated. A simple illustration of this is in the command to “go” (Mk. 16:15). “Go” is generic as regards various modes of travel—walking, riding, flying, etc. Any of these would be acceptable. Also acceptable would be any incidentals or expedients which would be used in obeying the command—shoes, horse, car, etc. Generic authority allows anything within the genus, and all otherwise lawful expedients pertaining to it.

Boundaries Set

The principle of generic and specific authority pertains to the boundaries set by positive divine instructions. A boundary marks both what is excluded and what is included. Where there are many negative instructions or prohibitions, God's *positive* laws are also effective in defining the perimeters of acceptable action.

To illustrate again, a child's fenced play

yard sets boundaries wherein the child is to play. The fence is specific in defining limits. All yards beyond the fence are not authorized; they are out of bounds. On the other hand, the fence is generic in allowing the child to play anywhere within the authorized area.

The doctrine of Christ defines the perimeters of things pleasing to God, and to go beyond, or to fail to abide in, these

boundaries is to break fellowship with God (2 Jn. 9). The excluding boundaries of specific authority and the including boundaries of generic authority cannot be ignored without adding to or subtracting from the word of God (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19; cf. Mt. 18:18; 1 Pet. 4:11).

*(Reprinted from *The Spiritual Sword*, April 1990) WOT

BE NOT DECEIVED

J.C. Choate, Winona, Mississippi

The Lord's word warns again and again that we be not deceived. To be deceived means that one has been misled, lied to, that he has been taught and has accepted false doctrine. Since we have the Scriptures to read and study, you wouldn't think that a person could easily be deceived, but he can be.

Jesus said, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Mt. 24:4-5). Just imagine people today being deceived by imposters claiming to be Christ or the Messiah! Who would think that there would be intelligent people who would fall for such lies, but there are many.

Paul warned, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Again, he said, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Writing to the Galatians, Paul said, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

The Ephesians were warned, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14). "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for

because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6).

Paul reminded the Thessalonians, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3). He wrote to Timothy, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13).

James wrote, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jam. 1:22). Then John was inspired to write, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8).

From these passages of Scripture, and others which could be given, we learn that it is possible to be deceived, misled, and for a person finally to be eternally lost because of the deception.

- **One can deceive himself.** He can want to do something, or to believe something, so much that he convinces himself it is right, whether it is or not. Many centuries ago the prophet Obadiah wrote in verse 3, "The pride of your heart has deceived you."

- **One can allow himself to be deceived by others,** as Paul warned in Romans 16:17-18: "... note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them, for they who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."

Perhaps the listener has so much confidence in a preacher or teacher that he convinces himself he is being taught the truth, even though it contradicts what the Bible says.

- **One may be deceived by a popular false doctrine.** Often the error goes back for many years, and it has been so widely taught and believed that it seems more true than the word of God itself, which it actually contradicts. The words of Paul in Romans 16:18, concerning the "smooth words and flattering speeches which deceive the hearts of the simple" should keep all on their guard.
- **One may be deceived by following the majority.** He reasons that it would not be possible for so many to be wrong, but he forgets what Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14: "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."

There are so many ways to be deceived when it comes to the plan God has made for our salvation, the church, acceptable worship, the kind of life He wants us to live, the certainty of the return of Christ and the judgment that will follow, and even eternity itself. Man-made teachings are generally accepted as truth, while the actual truths as revealed in the Scriptures may be rejected as error—simply because so many have heard men's lies more than they have heard God's truths! We plead with one and all to follow only God's word in matters of the soul. WOT

“WE STAND FOR SOMETHING”

Mel Futrell, Birmingham, Alabama

On Tuesday night September 8, 1999, the current President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Gordon B. Hinckley, appeared on the Larry King Live Show—he would appear again on December 24, 1999. This was, in and of itself, somewhat of a momentous occasion for both Mormonism and the general public. You see, Mormon leaders are, in the words of one respected authority on Mormonism, “obsessive about their image.”¹ So an opportunity for their President and first prophet to appear on the stylish and elite Larry King Live Show was quite an honor. Furthermore, it would provide them the means to hopefully demonstrate that they are normal—in contrast to the general public perception of them.

The truth is, most right thinking people correctly view Mormons and Mormonism as a cult and anti-Christian in their/its belief system. For example, Mormonism is polytheistic, believes that God was once a man, affirms that God the Father has a body of flesh and bones, believes that Adam was God, teaches that man can become a god, denies that the Bible is God’s sole revelation to man, holds that an angel [Moroni] appeared to Joseph Smith in the early nineteenth century, taught while Joseph Smith was alive and shortly thereafter that the “Son of man” would return in 1890, claims to have living apostles, etc.²

During the course of the interview Larry King asked Gordon Hinckley, “Why are you growing?” Remember that the Mormons claim some 10.5 to 11 million members worldwide—half of these being in the United States of America. Mr. Hinckley’s response to Larry’s question was not only intriguing but also impressive. He said, “**Because we stand for something and we expect something of our members.**” My immediate reaction and thought upon hearing this was, “That’s what we ought to be saying.” Brethren, that is *our* line . . . or at least it should be. And it should come as no surprise to any of us that the New Testament teaches in explicit fashion exactly that. New Testament Christians [there are no other kind], individually and collectively, are told to stand for certain things and against others. And the Lord does expect something of His people. Perhaps we can

investigate each of these a tad more.

A few years back country music singer Aaron Tippins recorded a song that included these words, “You’ve got to stand for something or you’ll fall for anything.” That is without a doubt the case in the church as well. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul said, “Therefore, brethren, **stand fast**, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” The traditions [*paradosis*] here are divine in nature—they have been handed down from God above (1 Thess. 2:13). To the Corinthians Paul said, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein **ye stand.**” Later, to the same group, he admonished, “Watch ye, **stand fast** in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). Writing to the “churches of Galatia” Paul penned this exhortation, “**Stand fast** therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” William Woodson once told the old story of the late brother E. A. Elam, then President of David Lipscomb College, asking H. Leo Boles, the incoming President, what his administration would stand for. He [Elam] said, “I know what you stand against, but what will you stand for?” That is such a rich question. Brethren, it is important, very important, what we as God’s people stand for and against.

It is equally true that we ought to expect something of each other as it pertains to the kingdom of Christ. **We should expect** of each other individually and of ourselves collectively that we will seek first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33), do our part in preaching the gospel to the whole world (Mk. 16:15), do what is our duty to do (Lk. 17:10), believe that Jesus is the Christ (Jn. 20:30-31), give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4), never be ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), speak the same thing and do all things with love (1 Cor. 1:10; 16:14), give lovingly and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7), restore the fallen and do good to all men (Gal. 6:1,10), speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), be set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17), lie not one to another (Col. 3:9), abstain from fornication (1 Thess. 4:3), withdraw from the disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6), provide for our own (1 Tim.

5:8), rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), speak sound doctrine and submit to civil authorities (Tit. 2:1; 3:1), make mention of the brethren always in our prayers (Phile. 4), assemble with the saints (Heb. 10:25), pray for wisdom and care for orphans and widows (Jam. 1:5,27), be ready to give a defense of our hope (1 Pet. 3:15), add to our faith . . . (2 Pet. 1:5-7), walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7), abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9), be fellow-helpers to the truth (3 Jn. 8), have compassion, making a difference (Jude 22), and do His commandments (Rev. 22:14).

Mormon President Gordon B. Hinckley said they were growing because they were standing for something and they expected something of their members. Is there not a lesson here for us? Currently, so many in the church aren’t standing for anything. And eldership after eldership expects nothing of the members. If we are to be pleasing to our God this must change. The Divine directive is clear and now is the time for great expectations.

ENDNOTES

¹Ostling, Richard, *Mormon America*, HarperSanFrancisco, 2000, p. xx. This is perhaps the most thorough recent review of Mormonism.

²For documentation of these errors see *Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 132:20, also Ostling, p. 296 on polytheism. See King Follett funeral sermon delivered by Joseph Smith, April 7, 1844 for the belief that God was once a man. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22 for the Mormon belief that God has a body of flesh and bones. See “Deseret News” June 18, 1873 p. 308 for the view that Adam was God. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:20 for the Mormon position that men can become gods. See *Pearl of Great Price* 8th and 9th articles of faith for the Mormon allegation that the Bible is not God’s sole revelation. See Fawn Brodie’s biography of Smith, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 39 to document Smith’s claim that an angel appeared to him. See Smith’s *History of the Church* vol. 2 p. 182 for proof that Joseph Smith believed that the Lord would return in 1890. It is common knowledge and experience that Mormons claim to have living apostles. WOT

"I AM HERE, MY SON"

Chuck Webster, Jasper, Alabama

Many years ago a little boy lay on his small bed, having retired for the night. Before going to sleep, he moved in the direction of the large bed on which his father lay and said, "Father, are you there?" "Yes, my son," was the answer. The little boy turned over and went to sleep without a thought of danger.

Tonight the little boy is an old man, and every night before going to sleep, he looks up into the face of the heavenly Father and says, "Father, are you there?" And the answer comes back clear and strong, "Yes, my son."

Long ago, the Hebrews writer said: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

It's sometimes disturbing to live in a world of uncertainty, to be frightened when life's storm clouds become dark and foreboding. But for Christians there's a sense of peacefulness that prevails, because we know something the world doesn't: *we know the One who has the world in His hands*. In fact, He's our Father.

Like the little boy described above, it's comforting to know that regardless of what happens in life, how dark the sky becomes or how forceful the storm blows, we can take comfort in knowing that the Father is there. As His children, we can pillow our heads each night, confident that the Creator of all is awake and constantly watching over us.

"Father, are You there?" "Yes, my son."

WOT



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for an associate evangelist to work with us. All interested men should send their résumés to:

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THE WORDS OF Truth

Chuck Webster, Editor

The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



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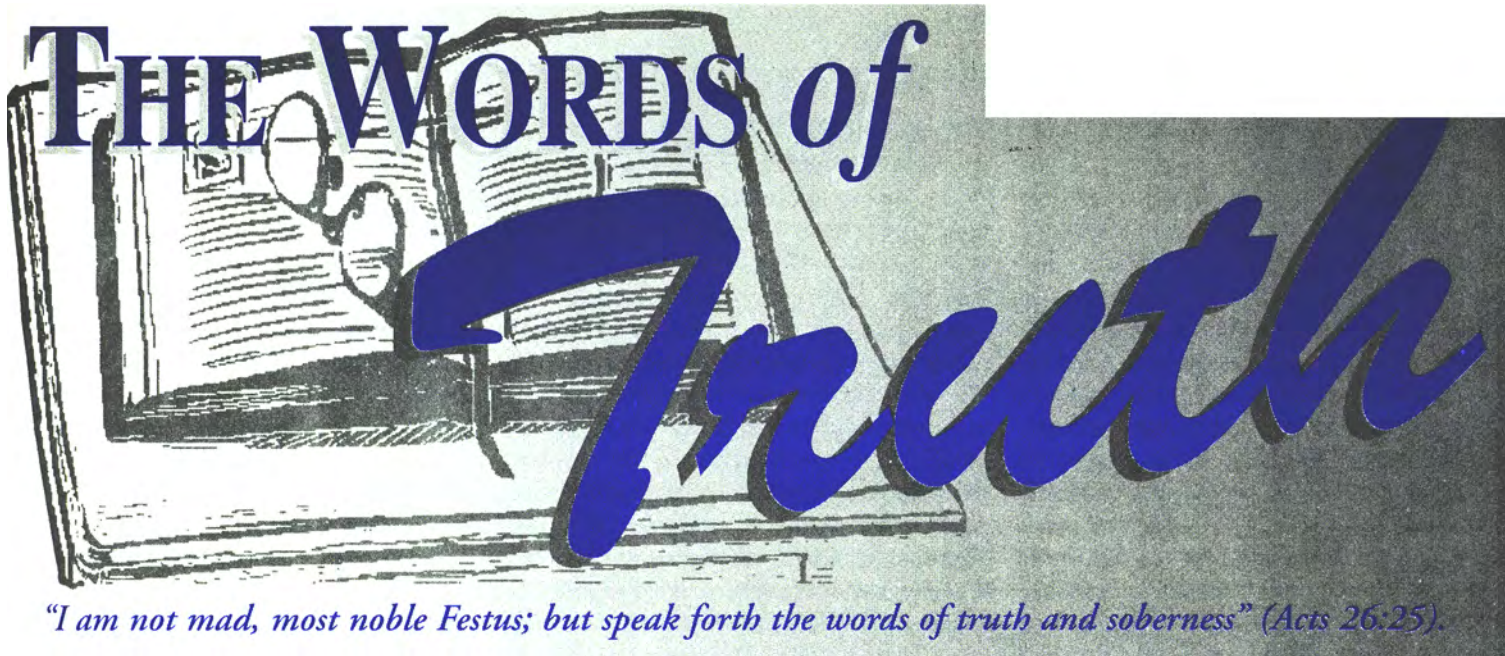
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THY KINGDOM COME

Mel Futrell, Birmingham, Alabama

The most recognized prayer in the Bible in all likelihood is the "model prayer" of Matthew 6:9-13. The background for our Lord's instruction here is rooted in Luke 11:1, where after having observed the Lord's praying, Jesus' disciples approached Him saying, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." The more detailed response is found in Matthew 6.

The element of the prayer that has perhaps been most controversial, at least within churches of Christ, is the expression "thy kingdom come." Could or should this be included in one of our prayers today? I hope my brethren would answer with an emphatic "No!"

