

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

GRAMMATICAL ERROR

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

Rookie Bill Grammatica had been having a great rookie season, hitting 80% of his field goals, faring even better than his older brother, Tampa Bay's Martin Grammatica. Then, against the New York Giants on December 15, 2001, Grammatica became a little over-exuberant about making a field goal. Jumping for joy, Bill landed awkwardly on one foot and in the process tore his right anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), making that field goal his last for the 2001 season (at least). Talk about your Grammatical errors! The Ticker report says, "Bill forever will be entrenched on blooper reels as the kicker who blew out his knee celebrating a field goal." Ouch!

Sometimes, we have good intentions but our plans backfire. Other times, we get hurt in the process of doing something nice for others. Maybe, with honorable intentions, we really foul up things. This can be discouraging and even

embarrassing. We may be tempted into thinking, "Why bother?" Can you relate?

Paul has an answer for us when we get discouraged, perhaps over failed attempts, poor results, or other missteps. He says, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). If you have felt such discouragement, you are in good company. God had to tell Joshua (1:9), David (1 Chr. 22:13), Solomon (1 Chr. 28:20), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20:15), Judah's captains of war (2 Chr. 32:7), and the Ephesians (3:13) not to be discouraged doing right, even if things were not going so well.

It is possible to slip up and say something inappropriate or embarrassing when visiting a sick person at home or in the hospital, but you are out there visiting! Learn from your mistake and keep going.

Maybe you were overzealous in talking with that person about Christ, but you were attempting to win a soul! Try not to be abrasive or combative, but keep at it! You may have sung a wrong note that everybody heard, but you are making a joyful noise. Do your best. Do not let embarrassment close your mouth.

Mistakes are to be anticipated, so long as you continue to be human. It may be so grave as an unintentional error (cf. Gal. 6:1). Be sweet and pay attention, make the correction, and do better. You have valuable service and abundant talent to use in the service of the King. Do not let mistakes and failures shame you out of working for Him. Hobble off and regroup, then get back out there and fight the good fight. The worst possible thing you could do is be a quitter! Grammatical errors are correctable.

WOT

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REPENT? (1)

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Perhaps God gave no command that is more widely misunderstood and imperfectly practiced than that of repentance, even among Christians. Does it mean simply saying that one is sorry (i.e., remorse alone)? Does it involve *only* the cessation of sinning? Does repentance ever involve restitution? When we repent, must we confess the sin(s) as well? We address these and other questions in this series of articles.

One sure sign that a person is unsaved is if he never admits doing wrong. In fact, John suggests, there is no truth in him (1 Jn. 1:8), and he makes God a “liar” (1 Jn. 1:10). The truth is, all sin and therefore need God’s forgiveness (Rom. 3:9,23; cf. Eccl. 7:20; Gal. 3:22). Repentance, however, stands before the sinner and forgiveness. As a result, it is essential for us to understand the nature of true repentance.

Repentance includes sorrow for sin. The emotional aspect of repentance is suggested first in the Hebrew term *nacham*, used 108 times in the Old Testament and translated “repent” 41 times. It is “an onomatopoeic term which implies difficulty in breathing, hence, ‘to pant,’ ‘to sigh,’ ‘to groan’” (Dement, *ISBE*, “Repentance”). As the word evolved, it came to signify lamentation or grief, and, according to Dement, “when the emotion was produced by the desire of good for others, it merged into compassion and sympathy, and when incited by a consideration of one’s own character and deeds it means ‘to rue,’ ‘to repent.’”

In the New Testament, the Greek word *metamelomai* reflects this emotional aspect. Used six times in the New Testament and translated “repent” each time (cf. Mt. 21:29,32; 27:3; 2 Cor. 7:8 [twice]; Heb. 7:21), *metamelomai* “literally signifies to have a feeling or care, concern or regret; like *nacham*, it expresses the emotional aspect of repentance” (Dement). Paul used this word in his

admonition to the Corinthians: “For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season” (2 Cor. 7:8).