Be reminded, however, that there have been and are those among us who think that we have made much ado about nothing in regard to this. One example from the brotherhood publication *Wineskins* will suffice:

When I set out for a Florida elementary school in the early '60s, my Flintstones lunch box firmly in hand, I was given two injunctions: one, parental; the other, congregational. First, in the event of a Cuban missile attack, I was to leave campus immediately—without asking permission . . . More important still was the Lord's Prayer. I was not to join in on the phrase "Thy kingdom come," for that would be unscriptural. It was a firm

conviction in our local congregation: on the Day of Pentecost, the kingdom *had* come in the form of the New Testament church. So joining in with the other children (benighted souls, in my eyes, from the sectarian world about us) would constitute a denial of this clear biblical teaching. Again, I complied without question. This Lord's Prayer prohibition didn't strike me as too strange. After all, I was accustomed to being different . . . One more difference didn't matter much. Refraining from that unscriptural phrase, falling silent while others around me unknowingly mumbled heresy, wasn't too bothersome . . . But I'm not so certain that "Thy kingdom come" must be interpreted solely in the past tense . . . Isn't the kingdom still in the process of coming? (Steve Weathers, *Wineskins*, Vol. 4, #1, 1998, pp. 28-29).

The concern at hand is whether or not the kingdom is still in the process of coming. I am not denying that the word "kingdom" sometimes carries a different meaning, depending upon the context. Two examples are: (1) Acts 14:22: "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"; and (2) 2 Timothy 4:18: "the Lord . . . will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." Here, "kingdom of God" is a reference to heaven itself. But that is not what Steve Weathers is suggesting in the above article.

He is saying that the kingdom *did* come in a sense on the day of Pentecost, in the form of the church, but it did not come completely then and "there's a sense in which the kingdom will not be fully realized until Christ's final appearing" (p. 29). I, and many others, deny that this was the situation.

The kingdom was "at hand" during the preaching of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2), of Jesus Christ (Mt. 4:17), and of the Lord's disciples (Mt. 10:7). **But on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 in the city of Jerusalem the kingdom came in full** (Mk. 9:1 with Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:1-4). Paul, in the early A.D. 60s, said he and the Colossians had been "translated into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). The apostle John—in the early to mid A.D. 90s—plainly stated that he was "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). And Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:24 indicated that Jesus at His second coming would "deliver up the kingdom to God." Were Paul, John, and the Colossians only in a partial kingdom? Will this be an incomplete kingdom that Jesus will deliver up to the Father? Of course not—but such is the case if one buys into the false philosophy of "Isn't the kingdom still in the process of coming?" All those that advocate that we can and should still pray "Thy kingdom come," whether they realize it or not, are insisting that the kingdom (the church—Col. 1:18) is incomplete. WOT

ISLAM

Part 1 of 2

Chuck Webster, Editorial

As I write these words, a little over a month has passed since a handful of militants attacked the most visible icons of America's economic and military strength, sparking justified outrage from all Americans, as well as most of the world. Just as our military and intelligence divisions began their resolute efforts to bring those responsible to justice, we found ourselves simultaneously fighting on another front, this one against an altered form of Anthrax, disseminated to create fear and uncertainty in the heart of every American. As we overcame the initial shock and disbelief, most of us asked, "Why? . . . What would lead anyone to perpetrate such evil and unthinkable acts against innocent civilians?" The answer lies, partially at least, in an understanding of the religious background of Osama bin Laden and his followers. We thus set forth a brief essay on Islam, in hopes that a better understanding of this apostate religion will help us better understand recent events, and better equip us to teach the gospel to adherents of this fast-growing religion.

The word *Islam* is an Arabic word that means "submission" (not "peace," as some have recently claimed). The word *Muslim* is a form of the word *Islam* and means simply "one who submits." The religion claims approximately 1.2 billion followers worldwide and is one of the fastest growing religions in the world.

A brief history

Muhammad was born around A.D. 570 in Mecca in Arabia (now Saudi Arabia). Because his father died before he was born, and his mother died when he was six years old, he was raised first by his grandfather and later his uncle. At the age of twenty-five he married a wealthy forty-year-old widow named Khadijah.

As the young man matured, he became quite reflective, often wandering into the wilderness to meditate. He soon became convinced that there was only one God, Allah, and that the polytheism and idolatry

surrounding him were evil. When he was forty (ca. A.D. 610), Muhammad claimed to receive a "vision," which, as it turned out, would be the first of many. Initially he was concerned that the vision was of demonic origin, but at the insistence of his wife he soon became convinced that it was from God. Soon he began to receive "messages" along with or shortly after the visions. At first they were fairly short, consisting of only a few verses ending in a common rhyme or assonance. As the new religion grew, however, the revelations tended to be longer, most of which were written down during Muhammad's lifetime by his secretaries. Many were committed to memory by him and his followers and recited as part of their common worship. Muhammad received these messages from 610 until his death in 632.

Soon after the visions began, Muhammad began to share them with others, and soon his new religion started to grow. As the converts increased, their opposition to Mecca's idolatry became more vocal, resulting in increased opposition from the idolatrous Meccans. Because of his rejection in Mecca and the ostracism of his views, Muhammad and his followers withdrew to the city now known as Medina, which means in full, "City of the Prophet," renamed from its original Yathrib. While in Medina, Muhammad's popularity grew significantly. He soon gained the support of dozens of very capable men who pledged their complete allegiance to him, even to the point of death. With this devoted support, Muhammad returned with such strength to Mecca that the inhabitants surrendered without a fight. He subsequently destroyed the idols of the city and made Islam its official religion.

Between the return to Mecca and Muhammad's death, the prophet zealously and militantly propagated Islam, and the new faith quickly spread throughout the area. Some who refused to convert were slaughtered. Others were forced to pay a special tax for unbelievers. Most people

simply converted to avoid both harm and monetary loss. Following Muhammad's death in 632, he was succeeded by a series of caliphs who built up a vast empire by the sword.

Concerning the subsequent history of Islam, Jesse L. Hurlbut writes:

Palestine and Syria were soon conquered; and the holy places of Christianity fell under the power of Islam. Province after province of the Greco-Roman Empire was seized, and soon all that was left was the city of Constantinople, so that all the lands of early Christianity became subject. Where the Christians submitted, their worship was permitted under restrictions. Eastward the empire of the caliphs extended beyond Persia into India. Their capital was at Baghdad on the Tigris. Westward, their conquests included Egypt, all northern Africa, and the greater part of Spain. Nearly all of this vast empire was gained within a hundred years after "the prophet's" death.

Islam's beliefs

Scholars suggest that one of the reasons Islam spread so quickly is its simplicity of doctrine. It has no "mysterious system of theology, giving rise to interminable, useless controversies" (Hurlbut). Islam can be summarized as follows:

Five articles of faith

1. *God*. There is only one true God and his name is Allah. Allah, though omniscient, omnipotent, and sovereign, is not a personal God, for he is so far above man in every way that he is not personally knowable. "The emphasis of the God of Islam is on judgment, not grace; on power, not mercy. He is the source of both good and evil and his will is supreme" (McDowell and Stewart, p. 389).

2. *Angels*. Muslims believe that angels, both good and bad, work continually—though invisibly—in the

world. Gabriel was the angel through whom Allah gave his messages to Muhammad.

3. *Scripture*. There are four inspired books in the Islamic faith. They are the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, the Gospel of Jesus, and the Qur'an. Muslims believe the former three books have been corrupted by Jews and Christians. Also, since the Qur'an is God's most recent and final word to man, it supercedes all the other works. In other words, Muslims accept the Qur'an as their holy book and reject—in their present form—the other three.

4. *Prophets*. The six great prophets of Islam are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses,

Jesus, and Muhammad. Muhammad is the last and greatest of all Allah's messengers. Muslims do not view Jesus as God's Son, nor do they accept Him as anything greater than a prophet; they believe that His words were supplanted by "the prophet," Muhammad.

5. *Last Days*. Muslims believe that at some unknown time in the future, the world will come to an end, all men will be raised, the books of their deeds will be opened, and they will then spend eternity in heaven or hell. Their conception of heaven, however, is extremely sensual. Heaven ("Paradise"), to Muslims, will be a place where men will recline on soft couches, drinking cups of

wine handed to them by beautiful maidens, of whom each man may marry as many as he pleases (Anderson, p. 81). Incidentally, to Muslims marriage is synonymous with sexual relations; it involves nothing of the multi-faceted concept of marriage found in the Bible—true intimacy, mutual self-sacrificing love, etc.

But does Islam allow, or perhaps even encourage, acts of violence against "unbelievers"? We will discuss this question and others in the conclusion to this article in next month's editorial. Relevant bibliographical information will also be included. WOT

ARE MIRACLES FOR TODAY?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

The term "miracle" is used rather loosely in today's world. Unusual occurrences or coincidences are often described as miracles. It is called a miracle when a person who is facing some financial need receives a check in the mail after praying about his need. One who suddenly happens upon a parking space near the mall entrance after circling the lot several times calls it a miracle. A mother who walks in a room just as her child is about to poke a paper clip into the electrical outlet describes it as a miracle. Are these miracles in the sense in which the Bible uses the term, or are these merely fortunate coincidences? Seeking a biblical response to several questions can aid our understanding.

What are miracles?

A miracle is an extraordinary event wrought by the power of God that cannot be explained by natural forces. They are called "signs and wonders" several times in the scriptures (e.g., Jn. 4:48; Acts 2:43; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12). It was a miraculous deed when Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea, and the Lord caused an east wind to divide the waters, enabling the Israelites, around two million of them, to cross over on **dry** ground (Ex. 14:21-22). It was a miracle when the prophet Elijah raised the son of the widow

of Zarephath from the dead (1 Kng. 17:21-23). His successor in the prophetic office, Elisha, caused an axe head to float on top of the Jordan River when it accidentally fell off the shaft (2 Kng. 6:6). The Lord Jesus proved His claim to be Deity by openly performing miracles during His earthly ministry (Jn. 20:30-31; Acts 2:22). These examples were more than just unusual occurrences or incidents, but were supernatural or miraculous events.

When has God used miracles?

Though miracles occurred at other times, most of them took place during three different periods of about one hundred years each. God performed miracles during the time that Moses and Joshua served as leaders of Israel when they came out of Egyptian captivity into the land promised to them. Another cluster of miracles took place during the ministries of the great prophets, Elijah and Elisha. Also, during the earthly ministry of Christ and the days of the apostles, in the infancy of the church, many miracles took place.

Why did God use miracles?

It is interesting to note that He used them to introduce new eras of revelation. Consider the fact that, as suggested above, Moses led Israel at a critical point in their history. God authenticated him as a

reliable messenger by performing miracles through him (Ex. 4:5; 9:16). This same man was the human writer of the first five books of the Old Testament. Elijah and Elisha introduced what is known as the prophetic age that extended from Isaiah to Malachi. During this time some of the greatest preaching in the Old Testament occurred. The message of these prophets was authenticated by the miracles God performed through them (cf. Ex. 8:19; 1 Kng. 17:24). Jesus and the apostles performed miracles as an authentication of their message as well (Jn. 20:30-31; Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4).

Are miracles necessary today?

By inspiration of God, the apostle Paul stated that miracles were not meant to be continuous in subsequent ages (1 Cor. 13:8-13). The purpose of validating the gospel is no longer needed (Heb. 2:3-4).

Has God's power diminished?

By no means! God has the power to create man from the dust of the earth as He once did, but He no longer chooses to bring life into the world in this manner. God has the power to perform miracles today, but He has not chosen to operate in that fashion; indeed, there no longer remains a need since the gospel has already been validated. WOT

THE CHURCH: PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

The first definition given by Webster for the word "precious" is "of great value or worth." Without hesitation, then, this word can be applied to the church in describing how God feels about it. The church is certainly "of great value and worth" to God, a fact which can be seen by many aspects about the church which God's word reveals.

Precious because of its particular prophecies

Prophets such as Samuel (2 Sam. 7:16), David (Psa. 110:1-3), Isaiah (Isa. 2:2-4), Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34), Daniel (Dan. 2:44-45), Zechariah (Zech. 6:12-13), Joel (Joel 2:28-32), and others prophesied concerning the coming kingdom of Christ. These men spoke, not their own words, but the words of God (2 Pet. 1:21). Their prophecies and the subsequent fulfillment were not the work of man, but rather the work of Almighty God. These matters were concealed in prophecy, fulfilled in Christ, and revealed by the Holy Spirit through inspiration (1 Pet. 1:9-12).

The prophecies were particular and pointed—they could not have been fulfilled by accident nor by any individual or body other than the Christ and His church. As recorded in Acts 2, Peter stated, "But *THIS IS THAT* which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (v. 16, emp. added). The fulfillment of these prophecies took place on Pentecost and is not, therefore, reserved for some future

date. Because of these pointed, particular prophecies, the church is precious in the eyes of God.

Precious because of its paramount promise

Our Lord *promised* to build His church (Mt. 16:18). That promise is of great significance. Since the promises of God are sure (2 Pet. 3:9), any failure to keep this promise would cast a reflection upon the integrity of God. That promise was made. That promise was kept. As seen, the unveiling of the Lord's church is a monumental event (recorded in Acts 2).

As the church was in the mind of God from eternity (Eph. 3:9-11), the promise of its coming is not something He would have taken lightly. Not even "the gates of hell" could prevent its establishment once that promise was made (Mt. 16:18). This paramount promise makes the church precious in the eyes of God.

Precious because of its purchase price

Most "religious" people have the idea (imposed in their minds by men and not from God's word) that the church is "non-essential," unimportant. Yet, one need look no further than its purchase price to see that it is indeed important, an essential entity—and one that is precious in the eyes of God. Acts 20:28 reveals that it was

purchased with the blood of Christ. To say that it is unimportant and a non-essential is the same as saying that God used the blood of His Son to purchase a worthless institution. Truly, the purchase price of the church is sufficient within itself to reveal its preciousness in the eyes of God.

Precious because of its preserved populace

On that notable day of Pentecost the Bible reveals that the Lord added "to the church" those who were saved (Acts 2:47). Thus, "the saved" are those who comprise "the church." Paul, through inspiration, stated that Jesus is "the saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). "The body" and the church are the same (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Therefore, He is the "saviour of the church." No other conclusion can be drawn. Since, then, the church is composed of the saved, this preserved populace makes the church precious in the eyes of God.

Dear friend, the church's role is too important, its contents too great, its cost too pricey, and its potential too tremendous to be termed a non-essential, unimportant institution. The prophets spoke of its coming, Jesus promised its establishment, His blood purchased its existence and it contains the redeemed of the earth. How, then, can it be termed in any sense "unimportant"? WOT

DOING IT THE EASY WAY

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

A widely circulated e-mail came to me recently. Some of our students may find this somewhat appealing. It said,

YOU CAN GET A UNIVERSITY DIPLOMA NOW!

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This is amusing and makes a strong spiritual illustration. How many today, even some religious leaders, want to promise heaven to those who don't obey God's Word? Such a promise of salvation, as with

the promise of a Ph.D. without any work, is a fairy tale and not reality. Throughout history people have tried to water down God's requirements. Some taught the doctrines of men in Christ's time, and their worship became vain (Mt. 15:9). Some used their imagination and taught a way different from God's way and were called "filthy dreamers" (Jude 8).

How many popular religious practices and doctrines can you think of which are attempts to help people "graduate" to heaven one day without fulfilling God's requirements?

1. To hear some funeral preachers today, a man may go to heaven without being religious at all. He may be active in the community, a good family man, and when he dies the preacher will often say, “he went to a better place.” Isn’t that like offering a degree to someone who doesn’t go to school?

2. The Bible teaches that one must repent and be baptized to have his sins forgiven (Acts 2:38). Some religious groups today sprinkle water on babies and claim such saves them. Babies can’t repent and have nothing from which to repent, but perhaps such religionists figure that they also can’t grow up and reject Christ if we “baptize” them when they are infants. Isn’t that like offering a degree to someone who doesn’t go to school?

3. Again, Acts 2:38 says “. . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Some today, even in some churches of Christ, are maintaining that baptism practiced in other religions, which is clearly not for the remission of sins, will still be good enough. One popular preacher encouraged people to do what the Bible never teaches them to do—pray the sinner’s

prayer for salvation. He then went on to say that such a prayer saves you, and afterwards you should be baptized. That isn’t the obedience Jesus required for salvation, but it makes things a lot easier in one way—we could relax our teaching and evangelism and simply accept false religions as God-approved. But isn’t that like offering a degree to someone who doesn’t go to school?

4. Some of our brethren were baptized according to the scriptures, but have been weak and sporadic in their worship attendance, their giving, and their general involvement. Clearly the Bible requires such of Christians. Their limited involvement shows these folks to have some intention and hope of heaven, but without all the effort and dedication and love. Isn’t that like offering a degree to someone who doesn’t go to school?

We do not earn our salvation in the way we might earn a degree, and yet there are requirements God has placed on us if we are to enter the pearly gates. God’s grace is rich and good and shows us how to please the Almighty (Tit. 2:11-12). Observe:

- “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

- “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).
- “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6:33).
- “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:25-27).
- “And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (Mt. 7:26-27). WOT

GIANTS, WIZARDS, AND DWARFS . . . AND MERMAIDS?

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

I confess to being a fan of Robert Fulghum. While I don’t share many of his religious or moral convictions, I do appreciate some of his insightful writing. Many of you will recall his first work, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. The following is an excerpt from that volume:

GIANTS, WIZARDS, AND DWARFS was the game to play. Being left in charge of about eighty children seven to ten years old, while their parents were off doing parenty things, I mustered my troops in the church social hall and explained the game. It’s a large-scale version of Rock, Paper, and Scissors, and involves some intellectual decision-making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody knows which side you are on or who

won.

Organizing a roomful of wired-up gradeschoolers into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, achieving consensus on group identity—all this is no mean accomplishment, but we did it with a right good will and were ready to go.

The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out: “You have to decide now which you are—a GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DWARF!”

While the groups huddled in frenzied, whispered consultation, a tug came at my pants leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small, concerned voice, “Where do the Mermaids stands?”

Where do the Mermaids stand? A long pause. A *very* long pause. “Where

do the Mermaids stand?” says I. “Yes. You see, I am a Mermaid.” “There are no such things as Mermaids.” “Oh, yes, I am one!”

She did not relate to being a Giant, a Wizard, or a Dwarf. She knew her category. Mermaid. And she was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand. She intended to participate, wherever Mermaids **fit** into the scheme of things. Without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted that there was a place for Mermaids and that I would know just where.

Well, where DO the Mermaids stand? All the “Mermaids”—all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes?

Answer that question and you can

build a school, a nation, or a world on it.

What was the answer at the moment? Every once in while I say the right thing. "The Mermaid stands right here by the King of the Sea!" says I. (*Yes, right here by the King's Fool, I thought to myself*).

So we stood there hand in hand, reviewing the troops of Wizards and Giants and Dwarfs as they rolled by in wild disarray.

It is not true, by the way, that mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I have held her hand (83-

85).

As I read that story, it occurred to me that *there's a message here for our Christian young people*. You need to be reminded that:

1) It's not always necessary to conform to the ways of your peers (Rom. 12:2).

2) At times, Christianity demands that you stand alone (Gen. 39:6-12; Dan. 1:8; 2 Kng. 22-23) and withdraw/separate (Ezra 10:11) yourself from those activities which may compromise your faith (1 Cor. 15:33).

On occasion, you may be tempted to

think, "I have to be this way or that way," when in reality, . . .

3) *Neither* position may be in keeping with what Christ desires for you and your life (Lk. 9:23; Mt. 5:13-16). To borrow from Fulghum, *you can be a "mermaid" despite what everybody else is trying to be*.

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. Tit. 2:14).

WOT

"STAND UP, STAND UP FOR JESUS!"

Neil Richey, Lynchburg, Virginia

A talented twenty-nine year-old preacher was conducting a revival in Philadelphia in 1858. As a result of the young preacher's message, as well as his oratorical ability, many responded at that meeting. On Wednesday, after the close of the meeting, he was at his farm watching a new machine shell corn. Intrigued by the apparatus, he moved in for a closer look. Tragically, he got too close, his sleeve was caught, and his arm was pulled out at the shoulder. By Friday, the news about the accident had spread, and friends and fellow ministers came to console the family. The young preacher's father leaned over the bed to hear his son utter his final words: "Tell them to stand up for Jesus!"

George Duffield was present at the time this young preacher was dying. He was so impressed by these final words that he went home and wrote this poem:

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the Cross,
Lift high his royal banner,
It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory,
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished
And Christ is Lord indeed.

Some of the most memorable words uttered are final words, and often these words are said to benefit others rather than self. Such was the case with this young preacher. When I consider the final

words of those in the Bible, I think about such men as the apostle Paul. Toward the end of his life he encouraged Timothy to "preach the word," to be watchful, to "endure," to be a worker, and to fulfill his ministry (2 Tim. 4:2-5). Paul then said there was a "crown of righteousness" waiting for him, and for "all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8). He was thinking of others at the time of his death. When the time came near for the Lord to leave His apostles to go to the right hand of His Father, He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14:1-3). The Lord did not want His disciples to be without hope.

We can learn valuable lessons from the young preacher who, in his dying breath, said "Tell them to stand up for Jesus!" Consider these:

The cost

Anything worthwhile in life is not free. Christianity is not free, for it cost the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). When we choose to stand on the Lord's side by becoming Christians through our obedience, then there is a cost. Jesus said, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot

be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). So the cost of discipleship is not cheap. We must be willing to give up all that we have if we are going to stand up for Jesus. In reality, this is a small price to pay when we think in terms of the rewards that are promised if we stand for the Lord.

The rewards

But the rewards also are numerous. When we choose to stand up for Jesus by obeying the Gospel, then we have . . .

- . . . *the forgiveness of sins* (Acts 2:38).
- . . . *a companion that will endure with us until the end*. Jesus said, ". . . and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20).
- . . . *power over Satan* (Mt. 4:1-11).
- . . . *a purpose*. Jesus said, ". . . Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15).
- . . . *hope for the future*. John penned these words, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 Jn. 5:13).

We must stand up for Jesus in all that we do. As Christians, we made that decision before we were immersed for the remission of our sins. Jesus must come first (Mt. 6:33). . . . *before* recreation and enter-tainment . . . *before* work and school . . . *before* family. "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus!"

WOT

“THE BEST IS YET TO BE”

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

I. Scientists Know More Than God

The famous English poet Robert Browning (1812-1889), in his poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra,” wrote:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand.

Can those growing “old along with” Robert Browning, and knowing that “Our times are in His hand” (cf. Psa. 31:15), sensibly say, with hope and joy and a smile, “The best is yet to be”?

Can a dead body live again? Unquestionably it is true that “dust [‘*aphar*, dry earth, clay] you are and to dust [the earth, the ground, the soil, the clods, the dirt] you shall return” (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 3:20; 12:7), but can there be a resurrection? Can dead chemicals, “houses of clay” (Job 4:19; 10:9; 34:15), come to life?

“The first man, Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) arrived in two stages: (1) God shaped some dead chemicals, dust, dry earth, or clay, into the shape of a human being, as Moses wrote: “God formed the man from the dust of the ground;” (2) then God made that dead body come to life, as Moses wrote: [God] “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7).

Those who are called scientists say that dead chemicals in a primeval muddy swamp, after millions of years, on their own, changed into the first living thing, a creature called an amoeba “a microscopic, one-celled animal” (*Webster’s*). Modern and post-modern scientists now say:

... that atoms of elements in a lifeless environment came alive by chance, as unicellular algae, and these plants stayed alive; that specimen invertebrates developed backbones and became vertebrates, by chance; a whole new physical structure appeared and thrived, by chance; that some of the vertebrate mammals became man with all his potential for creativity, appreciation of beauty, verbal communications, and

worship.

Up-to-date scientists say that God, if there is a God, made an unnecessary mistake, for God did not think that the dead chemicals He used, dust or clay, to shape a dead human body, would, if given enough time, on its own, change into a living human body. The scientists, with all their research, say that if God had waited long enough He would not have had to perform a miracle by breathing life into the dead human body. Thus the scientists admit that they know more about nature than God.

II. “The Best Is Yet To Be”

Though the scientists believe that dead chemicals can on their own change into living animals, they do not believe that God put life back into Jesus’ dead body. If He did not, all of life is a dead end street, and this glorious universe ends up frozen, senseless, and cruel. But Christians believe this universe makes sense, and that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8,16), and they rejoice in reading the testimony of men of old that “the best is yet to be”:

Job: I know that my Redeemer lives, . . . and after my skin, even this body, is destroyed, then without my flesh I shall see God; whom I, even I, shall see, on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger (19:25-27).

David: While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, “Who knows whether Jehovah will be gracious to me, that the child may live?” but now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me (2 Sam. 12:22-23). . . . As for me, I will see your face in righteousness. I will be satisfied when I awake in your likeness (Psa. 17:15). . . . Weeping lingers over night, but, in the morning, a shout of joy! (Psa. 30:5). . . . God will redeem my corpse from the grave, and he will receive *me* (Psa. 49:15).

Asaph: You lead me by your counsel, and afterwards you will receive me in Glory. Who is for me in heaven? With you, I want nothing in this world (Psa. 73:24-25).

Malachi: . . . a book of remembrance was written before him for them who revered

the Lord, and who thought upon his name. “And they shall be mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “In that day when I make up my jewels” (3:16-17).

Jesus: I assure you that many will come from the east and west and sit with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in heaven’s kingdom (Mt. 8:11). . . . those who have been accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more, for they are like the angels, and they are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection (Lk. 20:35-36). . . . I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he dies, will yet live! He who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? (Jn. 11:25-26).

Paul: I consider that the present day sufferings are not worthy of comparison with the splendor that is going to be disclosed to us (Rom. 8:18). . . . If only in this life we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most pitiable (1 Cor. 15:19ff). . . . Behold! I show you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be transformed, in an instant, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet; for it will sound, and the dead shall be raised immortal, and we will be transformed (1 Cor. 15:51-52). . . . This perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal must put on immortality. When this perishable has clothed itself with imperishability, and when this mortal has clothed itself with immortality, then the written prediction shall take place, “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Where, Death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:53-57). . . . a crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me in that day; yet not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearance (2 Tim. 4:8).

John: And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write: Blessed from now on are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labors. Their works go along with them” (Rev. 14:13).

WOT

WINNING SOULS

Keith Kinds, Downey, California

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10). Faithful followers of Jesus should always be desiring and striving to win souls for Him. Proverbs 11:30 says "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that is wise winneth souls." Proverbs 10:14 tells us that "Wise men lay up knowledge . . ." Therefore, if we are going to win souls we must possess and use wisdom. James 1:5 says that if we lack wisdom we should pray to God and ask Him to give us wisdom. With that in mind, consider these attributes of a wise soul-winner.

1. The one who is wise **knows the truth**. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." We must work hard at studying the truth in order to properly teach others. Paul told Timothy that the inspired scriptures "are able to make thee wise unto salvation . . ." and that they are able to furnish us "completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

2. One who is wise **lives the truth**. We must be good examples to others by living the truth. Jesus, Paul, and many others lived according to the truth as they taught and won lost souls. To live the truth is to obey the word of truth. 1 John 1:6 says, "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not tell the truth."