Two implications are obvious:

1. Since regret is an essential component of true repentance, we must understand the true nature of sin; i.e., that it is an affront to a holy God (Gen. 39:9; Psa. 51:4) that separates us from Him (Isa. 59:1-2). God looks at sin, not as a frivolous act to be ignored or amused by, but rather as an abomination (Deut. 25:16; Prov. 3:32; 6:16-19; 11:20; Lk. 16:15). With David (Psa. 51:4—“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned . . .”), we must realize that sin is primarily against God Himself, the One whose deep love for us is expressed in the giving of His Son. Our attitude should be like Joseph’s when he exclaimed, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9). The emotion of our repentance should be as graphic as that expressed by David, as he cries:

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: . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. 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. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;

and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. . . . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psa. 51:1-4,7-13,17).

One can almost see the tears flowing down David’s cheeks as he writes those words—he clearly understands the dreadful nature of sin.

2. True repentance is *not* simply the cessation of sinning. Like the children who stop disobeying after they’ve been “caught,” many believe they have repented of a particular sin if they simply stop committing the sin. For example, some who have been woefully unfaithful in attending worship assemblies resume attending . . . with no expressed regret or confession. Is *that* true repentance? Certainly a change in one’s behavior is *part* of repentance, but is it the *only* part? Clearly there must be an emotional element as well.

How do we cultivate the emotional aspect of repentance? “But,” someone says, “I cannot control my emotions, so surely God will not hold me accountable if my emotions aren’t stirred by sin in my life . . .” The truth is, our emotions are the product, at least to a great extent, of our intellect: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart*, and with all thy soul and with all thy *mind*, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mk. 12:30, emp. added). Notice carefully the connector between the heart and the mind—what we *know* and *think* affects how we *feel*.

Thus if we want to experience true regret, we must start with our intellect; that is, sorrow flows from a complete understanding of the nature of sin.

1. At its very essence sin is transgression of God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4) and thus violates His eternal and

perfect holiness, as seen in Habakkuk 1:13: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: . . ." The one who, like David, experiences true remorse is one who understands that his sin has hurt God and profaned His Name.

2. In the Bible sin is inexorably connected with death. Those living under the Old Law were reminded of their sins every time they offered an animal sacrifice and saw his blood spill over the altar. Living under the new covenant, we must remember that our sins are responsible for Jesus' dying on the cross. Every Lord's day, as we eat and drink with Christ in His supper, we should be reminded of the fact that *we* crucified Him. It was *our* sins that held

Him there . . . it was *our* iniquities for which He suffered. Notice the personal nature of Isaiah's beautiful prophetic passage: "Surely he hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows: yet *we* did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities: the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him; and with his stripes *we* are healed. All *we* like sheep have gone astray; *we* have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of *us all*. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa. 53:4-7, emp. added).

Has sin become "no big deal" to us? Are we *truly* sorry when we sin, or do we just mumble a quick prayer of vague "repentance" before we drift off to sleep? If so, perhaps we haven't adequately considered how badly sin hurts God . . . and maybe we haven't spent enough time at Calvary. When we look in Jesus' dying eyes, and remember that *we* put Him there, surely our hearts will hurt, and our emotions will be stirred. Such is the first element of true repentance.

Repentance isn't, of course, to be characterized solely by misty eyes and a sad face; it will always result in additional "fruits" (Mt. 3:8) . . . which will be the focus of next month's editorial.

WOT

AGAPE (2)

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

In this conclusion to our two-part series on *agape*, I consider some additional golden nuggets, clustered around the most meaningful word in the New Testament.

AGAPE AND PHILIA FURTHER DISTINGUISHED

Sometimes overlapping, but intrinsically different

Though *agape* and *philia* in some contexts have much in common, there is an idea in each that remains separate. "Even in some cases where they might appear to be used interchangeably (e. g., Jn. 14:23; 16:27) the difference can still be traced" (Thayer, p. 653). However, it appears to me that Thayer makes three non-valid differences:

- (1) He says that "men are said *agapan* God [Mt. 22:37], not *philein*" (p. 653). But if men are said to *philein* God's Son (1 Cor. 6:22), the distinction by the respected lexicographer is purely accidental, since Jesus and the Father are "one" (Jn. 10:30).
- (2) "God is said to *agapesai* the world (Jn. 3:16) and to *philein* the disciples of Christ" (Jn. 16:27) (p. 653). However, God's "love for man" (Greek, *philanthropia*, Tit. 3:4) has the

word *philein* embedded within it.

(3) "Love as an emotion [*philia*] cannot be commanded, but only love as a choice" (p. 653). On the contrary, *philia*, embedded in the Greek word *philadelphia*, is commanded (Rom. 12:10; Heb. 13:1).

Friendship Love

A wife, determined to get a divorce, said, "I do not love him any more." She did not understand that what had died was her friendship love (*philia*) for him, for his attractiveness had disappeared. But apparently she had never had a committed love (*agape*), a care for him even more than a care for herself.

Jesus and Peter

If ever there were a person understanding clearly the commitment inhering in *agape*, and of its superiority over the friendship of *philia*, it was the apostle Peter. He had bragged of his devotion to Jesus, claiming a deeper loyalty than that possessed by the other apostles: "If everyone else is offended at you, I will never be offended" (Mt. 26:33).

However, after he had forsaken his Lord, even cursing and swearing, "I do

not know the man," upon hearing the rooster crow his heart was broken (Mt. 26:74-75). Bitter weeping displayed his deep shame. Like Judas, he was a traitor, and he knew it. All bragging was gone, and his spirit was crushed.

After the Lord's resurrection, when Peter was with some disciples by the lakeside, Jesus asked him, "Do you love [*agapao*] me more than these?" (Jn. 21:15). Peter, hearing *agapao* in Jesus' question, knowing the magnitude of commitment involved in that word, knowing he had betrayed the Savior, could not honestly put the word *agapao* on his lips.

His reply was an evasion, using *phileo*. In this context the English word "love" does not rightly translate what Peter was saying, "Yes, Lord, you know that I like (*phileo*) you." A second time Jesus asked, "Do you *agapao* me?" and a second time Peter hedged, "Yes, Lord, you know that I like (*phileo*) you." The Lord, noticing Peter's evasion, in His third question asked, "Do you like (*phileo*) me?" Peter, undone, overcome, and grieved, as it were opened wide his breast and heart as if to say, "Lord, no more will I brag, and I will not be bold to say that I love (*agapao*) you." Actually his answer was "Lord, you know all

things: you know I like (*phileo*) you.”

A chart

Some contrasts between *agape* and *philia* are as follows:

<i>PHILIA</i>	<i>AGAPE</i>
Natural	Learned
Emotional	Volitional
Discriminatory	Nondiscriminatory
Conditional	Unconditional
Pleasure	Preciousness
Delight	Esteem
Liking	Prizing
Because of	In spite of
Fails	Never fails

Love of the truth

The most valuable thing in the world is “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13). Since only that truth (Jn. 8:32) can liberate men from their sins, how that truth should be cherished! “Buy the truth and do not sell it” (Prov. 23:23). Like “a treasure hidden in the field,” like “one pearl of great price,” is “the word of the truth of the gospel” (Mt. 13:44,46; Col. 1:5).

No second or third class love is worthy of the gospel treasure. Man’s relationship and esteem for that precious commodity can only be conveyed by *agape*. No other word can depict how earnestly God’s power to save is to be sought, and not for sale at any price. Happy and blessed are they who in their hearts have “the love [*agape*] of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:10). Sadly, when people do not love the truth, to them God sends “a working of error, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but enjoyed wrong doing” (2 Thess. 2:11-12).

OVERDOING AGAPE

“There Is No Law But Love”

Some have thought they were doing an in-depth study of Romans 6:14, “you are not under law, but under grace,” by asserting that since the word “law” does not have the Greek article (*to*, for “the”) before it, therefore Christians are under law of no kind whatsoever. They misuse Galatians 5:18 in the same way.

But since Paul was discussing the law of Moses (cf. Rom. 7:7; 10:4-5; Gal. 5:3), the word “law” was definite without the article. So clear is it that it is the law of Moses being considered that the ASV translators have inserted the article 30 of the 35 times that the word “law” has no article preceding it in the book of Romans.

To conclude that Christians are under no law is to render meaningless the phrases “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” and “the law of Christ” (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2). Also, such a conclusion would antagonize 1 John 3:4, “sin is lawlessness” (*anomia*). Furthermore, under the cover that “there is no law but love” some would justify fornication, lying, stealing, and murder. Actually, since baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not implicit in the word “love,” those commandments and others become unnecessary and superfluous.