3. The wise soul-winner **knows how to use the truth**. We have the example of Philip's using the truth in winning the soul of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:27-39. Notice the wisdom of Philip as he taught the Ethiopian: (1) He knew what question to ask to begin teaching (Acts 8:30-31). He asked, "Understandeth what thou readest?" We need to know what questions to ask in order to determine the student's interest and level of knowledge. His question led to questions from the Ethiopian. (2) He found out the student's Bible knowledge and proceeded to teach him from God's Word (Acts 8:32-34). (3) He was patient and thorough as his teaching led to conversion (Acts 8:35-38).

We should all be active in winning souls for Christ. Let us realize that the key to growth is the gospel message. We must know it well and then teach it wisely to others. We all must be diligent workers in the kingdom of the Lord. *WOT*



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THE WORDS OF Truth

Chuck Webster, Editor

The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama.

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

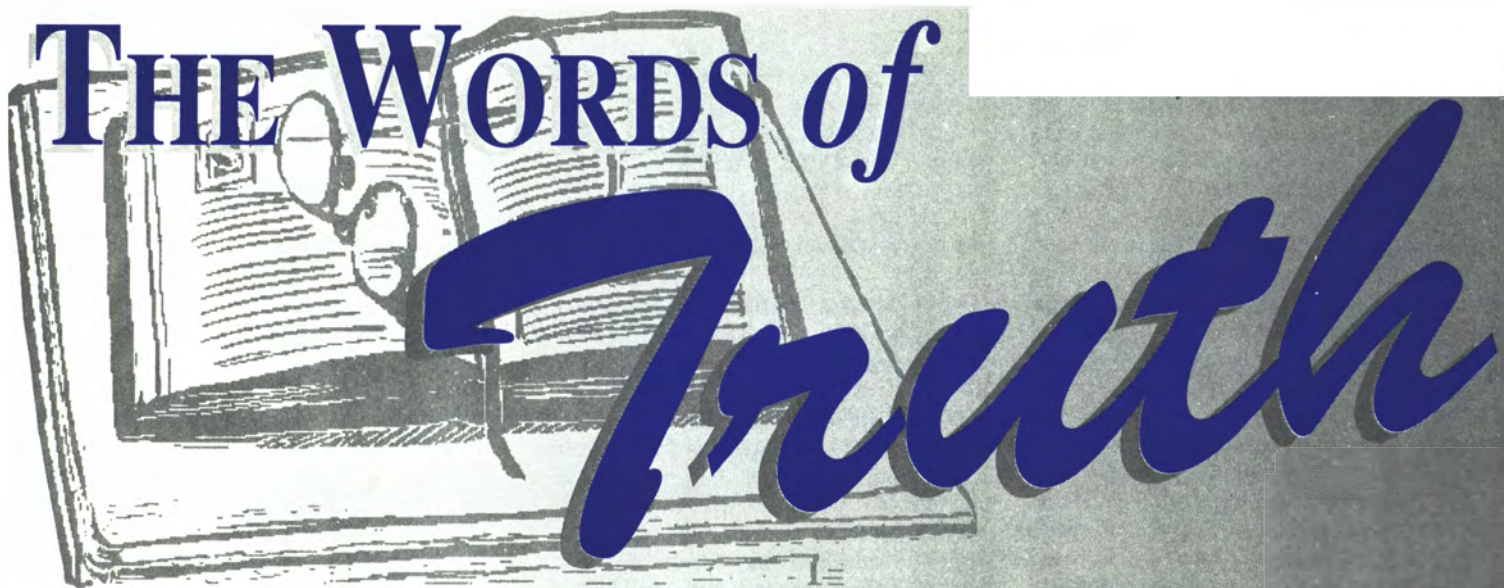
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS

Jason Jackson, Stockton, California

What should we do about church problems? Should we accept them as inevitable? In a sense we should, but only in recognizing they are going to happen. Congregations are going to have problems—they are made up of people. We cannot let this unnecessarily discourage us, nor should we use it as an excuse for unfaithfulness. But the issue is: "How are we to manage the problems?"

What New Testament passages teach us how to manage conflict? Actually, many address the issue, so we must consider *all* of the relevant biblical instruction.

I hope that the biblical principles contained in this study will help. But be aware: this article is not the final word on solving church problem "X, Y, and Z." No article, sermon, Wednesday night invitation, elders' meeting, men's business meeting, or ladies' Bible class has the last word on the problem of problems. Although Christian principles are constant, we are continually trying to live them—and understand them thoroughly.

When a doctrinal problem arises, only the New Testament can settle the dispute. But what do we do when strife is non-doctrinal? We do the same thing. The New Testament must have the final say. If we live by Christian principles, we will resolve issues like Christians should.

Can you think of two people in the New Testament who were in conflict? Do Paul and Barnabas come to mind? They both wanted to go on a second missionary trip, but they could not agree about John Mark. Paul did not want

him to return. Barnabas did. Luke writes, "And there arose a sharp contention" (Acts 15:39). Have you ever wondered why Paul did not just apply Matthew 18:15-17? Paul could have taken witnesses to Barnabas, and if Barnabas still refused to hear, then Paul could have taken it to the whole church. Is that not the format of the Lord's teaching?

Paul did not do that, however, because Matthew 18:15-17 did not apply to their situation. They had a problem. It hindered their ability to work together. But this was not a private matter wherein one had committed a sin against the other. In fact, there was not "one way" to settle their dispute. This was a matter of judgment; they considered the expedient thing was to go in separate directions.

Not every contention is a matter of right versus wrong, good against evil. If it's sin or error—fight the good fight of faith. Everything else is negotiable. Have you ever considered Paul's recommendation to two Christian ladies (Phil. 4:2-3)?

Paul's concern for them was urgent. He said, "come near." The word "exhort," *parakaleo*, means, "appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage" (Bauer, p. 617). Who might fall away because of this? How might this conflict damage their influence? Whose side are the members, elders, deacons, and preacher going to take? Would this not be detrimental to evangelistic works? Paul pleaded with them—settle this!

Paul's concern for them was mutual. What

about the blame: 50-50, 60-40, 70-30? Paul does not try to assign proportionate amounts of blame. But he did encourage both Euodia and Syntyche to be a part of the solution.

Paul's concern for them was mediatorial. These Christians needed help. Did Paul contradict the teaching of Christ? Absolutely not! We realize that not every contention is a private matter concerning personal sin between two people. In this situation, Paul encourages a third party to get involved. He calls on his "true yokefellow" to help these Christians.

It may have been necessary for Paul's "true yokefellow" to know the background of the conflict, how it developed, and other relevant facts. These issues may have been crucial. Yet, Paul's exhortation is that all—the principal parties and the mediator—could help promote a positive solution.

Paul's concern for them was spiritual. This was not about how much contribution the church might lose. It was not about their personal ties or power. Whatever the original controversy was, it was consequentially about the work of the church. It was about souls—names written in the book of life.

Although conflict can purify the church (cf. 1 Cor. 11:19), it can also damage the church. Paul noted that the brothers and sisters in Philippi had worked together in the past. They desperately needed to look for uncompromising solutions and get on with the work.

WOT

ISLAM

PART 2 OF 2

Chuck Webster, Editorial

[Note: last month's editorial consisted of an introduction to and history of Islam. We continue that study, without introduction, at the point at which that article ended]

In addition to the *articles* of faith which Muslims believe, there are five *pillars* of faith which they observe.

Five Pillars of Faith

1. *The Creed (Kalima)*. The very foundation of Muslim belief is the confession, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah." The confession is stated in order to become a Muslim, and is repeated often by faithful Muslims.

2. *Prayer (Salat)*. Prayer is extremely ritualistic in Islam. Every faithful Muslim prays five times daily (upon rising, at noon, in midafternoon, after sunset, and before retiring), reciting certain prescribed prayers (selections from the Qur'an) in Arabic while facing Mecca. Muslim tradition has turned these prayers into a mechanical procedure of standing, kneeling, hands and face on the ground, and so forth. The call to prayer is sounded by the *muezzin* (a Muslim crier) from a tower called a *minaret* which is part of the *mosque* (the place of public worship) (Boa, p. 53).

3. *Almsgiving (Zakat)*. Himself an orphan, Muhammad had a strong desire to help the needy. Consequently, all Muslims are legally required to give a significant portion of their income for the destitute, and are also bound by certain rules and regulations for produce, cattle, etc. Freewill offerings also can be exercised.

4. *Fasting (Ramadan)*. Faithful Muslims fast from sunup to sundown each day during their holy month, Ramadan. The fast develops self-control, devotion to God, and identity with the destitute. No food or drink may be consumed during the daylight hours; no smoking or sexual pleasures may be enjoyed either. Many Muslims eat two meals a day during Ramadan, one before sunrise and one shortly after sunset.

5. *The Pilgrimage (Hajj)*. In order to strengthen their faith, Muslims must make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. McDowell and Stewart comment:

It can be extremely arduous on the old or infirm, so in their cases they may send someone in their places. The trip is an essential part in Muslims' gaining salvation. It involves a set of ceremonies and rituals, many of which center around

the Ka'aba shrine, to which the pilgrimage is directed (McDowell and Stewart, p. 391).

Is Islam a peaceful religion?

Many have recently asked, "Is there anything in the Islamic religion that would cause Muslims to commit such atrocious acts against non-Muslims? If so, what?"

That question has been repeatedly discussed over the course of the last two months, with many American Muslims vehemently stating that such violent acts are *not* part of the Islamic religion. "Islam is a peaceful religion," we're told. One Islamic web site states: "We . . . and all [Muslims] around the world denounce and condemn the cowardly attack committed by the terrorists on September 11, 2001. God and the religion of Islam as stated in the Final Testament, the Qur'an, condemn this heinous and evil act." They quote the Qur'an:

Surely, those who believe, those who are Jewish, the Christians, and the converts; anyone who (1) believes in God and (2) believes in the Hereafter, and (3) leads a righteous life, will receive their [sic] recompense from their Lord; they have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve (5:69; 2:62) (see www.submission.org for these and other interesting statements).

The above Qur'anic quotation is quoted completely out of context and blatantly misapplied. Notice what the Qur'an states, just two verses later:

Pagans indeed are those who say that God is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah himself said, "O Children of Israel, you shall worship God; my Lord and your Lord." Anyone who sets up any idol beside God, God has forbidden Paradise for him, and his destiny is Hell. The wicked have no helpers. Pagans indeed are those who say that God is a third of a trinity. There is no god except the one God. Unless they refrain from saying this, those who disbelieve among them will incur a painful retribution. Would they not repent to God, and ask His forgiveness? God is Forgiver, Most Merciful. The Messiah, son of Mary, is no more than a messenger like the messengers before him, and his mother was a saint. Both of them used to eat the food. Note how we explain the

revelations for them, and note how they still deviate! Say, "Would you worship beside God powerless idols who can neither harm you, nor benefit you? God is Hearer, Omniscient" (5:72-76).

The Qur'an clearly consigns all non-Muslims to eternal torment. Earlier in the Sura is this passage:

Infidels now are they who say, "Verily God is the Messiah son of Mary!" Say: "And who could aught obtain from God, if He chose to destroy the Messiah son of Mary, and his mother, and all who are on earth together? . . ." (5:19).

The passages above either imply or explicitly state:

- (1) Christians are "infidels" and "pagans";
- (2) Belief in the triune nature of the Godhead is a "pagan" concept;
- (3) Christian worship is "idol" worship; and
- (4) Jesus is "no more than a messenger."

The statement that Christians are "pagans" is particularly relevant, especially in light of other Qur'anic statements concerning the Muslims' attitude toward infidels and all who oppose Islam.

Notice the aggressive attitude in the following passages from the Qur'an:

Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for God loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out (2:190-191).

If a wound hath touched you, be sure a similar wound hath touched the others. Such days we give to men and men by turns that God may know those that believe (3:140).

But those who are slain in the way of God, he will never let their deeds be lost. Soon he will guide them and improve their condition and admit them to the garden which he has announced for them (47:4-6).

Two points about the above passages are striking:

- (1) There is a remarkable contrast between Islam's "eye for an eye" retaliation and the Lord's emphasis on peace and non-aggression (cf. Mt. 5:39-45).

- (2) Muslims are clearly commanded to “fight . . . those who fight you,” to “slay them wherever you catch them,” and to return wound for wound.

The latter attitude is reiterated in other Qur’anic passages:

The punishment of those who wage war against God and His Apostle [Mohammed], and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution [cutting off of the head], or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides [i.e., right hand, left foot], or exile from the land: That is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the hereafter (5.36).

Because of United States trade sanctions against Iraq, Osama bin Laden and other Muslims hold our country responsible for the death of approximately 500,000 Iraqi Muslims. That is a chilling revelation, especially in view of the following command from “Allah”:

A sanction is given to those who, because they have suffered outrages, have taken up arms; and verily, God is well able to succor them (12:40).

The last quotation suggests what is now a well-known Islamic concept—*jihad*—which to many Muslims is actually a sixth religious duty associated with the five pillars (McDowell and Stewart, p. 392). The term basically means “struggling” or “striving,” and both Muslim and non-Muslim writers have used the phrase “holy war” with reference to *jihad* (Braswell, p. 71).

Notice very carefully the Qur’an’s instructions: “Then fight in the cause of Allah (2:244) [and] “then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them” (9:5). It also states, “when ye meet the unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks” (47:4), and “fight those who believe not In Allah nor the Last Day” (9:29). Lest this remarkable point be overlooked, remember—a “pagan” is any non-Muslim—Christians are therefore pagan and are to be “fought” and “smitten.”