It is easy to misuse the inspired words that “love covers all transgressions” (Prov. 10:12) by teaching that, as long as love is in a person’s heart, no matter what sins he commits, all his transgressions are covered, and he is bound for heaven. Such teaching ignores other inspired words: “Except you believe that I am he [the Christ, the Son of God], you

will die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24); “Except you repent, you will likewise perish” (Lk. 13:3,5); “Every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:11); “He commanded them to be baptized” (Acts 10:48); “Be faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10).

“Love Is The Only Monitor”

Some have abused Romans 13:8, “Owe no man anything, save to love one another,” by suggesting that since love is the only guide for one’s conscience, he may do as he pleases so long as love is the motivation. But Bible love keeps God’s commandments (Jn. 14:15,21, 23,24; 1 Jn. 2:4; 5:3). Augustine (A.D. 354-430) asserted that a Christian loves and does as he pleases, but his meaning was that he who loves God pleases only to do God’s will.

“Love Fellowships Everybody”

A third avenue of overdoing *agape* is to be so loving that one refuses to withdraw fellowship from anybody. But withdrawing fellowship (or not extending it) is a loving act, its first reason being love for a lost soul that his “spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:3). The sad act of announcement of withdrawal is included in the command, “Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:14). And Christians do not forget that, when loving discipline has accomplished its God-given mission, they are “to confirm” their “love toward” the restored member (2 Cor. 2:8).

Preachers today who say all people who say they believe in Jesus are their brothers are quite restrictive in their love unless they claim all Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and, indeed, all mankind, as their brothers. WOT

IMPLACABLE

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

In Romans 1:31, in a list of heinous crimes against God, is the unusual and overlooked word, *implacable*. People who just cannot be pleased are described in such an expression. Sadly, their kinfolk are still around today.

Some parents rear children in this direction by allowing their offspring to dictate policy via temper fits and selfish orientations. Our child-centered society is backward emphasis to Bible teaching. We are truly developing the

report of Judges 21:25 in our own day: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Most of the strife in congregational problems is but a reflection of spoiled children who grew up demanding their

own rights at the expense of others. Christianity is based upon Jesus dying for our wrongs, while we rebel by demanding “our rights.” Such strange philosophy causes havoc in society, in the church, and in our own personal lives! The old gospel song implores us to reverse the theme of “all of self and none of Thee” and fully surrender to the wiser approach that sings: “None of self and all of Thee.”

We will never know peace until we possess the mind of Christ. Philippians 2:5-8 clearly teaches that thrust in life as one that empties self-exaltation and produces genuine humility and devotion to higher, nobler, and eternal verities!

In the little book of 3 John we have the name of a man that has become synonymous with *implacable*. Diotrophes and Jezebel would have made a tremendous couple on Satan’s

hit parade. Devious, selfish, envious, arrogant, and miserable were they! The church has suffered through the years by bowing to the whims of such characters. Elders, preachers, and sometimes strong-willed women have hurt the cause of the Lord with stubborn, unrelenting, and factious hearts.

Here are four thoughts we all ought to ponder:

- A selfish success is a successful failure.
- Pleasure is not a proper goal. If prompted by selfishness the pursuit of happiness is vain and miserable.
- Nature did not make us perfect so she made us blind to our faults.
- Some minds are like concrete, mixed up and permanently set!

The last one is an apt description of the word *implacable*.

These are spiritual hymns we often sing that could cure this malady of self-centered conduct. But, do we really mean it when we sing . . . ?

- “Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee.”
- “Mold me and make me, after Thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still.”

These are times when we must stubbornly refuse to yield to false teachers and subtle error (Eph. 5:11), but we need wisdom (Jam. 1:5) to know the difference in personal preference and divine mandates. Serious Bible study is the key and not emotional feelings and bias. WOT

WORSHIPING GOD—ALL OF LIFE OR PART OF LIFE?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

A prominent thought that has circulated for several years is the idea that all of life is worship and that everything a Christian does is worship. Does the Bible support this concept, or is it a misunderstanding of the nature and practice of worship as God ordained it?

To be sure, worship involves far more than observing proper actions in the confines of a church building. It is possible for one to perform all five acts of worship mentioned in the New Testament (pray, sing, give, commune, and teach) and leave the church building with very little worship taking place in the heart. It is also possible for a person to engage in certain acts of worship to God individually—anywhere and anytime. But, is it Biblically accurate to view all of life as worship or to suggest that everything a Christian does is worship?

It is often affirmed that worship and service are identical; that all of a Christian’s life is service; that all service is worship and, therefore, all of life is worship. However, the Bible clearly distinguishes between worshiping and serving. Service is

broader than worship. Gary Workman has correctly observed that “all worship is service, but not all service is worship.” Notice that Paul made a trip to “worship” at Jerusalem (Acts 24:11), but was “serving” God night and day (Acts 26:7). Jesus said, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve” (Mt. 4:10). Paul wrote that some “worshiped” and “served” the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Clearly, there is a distinction between worship and service.

A review of the Biblical usage of the term “worship” reveals the following information. Worship is defined as: “bowing down; prostrating oneself; to kiss toward as an act of veneration; to revere; to act piously towards.” In the Bible, worship is extended to an idol as well as to God. In either case, worship is a positive action toward that which is revered.

Worship is *not* simply all and any daily routine activity. It is an *act* of paying homage or respect to God. It requires specific action with a starting and stopping place. It is not an ongoing state. Nearing Mt. Moriah, Abraham

told his servants to remain behind while he and Isaac “go yonder and worship” (Gen. 22:5). Elkanah and his family “arose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord, and returned again to their house” (1 Sam. 1:19). The Sryophoenician woman “came and worshiped” Jesus (Mt. 15:25).

It is one thing to say that all of a Christian’s life should glorify God, but another to say that all of the Christian’s life is worship to God. One may worship *while* he brushes his teeth, takes a shower, ties his shoe, drives his car, cleans the house, etc., but that does not mean that those are acts of worship. A housewife should be able to wash the dishes or make the beds in an awareness that she is fulfilling one of the functions God provided for her, and she can do it in such a way as to glorify Him, but that does not necessarily make them acts of worship.

All worship is service, but not all service is worship. Throughout life, the Christian should be grateful for the privilege of worshiping God often, both publicly and privately. WOT

TWO LESSONS FROM THE SPONGE

Tracy Dugger, Austin, Texas

The sponge is an amazing creature. Scientists really do not know where to place it in the animal kingdom. It is a multi-celled animal bereft of complex respiratory and digestive organs. *Compton's Encyclopedia* reports that some sponges can filter four gallons of water a day (the equivalent of 64 glasses of water). They do this to absorb oxygen and food from the surrounding water.

A sponge eats and breathes by filtering through its body. Different cells perform these life processes. Water flows through numerous pores in the sponge's skin. These pores lead into a central cavity, the spongocoel, which is lined with choanocytes, or collar cells. Each collar cell has a flagella, a tiny whiplike structure that creates a current to help draw the water through the sponge. The collar cells also capture food particles, bacteria, other microorganisms, and organic debris and absorb oxygen from the water current. Free-moving cells called amoebocytes bring digested food and oxygen to other cells and remove waste products. The current of water with digestive and respiratory waste products then flows out of the sponge through one or more large openings called oscula. Cells called myocytes surround the oscula and can make the openings larger or smaller, or close them completely (*Compton's Encyclopedia*).

Of particular interest is their marvelous ability to absorb sustenance. God created these animals with the proper capability to filter and absorb food particles enabling them to live and grow. Consider a spiritual lesson which we find in the words of Paul. He told the Ephesians elders:

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. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:28-31).

Notice the importance of feeding the church of God (v. 28). If God's people do not absorb spiritual food they cannot grow and will eventually die (1 Pet. 2:2). The importance of learning and obeying the truth of God's Word is apparent in a multitude of passages in the New Testament (see Jn. 8:32; 6:44-45; Rom. 1:16; Mt. 22:29). Since it is so consequential that we feed upon God's Word, we need to become like sponges; we need not only to be frequently feeding at the Word, but absorbing what we eat. James explains in 1:21-23, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves" (Jam. 1:21-23). By emphasizing the importance of engraving the Word and being doers of it, James is emphasizing the necessity of absorbing it. Just as the sponge teaches us the necessity of absorbing nutrients and not letting them just pass through, James wants us to be more than mere spectators and listeners. Paul puts it this way: "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:15-16).