Our peaceful Muslim friends need not suggest that violence is not part of their religion. Their holy book says otherwise, and this fact is supported by a casual glance at certain Muslim traditions which are regarded by them as authoritative.

One Islamic tradition records: “A man came to the Prophet and asked, ‘A man fights for war booty; another fights for fame and a third fights for showing off; which of them fights in Allah’s Cause?’ The Prophet said, ‘He who fights so that Allah’s Word

(i.e., Islam) should be superior, fights in Allah’s Cause” (Khan, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith 4:50; 52.15.65). Another tradition states the teaching of Muhammad about using force against nonbelievers: “Allah’s Apostle said, ‘I have been ordered (by Allah) to fight the people till they say: “None has the right to be worshiped but Allah,” and whoever said it then he will save his life and property”’ (Ibid., Hadith 2:274; 24.1.483).

As clearly indicated, both the Qur’an and Islamic tradition demand that violence be used both to defend and expand Islam.

E. Van Donzel writes:

Holy War (A. Jihad): the Arabic word, which signifies an effort directed towards a determined objective, is used for military action with the object of the expansion of Islam and, if need be, of its defense. The notion stems from the fundamental principle of the universality of Islam, according to which this religion, along with the temporal power which it implies, ought to embrace the whole universe, if necessary by force. This principle, however, must be partially combined with another which tolerates the existence, within the Islamic community itself, of the adherents of “the religions with holy books,” i.e., Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. For them Holy War ceases as soon as they agree to submit to the political authority of Islam and pay the poll tax and the land tax. At present times there is a thesis according to which Islam relies for its expansion exclusively upon persuasion and other peaceful means (*Islamic Desk Reference*, New York: E.J. Brill, 1994, p. 136).

As the last sentence suggests, Islam depends now primarily upon peaceful means for expansion, but it should be noted that this is of necessity, not choice. Historically, whenever Muslims have had the military strength to do so, they have fought to expand their religion.

Present day matters, though, are not related to *jihad* as a war of expansion, but of *defense* and *retaliation*, two principles upheld strongly by both the Qur’an and Islamic tradition. Many Muslims believe that the Western culture is an enemy of Islam; it should, then, be eradicated. As suggested above, some Muslims also believe that the United States has “wounded” Muslims; according to the Qur’an, then, every faithful Muslim should return “wound for wound.” If a person believes the Qur’an, as well as Islamic tradition, he finds abundant authority to engage in whatever violence he feels necessary in order to promote or defend his

religion. Proceeding from that basis, it is clear that the recent attacks on America were levied with Allah’s approval.

We live in a pluralistic society where every religion is granted equal status, regardless of the evidence for or against its claims. Let it never be doubted, though, that Islam is a godless religion founded on false premises and spread by violent means. Our attitude toward Muslims should be the same as that toward all unbelievers—we should approach them with love and compassion, trying gently to convince them to consider and embrace the evidence for the historicity of Jesus Christ and the inspiration and finality of His Word as revealed in the Bible.

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SOWING AND REAPING

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

It is axiomatic that a farmer who plants cotton will reap a cotton crop and not corn if the seed comes up at all. A seed's producing after its own kind is a principle well-known among planters everywhere. Our sins will find us out (Num. 32:23), and our chickens will come home to roost (Eccl. 11:1). Those who sow to the wind will reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7), because God is not mocked (Gal. 6: 7-8). We cannot squander golden opportunities in the Lord's vineyard and expect anything worthwhile at harvest time. As Haggai bluntly stated, so it will be: "You earn wages but you put them in a bag full of holes."

If one would ever see New Testament Christianity he must sow the seed of the kingdom, which is "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11). No one ever reaped the glad dividends of the pristine religion of God's Son by planting denominational doctrine or Popish dogmas! We must get back to the old paths of Bible teaching if heaven's will and way are to enhance our lives here below (1 Pet. 1:25). A poet caught this principle well:

Though all the world be shattered
God's truth remains the same,
His righteous laws still potent and
"Father" still His name,
We know above confusion
"There always will be God!"

We cannot be spiritual giants if we feed upon the shallow, carnal, and insane concepts of men. When brethren specialize in the social gospel they will reap the sad plight of the unconverted, uncommitted congregation that naturally results from the pabulum diet of nothingness they feed upon. The reason Satan is gaining ground in the area of

compromise in worship, doctrine, and morality is the solemn fact that some brethren have heard precious little Bible teaching in the past ten years. Distinctive pronouncements on sin, error, and impurity were exchanged for cathedrals, gymnasiums, and aerobics. Such emphasis cannot make us strong in the faith (1 Pet. 5:9) and fully armed to defeat the devil (Jam. 4:7). Yes, we reap what we sow!

When we refuse to yield ourselves to the Master as His devoted servants (Rom. 6: 16-18) we naturally become carnal, and Romans 8:6 clearly tells us that such conduct produces spiritual death!

Congregations that give scripturally reap a rich harvest that allows lost souls to be taught and sinners to be saved. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, we learn anew the principle of sowing and reaping as it pertains to the contribution. Someone has put together these words: "Our collection is a reflection of our divine connection."

Yes, when we first give ourselves to the Lord as proof of our love we are abundantly blessed by our Creator with extended opportunities to receive more so that we can give more to heaven's great cause. Stingy givers rob themselves of blessings only liberal contributors can fathom.

There is no way to become a powerful teacher of the Bible apart from hours of diligent study within the pages of Holy Scripture. To waste hours, days, and years of precious time in secular pursuits is always reflected in unprepared teachers and pupils who are robbed of richer material that could have been given. On the Day of Judgment one verse that could well haunt us is Hebrews 5:12: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers."

Parents must ever be reminded of the principle of sowing and reaping. This does not mean that every person who chooses of his own accountable will to go astray from truth is a product of ungodly parents. Just as children brought up in evil homes can later choose to be righteous (Josh. 24:15), so can offspring of spiritual homes decide later to leave the Lord (Rom. 11:22). After all, Romans 14:12 tells us that "each one shall give account of himself to God." However, parents who fail to *teach* and *live* the genuineness of Christianity before their children will one day answer for such tragic blunders. We build *today* the house we and our offspring will live in *tomorrow*. May it be built upon the solid foundation of godliness (2 Kng. 20:1). The message of Psalm 127:1 is apropos: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."

Young people who choose worldly associates will reap the whirlwind of such poor decisions (1 Cor. 15:33). Rather, all youth should remember their Maker early in life, be an example of purity (1 Tim. 4:12), and sojourn upon this earth to the glory of God (Mt. 5:16). Such wisdom will evince itself in a life of peace and joy that no earthly wealth could provide (Phil. 4:7,11,13,19).

There is never any peace for the wicked (Isa. 57:21), and all temporal wealth will someday be dissolved (2 Pet. 3:11). Let us, therefore, cease to sow the seed of mundane pleasure lest we reap the dividends of our shameful emphasis. No verse says it better than Romans 6:21: "What reward have you in those things you are now ashamed of?"

Let us be ever alert to the fact that we do reap what we sow, and thus, may we be dedicated and disciplined as we march toward eternity.

WOT

RELIGION AND ETHICS

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

"Religion and Ethics" is the title of an article in *The Oregonian* (May 26, 2001), but I look in vain to find anything in the article pertaining to religion and ethics. Michael and Dianne Alexanian (East Lansing, Michigan), "fed up with the stress of their daily grind," have "built a Japanese meditation garden in their backyard." Dianne says, "It's completely changed our lives. We look forward to getting up each day. When we can't take other people, we go to hide in the solace of our gardens."

Dianne's blood pressure has fallen, and Michael "has kicked his smoking habit." "Millions of Americans hunger for the kind of spiritual solace the Alexanians have found in their own backyard, according to a new national survey. But people aren't flocking to churches to find it" (David Crumm and Alexa Capeloto, Knight Ridder News Service, May 26, 2001).

But if "millions of Americans" and millions of non-Americans build "Japanese meditation" gardens in their backyards, in search of "spiritual solace" (selfish contentment?), and finally die, what then?

A young man was asked by an aged person, "what are your plans for life?" He replied, "I aim to find a nice girl, marry, have children, and enjoy my family." The aged man continued, "What then?" The lad replied, "I hope to retire and to enjoy the rest of my life." The aged man continued, "What then?" The young man said, "I have no plans after death." The aged man said, "You have made no plans for the most important part of your life."

The young man, like the Alexanians in their Japanese meditation gardens, had made plans

only for this life, not for "everlasting life" (Mt. 25:46). I think of two other people, a man and a woman, neither of whom retreated into selfish contentment in a Japanese meditation garden, but both considered this present life merely as a short preparatory experience to be ready for eternity: "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12).

William Tyndale

William Tyndale was born in Gloucestershire, England, in 1494, and graduated from Oxford University in 1515.

In 1516 Tyndale appealed to the [Roman Catholic] bishop of London to produce an English version of the Bible, but his request was turned down. The Catholic Church and the English throne were firmly against the creation of a Bible in any language other than in the sanctioned Latin or Greek. Their fear was that by making God's word more accessible, ordinary citizens, armed with independence of faith, might one day revolt against the ruling establishment (Chuck Meyers, Knight Ridder News Service, *The Oregonian*, August 23, 1997).

Tyndale was insistent and told a priest, "I defy the Pope and all his laws; if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost." Then Tyndale did the translating of the New Testament into English from the Greek original, but no printer in England would dare to print it for him.

After an attempt to print his English New Testament in Cologne, Germany, ended with a raid by authorities in 1525, Tyndale took his

manuscript up the Rhine River to a printer in Worms. A year later, as many as 6,000 copies of his New Testament were finally produced.

Smugglers managed to get a number of Tyndale's Bibles into England (shipped in hay, clothing, and grain). Many were confiscated, however, and ceremoniously burned outside St. Paul's Cathedral. The "Bishop's Burn the Bible Fund" destroyed most of three editions.

He soon became a marked man in the eyes of the guardians of the faith and a target for the acrimonious rhetoric of Sir Thomas More, the chancellor of England, who vilified him as "hell bound" and a "beast" (Meyers).

Tyndale dared not return to England, but even on the continent of Europe the power of the Pope made him subject to arrest. In 1535, in Antwerp, Belgium, he was "kidnapped by men loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V."

During his imprisonment, Tyndale worked on translating the Old Testament from Hebrew, which he had started before his capture. Finally, after 16 months of incarceration, Tyndale was convicted of heresy by a secular court, and sentenced to death (Meyers).

The German Emperor Charles V, a staunch Roman Catholic, had made it a crime, "punishable by torture, burning, or burial alive, for anyone to read, purchase, or possess any proscribed book or any New Testament prohibited by the theologians" (Maxie B. Boren, *The Voice of Truth International*, vol.14).

On the charge of heresy, he was tied to the stake on October 6, 1536,

strangled, and burned in Vilvorde, Belgium. A 1610 edition of "Acts and Monuments" (*Book of Martyrs*), by John Foxe, describes Tyndale's final moments. According to Foxe, Tyndale "cried with a fervent zeal and a loud voice, 'Lord, open the king of England's eyes'" (Meyers).

I do not think that William Tyndale would have thought that "spiritual solace" could be found in a "Japanese meditation garden."

Mary Jane Royse

A grandson, Nyal Dailey Royse, professor emeritus of Harding University, writes:

My grandparents, A. J. and Mary Jane Royse, resided three miles west of Covington on the old Danville and Covington road. They had a large family. Grandmother was a Christian, but grandfather wished to have nothing to do with the church. Each Sunday morning she would get the horses up, put on the harness, hitch them to the wagon, and drive in to Covington

for worship. One bitter cold day Grandpap said to her, "Maw, you're not going to take these children out in this cold weather, are you?" She replied, "Pap, we are going." She got the horses harnessed and hitched up and went to the house to get the children ready. When she went out to go he had unharnessed the horses and turned them back out to pasture. She sent the children into the house and went back out and got the horses and hitched them up and drove to worship. *Granddad never pulled that trick again.*

Another really cold day he asked her again not to go. He got the same answer. He told her that he was going to drive them in, not because he wanted to, but he was ashamed for the neighbors to see her driving to town in the cold and know that he was at home, comfortable by the fire. He drove them to Covington but said he would stay in the wagon. Before the service was over he almost froze and had to come in to get

warm.

After that he drove them quite often and then all of the time, but he would always sit alone on the back seat. One day he came walking down the aisle and was baptized. Grandmother died in 1922 and he died in 1933. For the eleven years he lived alone he was faithful to the end, thanks to a wife that took over the spiritual leadership of the family while he served Satan.

I thought you might like that story of my grandparents. I was born in the log cabin where they lived before they retired to live in Covington. Yours in Christ, Nyal D. Royse.

Brother Royse told me later that, as a result of his grandmother's faithfulness, today there are five generations of Christians. I doubt that if Mary Jane Royse had sought "spiritual solace" in a "Japanese meditation garden" that her husband would have become a Christian. *WOT*

OMNISCIENCE

Drew Kizer, Leeds, Alabama

I often wonder why the Lord considered David to be a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Is it even possible that David, son of Jesse and king of Israel, was worthy of such an honor? David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband executed on the front lines of war? David, who took an illegal census of Israel, causing the wrath of the Lord to fall upon 70,000 Israelites in the form of a fatal plague? Was this bloodthirsty, flawed David the "man after God's own heart"?

Perhaps we err in dwelling on

David's mistakes. Indeed he was flawed, but that is irrelevant to the question. All men are flawed (Rom. 3:10,23; Gal. 3:22). If moral perfection were the point of comparison in the above designation, then it would amount to an impossible paradox. No man, on his own, matches the righteousness of God.