But notice another characteristic of

sponges. Of the more than 5000 varieties, many are soft and cushioned. Sponges have been used since ancient times. The Greeks and the Romans used them as padding for their armor, as well as for paintbrushes and mops. There are many commercial uses today being employed for sponges because of their softness.

Sponges have within their skeleton fragments of flint or silex. These fragments attract various types of elements which can, over a period of time, cause the entire sponge to become hardened and eventually lose its softness. The skeletal remains of sponges have been found that have formed enormous deposits of flint. From this flint, ancient tools and weapons have been likewise discovered.

What occurs in sponges is often what occurs in many people regarding their relationship to the gospel. Take for instance one who has never become a Christian, but who properly understands. As they continue to hear the message of glad tidings and at the same time reject each call, their heart is affected. Just as the sponge collects hard particles as time passes, the human heart collects hard fragments as it continues to put off obedience. This can also take place in the unfaithful child of God. As that soul continues to reject his call of repentance, the heart becomes the more hardened and callused. It can become a very dangerous time in his spiritual life.

We must not procrastinate when it comes to our salvation. Paul explicitly explained, "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). The urgency is seen in the word "now." We need not put off what is the most important thing in our lives. It is much too dangerous to remain in the sea of sin!

Let us become like sponges in absorbing food from God, but let us refuse to emulate their tendency to lose their softness.

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THE LITTLE CHURCH WITH THE BIG HEART

Duane Patton, Wylie, Texas

The phrase "there is strength in numbers" is not always an accurate statement. Numbers alone may not indicate the strength of the church. Spiritual strength is determined by God's presence and support, not by the volume of professing believers in a given locale. If we desire to be strong spiritually, then we must have God's approval.

A good illustration of this is found toward the close of the Bible. The church of Christ in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13) apparently was not numerically strong—yet, according to the Lord, they had the kind of strength that is to be commended:

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: 'I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied my name.'"

While the text does not directly indicate that these brethren were small in physical number, there is some implication of this from the term "little strength" (v. 8). For, they were not mostly weak. They had "kept [the] word" of the Lord and had "not denied" His name. Activity and faithfulness, the two outstanding characteristics of this persecuted little church, make for a truly strong congregation with great opportunity.

There is no doubt but that what made this church strong was their heart. When obedience stems from the heart, real spiritual strength, along with God's accolades, will result (vv. 8-12). The keeping and promotion of God's word yields opportunities on a regular basis. Anyone who desires to live according to the way of Christianity will never find himself without a situation in which he may bring glory to God. Brethren, the world needs converting, the converted need strengthening, and, as Jesus rightly exclaimed: "the poor you have with you always," and deserve our attention (Jn. 12:8; Jam. 1:27; 2:15-16)—surely in these areas we all have opportunity to keep God's word and not deny the name of the Lord!

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

**Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
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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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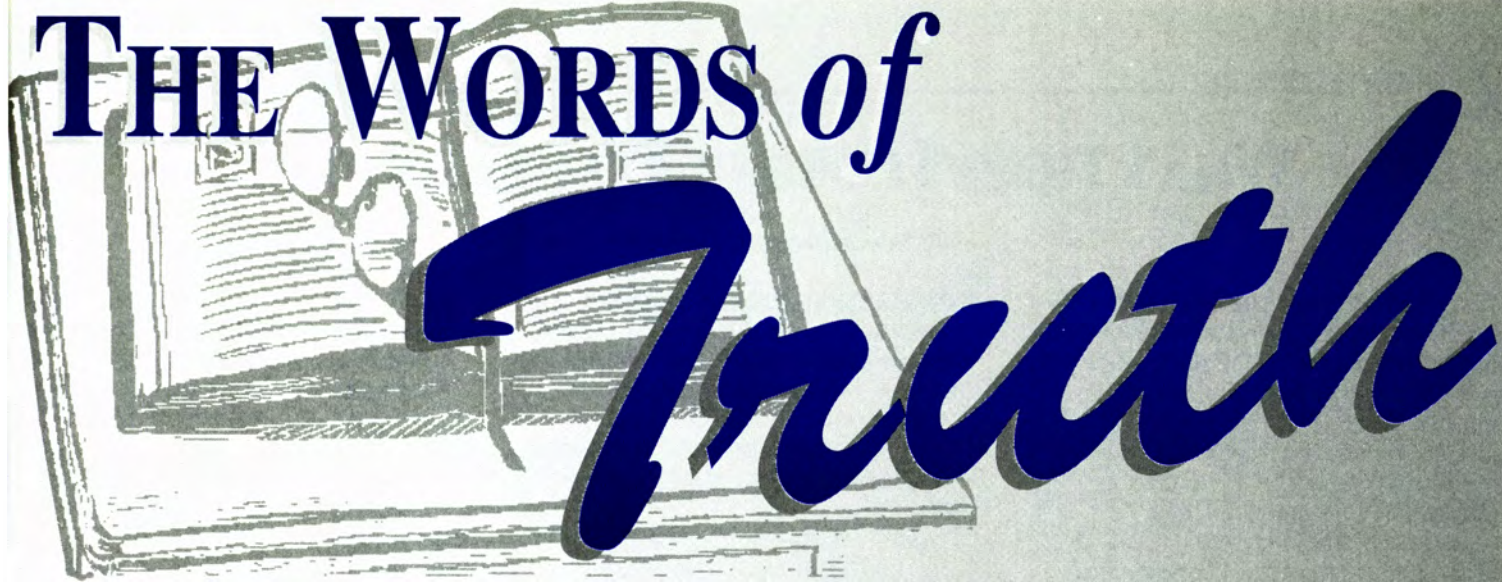
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THE WORDS of Truth

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

Vol. 39 No. 2

February 2002

“FOR THE ASSEMBLY WAS CONFUSED”

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

During his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23ff), Paul went to Ephesus. Having sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia (Acts 19:22), he found himself facing an angry mob, headed by one Demetrius, a silversmith (Acts 19:23-28). Demetrius aroused the people of the city with his speech concerning Paul’s intrusion into their way of life through his claim that there were no gods made with hands (Acts 19:26). The crowd was finally dismissed by the town clerk following his appeal to the more rational side of the people (Acts 19:35-41).

Concerning this assembly, it is interesting how the Bible describes their actions. It states: “Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come

together” (Acts 19:32). The assembly is described as being “confused.” The reason for this is twofold: 1) Division and 2) Ignorance. There was confusion because there were mixed messages being delivered—“some therefore cried one thing, and some another.” There was confusion because some had no idea why they were there. Even though they had no idea what had gathered the mob, they were there “crying” nonetheless.

When we compare this situation with the situation ongoing in the religious world, we will find that things haven’t changed all that much. Just as then, there is still confusion today. Why? 1) Division and 2) Ignorance. There are many “crying one thing” and many more “crying another.” There are numerous ones “crying” who have

little idea at all about the subject(s) at hand. Confusion will always be the result of such a formula.

The prophet said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). Perhaps the greater contribution to the “confusion” of this audience was from those who “knew not.” After all, Luke records that they were “the more part.” Certainly, the presence of either of these two will result in “confusion.”

There is one thing about which we can be certain—since there was confusion at this assembly, it was not God’s doing (1 Cor. 14:33). With “one speaking one thing and another something else,” there will always be confusion in the religious world. Only through “speaking as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11) can the world be unified.

WOT

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REPENT? (2)

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Last month we suggested that true repentance has an emotional element, a fact implied not only by the meaning of the word, but also by that for which one is repenting—sin . . . a violation of God's infinite holiness. But repentance that pleases God is not simply remorse, as illustrated by Judas Iscariot: after his traitorous deed he "repented himself" (Mt. 27:3), but his "repentance" degenerated into mere remorse and was not, therefore, pleasing to God.

So, if repentance includes remorse but is not limited to it, what other elements does it include?

The most basic element is turning away from sin. Notice *Vine's* definition of *metanoeo*, the Greek word most commonly used to denote the concept of repentance: "lit., 'to perceive afterwards' . . . [it] signifies 'to change one's mind or purpose,' always, in the New Testament, involving a change for the better, an amendment, . . ." (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, "Repent, repentance"). Dement suggests: "The word *metanoeo* expresses the true New Testament idea of the spiritual change implied in a sinner's return to God" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Repentance"). He further suggests that

the term signifies "to have another mind," to change the opinion or purpose with regard to sin. It is equivalent to the Old Testament word "turn." . . . The idea expressed by the word is intimately associated with different aspects of spiritual transformation and of Christian life, . . . As a vital experience, repentance is to manifest its reality by producing good fruits appropriate to the new spiritual life (Mt 3:8) (Ibid).