But David was a man after God's own heart. He was not perfect, but he did have an understanding of things higher, things divine. He believed in God and considered Him his "shepherd" (Psa. 23:1). He knew the

ugly stain of sin and truly repented with a broken heart (Psa. 51). He was glad when they said unto him, "Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psa. 122:1). It crushed him to learn that he would never be able to build a temple for his Lord. David was a man after God's own heart, because he had understanding.

It was this same understanding that caused him to write,

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou

understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it (Psa. 139:1-6).

Being a man after God's own heart, David understood his Lord's nature, and he was especially intrigued with His omniscience.

The word "omniscience" is derived from two words: "omni," meaning "all," and "science," meaning "knowledge." Therefore, the word simply means "all knowing." This unattainable, "high" knowledge is clearly affirmed throughout the Bible. David's son later wrote, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). The eye, the organ used most frequently by man to gain knowledge, is used by Solomon to symbolize divine intelligence, limited by no barriers. Again, wise Solomon says, "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord, how much more the hearts of men!" (Prov. 15:11, NASB). "Sheol" refers to the place of the dead, and "Abaddon" means "destruction." If God can peer into these elusive realms, then certainly nothing on earth evades His mind—even the hearts of men. Jesus illustrated the fascinating power of God's omniscience, saying, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Mt. 10:30). Thus, Scripture defines God's omniscience in all-inclusive terms. Literally *all* things are known by His infinite mind.

Having understood a basic definition of God's omniscience, consider now the idea in more detail.

1. "Omniscience" means that God has never learned, nor can He ever learn. For one to learn, two things are

required: (1) ignorance, and (2) an instructor who exceeds the learner in intelligence. Neither of these requisites is possible with God. Knowing this, Isaiah cried, "Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?" (40:13-14). "Learning" is one of the rare impossibilities of God.

2. "Omniscience" means that He can simultaneously observe all events when they occur. "The eyes of the Lord," Solomon says, "are in every place." He hears and sees everything, despite the fact that millions of activities are occurring at the same time! Certainly, this is a comfort to those who seek Him in prayer. Even in times of national tragedy, when thousands of prayers are cast before Him, He listens.

3. "Omniscience" means that God can predict future events. David says, "Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all" (Psa. 139:4, NASB). Every prophecy concerning the Messiah came to pass (cf. Psa. 22:17-18; Isa. 7:14; 9:7; 53:1ff; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 11:12; 12:10), and every prophecy concerning the people of God will likewise be rendered true (cf. Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; Rev. 21:1-4; etc.).

4. "Omniscience" means that no one can hide from God (cf. Psa. 139:11; Heb. 4:13). Adam and Jonah tried, but they both failed (Gen. 3:8; Jon. 1:3).

5. "Omniscience" means that every deed committed and every word spoken lie open before the Lord (cf. Psa. 139:1-6).

6. "Omniscience" also means that every thought contained within the heart lies open before the Lord. Solomon argues from the lesser to the greater, employing what is commonly called the "how-much-more" argument,

saying, "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord, how much more the hearts of men!" It is as the Lord told Samuel when he wanted to select David's older brother, Eliab, for the throne of Israel: "... the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

So, what are the implications for mankind? Does the omniscience of God touch us in any significant way? As we stated earlier, Proverbs 15:3 says that the eyes of the Lord are watching both "the evil and the good." Thus, His omniscience implies certainties for all men and women. Those who are wicked can be certain that they will be punished. Nothing can be kept secret from God, not even sin (Psa. 90:8). Therefore, while in this life it may seem that God overlooks sin, He does not. He patiently awaits the repentance of a sinner (2 Pet. 3:9), but He will not wait forever (Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). On the other hand, those who are righteous can be certain that God knows their problems and that they will be comforted. His vast knowledge reaches beyond the theoretical. His Son, Jesus, has visited the earth and our sorrows, and He is able to sympathize with us (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). We can take heart in knowing that not only does God *know* about our difficult situations, but He also *understands*.

David was by no means perfect, but he had an understanding of the Lord. In particular, he knew of His omniscience and what it means to man. We too can grasp enough of this understanding to know that our various plights do not go unnoticed, that God knows of them . . . and He cares. With such an understanding, we can hope in God and exclaim to others along with Peter, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

WHAT IS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

Biblically speaking, there is no such thing. One may search the Bible from cover to cover, and he will never find the expression or the idea of an "unpardonable sin" discussed. Such a concept is directly opposed to inspired teaching. The Scriptures abound with the comforting assurance that when one truly repents of sins and complies with the conditions necessary to obtain pardon, forgiveness is graciously bestowed.

The passage that has often been referred to in teaching the existence of an "unpardonable sin" is Matthew 12:31-32: "Therefore I say unto you, every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come."

A study of this passage shows that blasphemy against the Spirit is not an "unpardonable sin," but it is an unpardoned sin because the sinner permanently rejects the salvation offered to him. The terms of salvation offered in the gospel are the last will and statement of Christ (Heb. 9:15-17). The person who rejects the final revelation which the Spirit made (i.e., the New Testament), rejects the last instruction which God will ever give to man pertaining to his redemption. God gave His Son to die as the last and ultimate sacrifice for sin. If one, then, repudiates Christ's sacrificial death and rejects His deity, he turns his back upon his only hope for salvation (Heb. 10:26). Only a complete change in his rejection of God's Son can bring man again into God's grace. Such a change is often difficult but not impossible. A person can reach a point in his spiritual life where repentance becomes impossible (Heb. 6:6). However, let us never forget that man's refusal to repent, and not God's refusal to forgive, is what will condemn us. Only sins in which repentance does not take place are unpardoned sins.

There is an erroneous doctrine believed by many religious people that teaches "once in grace, always in grace" or "once saved, always saved." This doctrine should be repudiated, but it is no more an unscriptural doctrine than the one which implies "once turned from grace, always turned from grace" or "unpardonable sin." The gracious invitation of Jesus is extended to all who have ears to hear and hearts to accept. There is power enough in the blood of Jesus to forgive any person who genuinely repents (Acts 13:38-39).

WOT



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for a youth minister to work with us. All interested men should send their résumés to:

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Jasper, AL 35501

The Words of Truth
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THE WORDS OF Truth

Chuck Webster, Editor

The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



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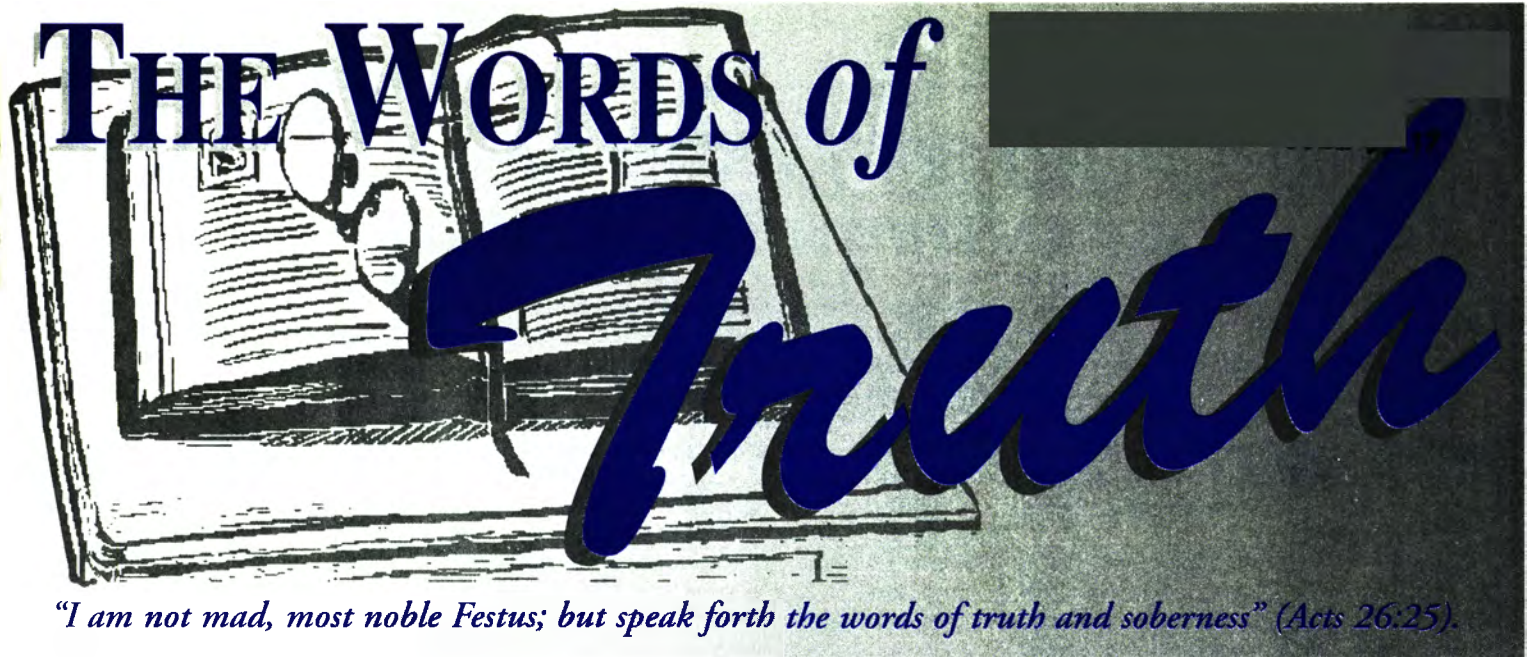
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RECOGNIZING OUR FLESHLY ENEMY

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

Peter writes, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). To abstain (Greek, *apechomai*) means to "hold one's self off, to refrain." We are to restrain ourselves from fleshly lusts. Now the reason: They war against the soul. Fleshly lusts are not our friends to bring pleasure to our character, but enemies which attempt to destroy our most valuable possession, our soul. Fleshly lusts are not a rose which adorns the bosom, but a dagger in the heart.

We can know the kinds of things involved in the phrase "fleshly lusts." Consider what the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:19: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery (sexual sin in which someone is breaking a marriage vow), fornication (sinful sex including adultery, sex before marriage, homosexuality, etc.), uncleanness (impure, lustful living), lasciviousness (that which pertains to, or contributes to, sexual sin), idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance (strifeful, always stirring up trouble), emulations

(envy or jealousy), wrath, strife, seditions (that which causes division among brethren), heresies (division based on false doctrines), envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings (parties of drinking and relaxing proper restraints), and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Look closely at the list. These are the declared enemies of your soul! Despise them altogether. Resist them and refrain from them. If they can they will keep you out of heaven.

Now, just how do they "war" against the soul? The first way is the one just stated. If we give in to them we sin, and unforgiven sin will keep us from heaven. The second way is more subtle.

Albert Barnes, in his commentary on 1 Peter, says this: "Indulgence in these things makes war against the nobler faculties of the soul; against the conscience, the understanding, the memory, the judgment, the exercise of a pure imagination. There is not a faculty of the mind, however brilliant in itself,

which will not be ultimately ruined by indulgence in the carnal propensities of our world. . . . It blunts the moral sense, pollutes the memory, defiles the imagination, hardens the heart, and sends a withering influence through all the faculties of the soul."

How can you defend yourself against the fleshly lusts which war against your soul? Every day, load up on the word of God. Carefully put on the armor of God and wear it until the angels escort you to your eternal home. Here is the description of that armor: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:13-17).
WOT

AN OPEN LETTER TO AND RESPONSE FROM THE GERMANTOWN BAPTIST CHURCH

B.J. Clarke, Southaven, Mississippi

Dear Germantown Baptist Church:

Recently, I was up late watching television when I came across your weekly TV program. At the moment I tuned in, one of your preachers was in the water preparing to baptize someone.

Because I love the Bible and what it teaches, I was greatly interested to watch this baptism. However, as I watched, I saw something very odd take place. One of your preachers asked the candidate for baptism if he had anything that he would like to confess. The person in the water nodded in the affirmative and proceeded to confess that Jesus had saved him from his sins. Several other baptisms immediately followed, and in each case, prior to his baptism, the candidate for baptism confessed that Jesus had saved him from his sins.

Please let me explain why this was so unusual to me. I have read my Bible diligently, and I have never read of an example (after the establishment of the New Testament church in Acts 2) where someone confessed that Jesus had saved him from his sins before he was baptized. In fact, I read of just the opposite.

For example, the inspired apostle Peter affirmed that "baptism doth also now save us" (1 Pet. 3:21). This same apostle Peter commanded the people on Pentecost who wanted to be saved, to "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Furthermore, the Bible says that salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). Hence, one who is not in Christ is not saved. However, the Bible clearly teaches that we are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Therefore, if salvation is in Christ, and baptism is what puts me into Christ, then it is impossible for me to be saved before I have been baptized. This being so, I must ask why your TV show depicted people confessing that they had been saved prior to their baptism? Can you show me a New Testament example after Acts 2 where anyone ever confessed salvation prior to baptism? If baptism saves us, and Peter plainly states that it does, then how can one be saved before he has done that which the Bible says saves his soul?

I was also puzzled by a statement your preacher, Mr. Ken Story, made. In his lesson, he asserted that Saul of Tarsus was saved on the road to Damascus. This puzzled me because if Saul had been saved on the road to

Damascus, he wasn't aware of it. He went into the city and fasted and prayed in anguish. If he had been saved on the road to Damascus, he was the most miserable saved man that ever lived.

Furthermore, if Saul had been saved on the road to Damascus, God didn't know it because He dispatched Ananias to go tell Saul how to have his sins washed away.

When Ananias arrived, he said to Saul, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Mr. Story, would you please explain something to me? If Saul had already been saved on the road to Damascus, why did he have sins that needed to be washed away? If he had been saved on the road to Damascus, would not his sins have already been washed away?

In view of the fact that Acts 22:16 teaches that our sins are not washed away prior to baptism, how does your practice at Germantown Baptist Church measure up to Holy Scripture? Why do you have people confess that their sins are washed away before baptism, when Acts 22:16 teaches that it is when a penitent believer is baptized that the blood of Christ washes away his/her sins? Saul did not confess that his sins had been forgiven prior to his baptism. Why don't you follow his example?

One more thing that confused me about your program was the presence of a choir singing to the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music. Where is the New Testament authority for such a practice? The Bible teaches that all Christians are to sing and make melody in their hearts (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Is your practice with or without Scriptural authority?

Please do not be offended by my questions. I just believe that if any man speaks, he should speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11).

Will someone please write me and give me the book, chapter, and verse that teaches one should believe he is saved before he is baptized? Would someone please demonstrate how Saul could have been saved on the road to Damascus, and yet still in his sins when Ananias arrived? Would someone please provide an example in the New Testament of a group of worshippers dressing up in special robes and singing to the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music?

Awaiting your Scriptural reply,

B. J. Clarke

After waiting several weeks, and receiving no reply, I just happened to bump into Ken Story (who was preaching at Germantown Baptist Church at the time, but has since resigned) at the hospital. I verified that he was Ken Story, and that he was the preacher for the Germantown Baptist Church. He told me that he was, but that he had resigned and would soon be moving on. After informing him that I had watched one of the GBC TV programs, I asked, "Did you get my letter?" He did not remember having seen it; I was fairly confident that he would remember the letter if he had seen it. He explained that his secretary sometimes screened his mail and that perhaps she had decided not to pass it on to his attention. I tried to discuss some of the objections mentioned in the letter with Mr. Story, but it was evident that he wasn't really interested in answering my questions. He thanked me for watching the program and proceeded to move on down the hall. I thought that was the end of it.

However, a few days later, I received the following "answer" from Ken Story:

Dear BJ –

As we were moving the church office your letter of April 30 was found. I appreciate your interest in GBC's TV ministry and also the opportunity I had to meet you. The information you indicated you are looking for is stated clearly in the Bible so I don't know how you missed it. Look again—May the Lord guide you.

Ken Story

Pardon me for saying so, but this is not exactly the "scriptural reply" I was waiting for! Mr. Story's response communicates one of two things: (1) He doesn't care enough about my soul to take the time to give me a "book, chapter, and verse answer"; or (2) He doesn't have any book, chapter, and verse answers to support his doctrine. Either way, his "reply" leaves much to be desired.

Quite frankly, his "reply" borders on being insulting. Mr. Story says that he doesn't know how I could have missed what he alleges is so clearly revealed in the Bible. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 when Philip ran up to his chariot. The eunuch asked

Philip, "of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34). It is impossible to imagine Philip saying, "the information you are looking for is stated clearly in the Bible, so I don't know how you missed it. Look again—May the Lord guide you." In other words, "Good luck; you're on your own. Don't ask me any questions." The apostle Peter declared that we are to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Why won't Mr. Story give me an answer for the reason of his hope? Philip

answered the eunuch's question by opening his mouth and preaching Jesus (Acts 8:35). The eunuch's response to Philip's preaching may help to explain why Mr. Story won't answer my questions. Upon hearing Jesus preached, the eunuch said, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). The Bible clearly states that the eunuch was baptized and *then* he went on his way rejoicing. This order of events is contrary to the way that Mr. Story and the Germantown Baptist Church practice things. They believe and teach that one is saved first, rejoices at his/her salvation, and is then

baptized to symbolize having already received forgiveness of sins. Now, don't you dare ask Mr. Story to show you a Biblical example of someone after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) rejoicing in forgiveness of sins prior to his baptism. He will promptly rebuke you for not seeing what he alleges the Bible so clearly states.

Since Mr. Story has encouraged me to "look again" for the answers to my questions, I will do that very thing. Let us see what the Bible clearly states about the essentiality of water baptism. The following chart should assist us in this regard:

Heard	Believed	Repented	Confessed	Baptized	Saved
3000		Acts 2:38		Acts 2:41	Sins remitted
Samaria	Acts 8:12			Acts 8:12	
Eunuch	Acts 8:37		Acts 8:37	Acts 8:38	Went on his way rejoicing
Simon	Acts 8:13			Acts 8:13	Saved per Mark 16:16
Cornelius		Acts 11:18		Acts 10:48	Acts 11:14
Lydia				Acts 16:14-15	
Jailor	Acts 16:31-32	Acts 16:33		Acts 16:33	Rejoiced greatly
Corinth	Acts 18:8			Acts 18:8	Washed, saved, 1 Cor. 16:11
Ephesus				Acts 19:5	Saved, Eph. 1:7; 2:8-9
Saul (Paul)			Acts 22:10	Rom. 6:3-4	Made free from sin, Rom. 6:17-18

The point of the above chart is to show the tremendous emphasis upon baptism in the New Testament as a prerequisite to forgiveness of sins. You will observe that not every case of conversion explicitly states that the converts "believed"; but we know that they must have, for except one believes in Jesus Christ, he will die in his sins (Jn. 8:21,24). Furthermore, "without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God" (Heb. 11:6). Not every account of conversion in the book of Acts explicitly states that the converts repented of their sins. However, we know that they did so because God has commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30), and if they do not repent they will perish (Lk. 13:3). Not every case of conversion specifically records that the converts made the good confession. Yet, we know that this must have occurred for "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

Now, the reader should note that every

single account of every single case of conversion represented on the chart explicitly states that the converts were baptized! This is not to suggest that baptism should be exalted above faith as a step in God's plan of salvation. It is to say that the essentiality of baptism in God's plan of salvation is too clearly documented to be denied! Furthermore, in not one case of conversion is forgiveness of sins ever placed before baptism. Mr. Story invited us to "look again" at the Bible for what it clearly states. We have done so!

Now, although it might be an exercise in futility, ask Mr. Story to "look again" at the following questions and tell us where the Bible clearly states the answer?

- Where is the book, chapter, and verse that teaches one should believe he is saved **before** he/she is baptized?
- How could Saul have been saved on the road to Damascus, and yet still be in his sins when Ananias arrived?

- If Saul was saved from his sins on the road to Damascus, why did Ananias command him to be baptized to wash away his sins? (Acts 22:16).

- Why do you teach that baptism has nothing to do with salvation when Peter said that "baptism doth also now save us" (1 Pet. 3:21)?

- Where is the example in the New Testament of a group of worshippers dressing up in special robes and singing to the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music?

We will send this article to the Germantown Baptist Church, and to Mr. Ken Story in hopes of receiving a real reply. Will they answer the questions this time, or will their silence prove once and for all that they are not teaching the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9), but rather, the doctrines and commandments of men (Mt. 15:9)? We await a Scriptural reply. WOT

AGAPE

PART I

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

An attempt at an in-depth study of *agape*, the greatest word in Spirit-inspired language ("God is *agape*," 1 Jn. 4:8) ought to help the investigator and as many readers as are willing to study with him.

WORDS RELATED TO AGAPE

Necessary to a knowledge of *agape* is an acquaintance with three other Greek words meaning "love":

Eros

For sexual love the Greeks used the word *eros*. From it is derived the English word "erotic." Capitalized, *Eros* becomes the name of the Greek god of sexual love. As a proper noun it is equated with the Roman god of sexual love, Cupid. A harlot, "wily of heart," told a potential customer, "Let us solace ourselves with loves" (Prov. 7:10,18). Her word "loves" in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) is a form of *eros*.

As misused as is the sexual nature, and with so many sins related to that misuse, some have concluded that a person's sexual nature is evil and must altogether be denied. However, when God had created all things, including the sexual natures of Adam and Eve, He said that the whole was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). If the human sexual nature is evil, the Creator Himself must be blamed.

In marriage the bed is "undefiled" (Heb. 13:4). The doctrine affirming the perpetual virginity of Mary, designed to exalt the Lord's mother above other women, actually slanders all mothers.

Storge

A second Greek word meaning "love" defines family and kinship loyalty. As *eros* in itself is one of the Creator's good provisions for the human race, so *storge* is divinely implanted. Only the worst of men (boastful, implacable, fierce) so pervert themselves as to be "without natural affection" (*astorgous*, Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:1-3).

Philia

Distinct from sexual indulgence, and separate from kinfolks' affection, is friendship love, *philia*. John the Baptist was "the friend" (*philos*, Jn. 3:29) of the bridegroom Jesus. Jesus used the word *philos* in saying "our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep" (Jn. 11:11). Luke used a form of *phileo* to tell how the centurion Julius

treated Paul: "courteously" (KJV), "kindly" (ASV, Acts 27:3). He used a form of the same word to describe how, on the island of Malta, during a cold rain, "the barbarians showed us no common kindness" (Acts 28:2). And he used a form of the same word to tell how the island's chief official "entertained us three days courteously" (Acts 28:7).

A STUDY OF AGAPE

Agape carries an unflinching regard for, and deeply cherishes, the object of its devotion. It is love with 100% commitment.

Devotion in two directions

When one is 100% committed to something or to somebody, the word describing such is *agape*. Even if that devotion is to darkness, to vanities (chief seats, salutations, praises of men), to money, or to lying, it is *agape* (Psa. 52:3-4; Eccl. 5:10; Lk. 11:43; Jn. 3:19; 12:43), a 100% devotion to self.

Then, in the opposite direction from a devotion to self, *agape* is good will and selfless giving even of one's life to help others. It involves a commitment without thought of gain or loss to the giver, or merit on the part of the receiver. Jesus "loved me," wrote a man who had been a blaspheming, injurious persecutor, and "gave himself for me" (*agapao*, Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 1:13). Consequently, that ex-hater of Christians praised God for His "great love (*agapao*) wherewith he loved (*agapao*) us" (Eph. 2:4).

When one sees that the beneficiaries of *agape* are ungodly sinners and enemies, one can understand why the Scripture says, not that God is *eros* or *storge* or *philia*, but *agape* (Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Jn. 4:8,16). I have come to believe that the Bible as originally written always has the right word in every place.

Agape overlaps the related words

The towering superiority of *agape* above the three related words does not mean that it cannot be used to convey the lesser meanings of the related words.

The warm affection of *phileo* was embedded in Jesus' *agape* toward Lazarus his "friend" (*philos*, Jn. 11:5,11), and toward the only apostle who stood with Jesus' mother at the cross (Jn. 13:26). *Agape* including *phileo* are in both the Father and the Son as They come to dwell with everyone who loves (*agapao*) Them and

keeps Their "commands" (Jn. 14:21-23; 16:27). Among humans there is no greater love (*agape*) than to lay down one's life for his friends (*philois*, Jn. 15:13). Sad is the story of a "very rich" young ruler who loved his riches more than he loved Jesus though Jesus loved (*agapao*) him (Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-23).

In family relations *agape* overlaps *philia* and *storge*, even for a person to die willingly for kinfolks, as Christ gave Himself for His bride (Eph. 5:25-28). No true happiness is present among family members unless an affirmation of love (*agape*, Rom. 12:9) exhibits itself in tender affection (*philostorgoi*, Rom. 12:10) "one to another."

Though it is clear that *agape* overlaps and encompasses both *philia* and *storge*, it is questionable whether *agape* includes *eros*. Thayer (p. 653) denied that *agape* may properly be used of sexual love. If he is correct, the Septuagint translators improperly used *agape* in describing the exploitation of Shechem, of Samson, of Amnon, and even of legitimate sexual indulgence (Gen. 34:2; Jud. 16:4; 2 Sam. 13:1-14; Song 1:3; 2:4,5,7; 3:1-5; 5:8; 8:4,7).

A distinctive word

Though *agape* overlaps meanings found in *philia* and in *storge*, and possibly in *eros*, in the New Testament *agape* at times is in a realm to itself, a *sui generis*, a *monogenes*. At times, as the sun outshines the stars, *agape* is more brilliant than all other words. In certain contexts it is unique, alone, solitary, a super-word, the greatest New Testament sign of an idea (1 Cor. 13:13). *Agape* is "above all these": "a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering" (Col. 3:12-14). "Above all things" God's people are commanded to practice "fervent *agape*" among themselves (1 Pet. 4:8). Seven noble attributes (faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness [*philia*]) by themselves are incomplete. They need to be supplemented, "adding on your part" *agape* (2 Pet. 1:5-7). As Jesus was a *monogenes* (Jn. 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 Jn. 4:9), the only being of His kind, so *agape* is the only word of its kind.

The distinctiveness and high excellency of *agape* are evident when the good Samaritan saw a beaten, unsightly, bloody, half-dead foreigner lying on the Jerusalem-Jericho road. Apparently the victim was not

a kinsman (which would eliminate *storge*), nor was he a friend (which would eliminate *philia*). In this case only *agape* would bind up wounds, pour on oil and wine, lift him up, and put him on his own beast, get the man to

a bed in a hotel, care for him, and pay his bills (Lk. 10:33-35).

When one understands the exalted position of *agape* he understands why Jesus did not use *phileo* in the command to love

(*agapan*) one's enemies (Mt. 5:44). Enmity is the opposite of *phileo* (friendship), but *agape* includes both friends and enemies. It knows no limits ("never faileth," 1 Cor. 13:8) in good will and sacrifice. *WOT*

THE DEBT THAT HAS BEEN PAID

Duane Patton, Wylie, Texas

Those of us who are of accountable age ought to be fully aware of the concept of owing something to someone. Financial lenders will allow us to borrow money for a set period of time and, with interest, expect us to pay the sum back to them in full by the end of the period. Certainly we can understand this basic concept of trade.

Yet, as one muses over the subject of salvation, how much consideration is given to that which humanity owes to its Creator? Even our human existence shows forth God's genius as we consider the intricate nature of our being—our salvation, however, is far more complex, having deeper tones than can be humanly imagined (Rom. 11:33-36). Christ came to satisfy an account owed to God almost as old as the earth itself. Once Adam, the first man, sinned, mankind became indebted to God. Man alone could never settle the high cost of sin, so God chose to mediate on his behalf. This He did by sending the eternal living Word to earth that He might "taste of death for every man," the ultimate price for sin (Heb. 2:9; Rom. 6:23). In that He "settled the debt," He paid that which we owed through receiving in full the penalty of our transgressions—death (Isa. 53; 1 Pet. 2:21-23). However, Peter announced concerning Him who had no sin of His own to pay for: "ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain [Jesus]: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts

2:23-24).

Jesus was unlawfully given what we should have justly received. He therefore overcame the grave and eternal despair—the just payment for our transgressions (Heb. 2:1-2; 10:36ff).

In view of God's supreme kindness toward us, what do we owe God?

1. Our Own Lives . . . It is God who "gives to all life, breath and all things." The Creator and Sustainer of the life we live, including our entire habitation, is to be rewarded back with our lives. "Life for life" summarized the way the apostle Paul viewed his indebtedness for the mercy shown him by God through Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20). How thankful ought we to be in view of what God has so abundantly enriched us with in this life—including life itself!

2. Our Genuine Obedience . . . God desires our heartfelt obedience (1 Sam. 15:22; Rom. 6:17). Since Jesus was obedient to the heavenly Father, shouldn't we be obedient also? Surely God would be pleased if all humanity would turn to Him, and in obedient trust obey the Lord by accepting the one true Gospel. Since He is King of kings and Lord of lords, He certainly has a right to be obediently served. Genuine obedience to the "King Eternal" (1 Tim. 1:17) would surely result in a peaceful clime!

3. Our Devoted Worship . . . Worship to

God must be more than a personally gratifying experience. In fact, in order for our worship even to be acceptable to God it must be done within the confines of God's will (Jn. 4:23-24). Worship is a great privilege afforded to man by God. As such it should be approached with the utmost desire and care. Truly our worship to God ought to reflect a deep and sincere appreciation for all that God has done for us through Jesus Christ, with reverence, adoration, and conviction in an orderly and Biblical manner.

4. Our Personal Evangelism . . . It has been said that Christianity is a religion that naturally promotes the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. The personal nature of Christianity also demands that we respond individually to the spiritual needs of others. God took the personal initiative to save our souls from certain death—should we not reflect this very thing in our own lives? Paul reminded the Christians at Ephesus to "become imitators of God, as dear children" (Eph. 5:1-2)—we should as well!

In all things we owe God our very best. While we will never be able to recompense God for canceling our spiritual debt, the truly grateful person will honestly endeavor to show his appreciation by striving to live life in harmony with His will. All who are found faithful anticipate a heavenly home. Yet, before then, even until the very end, they will remain "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10; Rev. 2:10). *WOT*

WHERE'S THE PIANO?

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

Bible scholars and historians of all denominations agree on at least one issue—mechanical instruments of music were entirely absent from the worship of the New Testament church. Consider their commentary:

- "All ancient Christian music was vocal" (Dr. Curt Sachs, Columbia University).
- "Both the Jews in their temple service and the Greeks in their idol worship

were accustomed to singing with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The converts to Christianity must have been familiar with this mode of singing, but it is generally admitted that the primitive Christians employed no instrumental music in their religious worship. . . . Musical accompaniments were gradually introduced; but they can hardly be assigned to a period earlier than the fifth and sixth centuries. Organs

were unknown in the church until the eighth or ninth century. Previous to this they had their place in the theater rather than in the church" (Lyman Coleman, Presbyterian).

- "Music in the church is as ancient as the apostles; but instrumental music is not" (Joseph Bingham, Church of England).
- "Only singing . . . and no playing of instruments, was permitted in the early church" (Hugo Leichtentritt, *Music*,

- History and Ideas*, 34).
- “That instrumental music was not practiced by primitive Christians . . . is evident from church history” (*The Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 852).
 - “All our sources deal amply with vocal music of the church, but they chary with mention of any other manifestations of music art . . .” (Paul Henry Lang, *Music In Western Civilization*, 53).
 - “. . . Respected scholars simply say that in the early church no instruments were used. They came in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, too late to be authorized by inspiration in the Scriptures” (*The Shaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. II, 1702).
 - “In the early or primitive church of the first six centuries there were no mechanical instruments. The music was quiet, simple, straightforward, and was meant to instruct, comfort, and encourage” (Dr. T. Ambross, head of the music department at Scarritt [Methodist College], *History of Sacred Music*).
 - “Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law” (John Calvin, originator of Presbyterianism).
 - “I have no objection to the organ in our chapels provided it is neither heard nor seen” (John Wesley, originator of Methodism).
 - “There can be no doubt that originally the music of the divine service was

- everywhere entirely of a vocal nature” (Emil Nauman, *The History of Music*, Vol. 1, 177).
- “All music employed in their early services was vocal” (Frank Landon Humphreys, *Evolution of Church Music*, 42).
 - “. . . I here declare that I never knew them [instruments of music] productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire; but instruments of music in the house of God, I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music, and I here register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of that Infinite Spirit who requires His followers to worship Him in spirit and truth” (Adam Clarke, Methodist).
 - “We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregations. It was, however, purely vocal” (Dr. Frederic Louis Ritter, *History of Music from the Christian Era to the Present Time*, 28).

This is but a minute sampling of testimony on the music of the early church. It is abundantly clear that mechanical instruments of music were never used until centuries after the church’s establishment. Early Christians, who were guided by the inspired apostles, simply, yet reverently, lifted their collective voices in heartfelt song:

- “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Mt. 26:30).
- “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God . . .” (Acts 16:25).
- “. . . For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name” (Rom. 15:9b).
- “. . . I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Cor. 14:15b).
- “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19).
- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).
- “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You” (Heb. 2:12).
- “. . . Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms” (Jam. 5:13).

Brethren, if we seriously intend to follow God and the pattern He has set forth in the Scriptures, how can we employ a piano in our worship and do that which was never permitted in the New Testament assembly (1 Cor. 4:6, ASV; Jn. 4:24; 17:17; Rev. 22:18)? God has authorized the “fruit of the lips”—not the “fruit of the finger tips” (Col. 3:17). WOT

WHAT GOD DOES *NOT* EXPECT OF ELDERS

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

Sermons preached on the qualifications of elders often, rightly, emphasize the importance of selecting men who qualify to serve. In the Lord’s church, unmarried men, childless men, covetous men, men with anger-control problems, cold and inhospitable men, and novices (among others) have been appointed to this important work who obviously should not have been. This hurts the local church! Many times it has been said that “bad elders” are worse than “no elders.”

Harboring unfair expectations of men who would serve as elders is another hurtful trend that sometimes surfaces. A hypercritical spirit is a

quality of human nature, though a quality the spiritually-minded ought to fight to personally eliminate. Let us briefly consider what God does *not* expect of elders.

He does not expect more than the qualifications specify. Gut feelings, intuitions, and hunches might work well when fishing or buying appliances, but there is no call for them in selecting men to serve as elders. God does not need our help, tacking on additional requirements for an elder than He felt the need to supply for us. Adding to the word of God carries a stiff penalty (cf. Rev. 22:18); therefore, our scrutiny of a

man’s fitness to serve needs to stop where the Bible’s does.

He does not expect perfection. He expects maturity (1 Tim. 3:6), ability (Tit. 1:9), and stability (1 Tim. 3:4-5), but not impeccability! If so, no man could ever conceivably qualify to serve. Gnat-straining has kept qualified men from serving just as surely as some camel-swallowing has placed unqualified men in the role of spiritual watchmen (cf. Mt. 23:24). With a thousand-tooth comb, some would inspect the minutia of his life and his family’s. Those searching for flaws, who look hard enough, will always find

things. Yet, such findings do not necessarily prove anything. Weaknesses are different from disqualifications.

He does not expect elders to neglect their own families. It is unfair to expect a man, as elder, always to place the needs of the congregation over those of his own family. Too many wives and children have been deprived of husbands and fathers due to disproportionate expectations of time, resources, and attention placed upon elders by members. Elders need the full cooperation and understanding of their families, while elders are obligated by God to supply the needs of their families (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4-5,7). Elders (and their families) are entitled to vacations, as well as nights at home. Elders will

answer, not only for their service as elders (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:4), but also for their influence and leadership in the home (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 6:1-4).

He does not expect elders to be the "complaint-receiving committee." It is impossible but that complaints will come, but woe unto him (or her) through whom they constantly come. Murmuring and complaining got Israel into trouble (cf. 1 Cor. 10:10), and members who find it impossible to speak to elders without doing such may find themselves in the same predicament. How many times has an elder heard you say something positive about another member, a successful program, or their efforts on your behalf? How many of your complaints have they fielded?

Elders will answer for our souls. Let us find ways and opportunities to encourage, praise, and support them. Complain whenever you must, but compliment whenever you can.

Did you realize members have qualifications to meet with regard to the elders (1 Thess. 5:12-13—love and appreciate them; 1 Tim. 5:17—honor them; 1 Tim. 5:19—do not recklessly accuse them; Heb. 13:7,17—obey and submit to them)? As we examine men who would serve as elders, let us not forget to examine ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5). How spiritually fit are we? Jesus' words about beams and specks apply to our relationship with elders, too (Mt. 7:3-5). Let us have high expectations of elders, but let us have only those expectations God has! *WOT*

GOD'S WORD

Sam Willcut, Munford, Tennessee

Psalm 119 is an interesting piece of scripture. Not only does it have the distinction of being the longest chapter in the Bible (with 176 verses), but it is divided into twenty-two sections with eight verses each and each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The entire psalm's emphasis is on the word of God. Notice some lessons we can learn about God's word in the second section (Beth).

God's word can cleanse (Psa. 119:9). Jesus said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (Jn. 15:3). We are sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26).

God's word needs to be read daily (Psa. 119:10). In seeking God with our "whole heart" and trying not to wander from His commandments, we need to be daily Bible readers.

God's word can prohibit us from sin (Psa. 119:11). It can only work, though, if the word is in our hearts (Psa. 40:8; Rom. 10:8; Col. 3:16). It will do little good in prohibiting from sin if God's word is simply on the shelf, on the table, in our pew, or even in our hand. It must be in our hearts.

God's word must be learned (Psa. 119:12). Just as the Psalmist was open to learn God's word (Psa. 119:64,68,108,181), we should be eager to learn. A knowledge of God's word does not come naturally through osmosis, but rather it takes diligent study (2 Tim. 2:15). The Ethiopian nobleman answered Philip's question concerning his understanding of God's word, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30-31). Jesus quoted the prophets (Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 4:2) when He said, "And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (Jn. 6:45).

God's word must be taught (Psa. 119:13). After learning God's word, we should be willing with our lips to declare "all the judgments of thy mouth." This is emphasized in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). The Psalmist also said, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest" (Psa. 40:9). Paul told the young man Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

God's word is valuable (Psa. 119:14). It is "better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Psa. 119:72). It is more valuable than "gold; yea above fine gold" (Psa. 119:127). The wise man spoke of the wisest investment one can make: "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23).

God's word needs to be meditated and respected (Psa. 119:15). Oh, how we desperately need both of these things today! We should spend time in daily meditation of God's word (Josh. 1:8; Psa. 1:2; 63:6; 104:34; 119:78, 148; 143:5). As the Psalmist later said, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97). We also need a deep respect for God's word as the supreme authority for our lives (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is divine in its origin (2 Pet. 1:21). It is truly a blessing to those who respect it (Psa. 19:11; Mt. 7:24). It is our standard for faith and practice in all matters of religion and morality (Jn. 12:48; 1 Thess. 2:13). It is sacred (Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19).

God's word needs to be remembered (Psa. 119:16). We need to take heed to "never forget thy precepts" (Psa. 119:93).

May God bless our treatment of this sacred book He has bestowed to us as a blessing! *WOT*

WHAT DO YOU SPEND YOUR MONEY ON?

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

On the average, Americans spend \$300 million each year to obtain them. Their upkeep costs Americans over \$2 billion each year. There are over 3000 companies that cater to the need of the maintenance of them. Over \$2 billion is spent annually on accessories for them. What are *they*? Automobiles? Houses? Computers? Cellular phones? No! "They" are pets; specifically, dogs and cats. The figures included above include only dogs and cats and the costs to feed them annually. The ratio of cats/dogs to people in America is 1-to-2 (one cat/dog for every two people)—the highest ratio in the world.

As amazing as this might seem, when all the other expenses we pile upon ourselves are calculated, no wonder we have little left for the "essentials." Take a look at your own budget. On what are you spending your money? Does God receive a liberal portion of your income? Is your family a benefactor of what you have materially? Are you supporting a mission effort or other worthy and eternal cause besides what you contribute to the Lord on Sunday morning? Is much more of your money being used for trivial matters than it should be? Perhaps we should take stock and an inventory of our finances to see where our values really are. As Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). Where is your "treasure" and, thus, your heart? WOT



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for a youth minister to work with us. All interested men should send their résumés to:

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
Attn: Elders
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The Words of Truth
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THE WORDS OF Truth

Chuck Webster, Editor

The Words of Truth

is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama

It is dedicated to the promotion and defense of New Testament Christianity.



The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

If you would like to submit an article for consideration, please send via postal mail or fax, or (preferably) via e-mail or on IBM PC compatible 3.5" disk.

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