Another interesting word is often used in conjunction with *metanoeo*. For example, in Peter's command to the Jews to "Repent ye therefore, and be converted" (Acts 3:19), "be converted" translates *epistrepho*, which means "to turn oneself round" (*Vine's*, "Turn").

Notice how this word is used in the following verses to denote the idea of turning away from sin and toward God:

- "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and **should be converted**, and I should heal them" (Mt. 13:15).
- "And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and **turned** to the Lord" (Acts 9:35).
- "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and **turned** unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21).
- "To open their eyes, and **to turn** them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18).
- "But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and **turn** to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20).
- "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye **turned** to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).
- "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one **convert** him: Let him know, that he which **converteth** the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (Jam. 5:19-20).

Because the word is used so frequently in conjunction with repentance, Dement writes:

The word *epistrepho* is used to bring out more clearly the distinct change wrought in repentance. It is employed quite frequently in Acts to express the positive side of a change involved in New Testament repentance, or to indicate the return to God of which the turning from sin is the negative aspect. The two conceptions are inseparable and complementary. The word is used to express the spiritual transition from sin to God (Acts 9:35; 1 Thess 1:9); to strengthen the idea of faith (Acts

11:21); and to complete and emphasize the change required by New Testament repentance (Acts 26:20) (*ISBE*, "Repentance").

The primary concept of repentance, then, is that of changing one's mind concerning sin and turning back toward God. When we realize that our sins have hurt God, we experience true remorse. This emotional reaction is quickly followed by an intellectual decision to turn *from* sin and turn *to* God. As we make this decision we commit ourselves to try never to sin again.

Though the implications are numerous, one of the most relevant concerns adultery. The Lord taught explicitly that one who divorces his wife for any cause other than fornication and subsequently remarries commits adultery; i.e., he is having "unlawful intercourse with another's wife" (Thayer's Greek Lexicon, "*moicheuo*"; cf. *Vine's*, "Adultery"). When he repents, he changes his mind toward all sin in his life, including adultery. He commits himself to turning away from sin and turning to God. He has a new mind toward sin. Therefore, in order for him to repent of committing adultery, he must stop committing it. How can some argue that in this case repentance does not include the cessation of adultery? The clear implication is that this penitent brother, in order to repent, must dissolve the unauthorized marriage and its corresponding sexual relations. The Corinthians had formerly been adulterers, but Christ washed, sanctified, and justified them in their conversion (1 Cor. 6:9-11). After their baptism, did they simply continue committing adultery? Or did they have "a new mind"? Did they continue committing adultery, or did they "turn" away from it and toward God?

Of course, the same reasoning applies to all sin. If our previous conduct included drunkenness, foul speech, lust, or dishonesty, as we repent we make a commitment to avoid *every* sin in the future.

In these two editorials we've noticed that repentance involves both remorse and a commitment to turn away from sin. Is that all? Are there times where restitution is necessary? What about confession? Next month's article will address these questions.

CAN YOU SLEEP AT NIGHT?

Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama

It takes more than a soft pillow to insure sound sleep. Americans live in gated communities, under radar surveillance, with patrolmen circling at all hours, and still can't sleep for fear. Ancient cities encircled their cities with impenetrable walls. The pioneers circled their wagons to protect themselves from surprise dawn Indian attacks. Modern countries line their borders with nuclear arms. Today's homes are equipped with alarms, motion sensors, and sprinkler systems but we still fear the worst. We are covered by life insurance, health insurance, disability insurance, and fire insurance, but are still not too sure of the future. Even our pets reflect our fears. In 1975, cuddly poodles were the most popular purebred dog in America, with 139,750 registered. There were only 952 registered Rottweilers, a fierce breed often used as a guard dog. By 1994, the poodle population was cut in half to 61,775, while Rottweilers had increased 100 times to 102,596.¹

A Christian's best defense is none of these things. It's a child-like trust in a Father-like God. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psa. 20:7; cf. Isa. 31:1). "And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee" (2 Chron. 14:11). "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. 32:8a). "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Pet. 3:13).

God's protection is like . . . a hedge of thorns. Those who lived in Bible lands were familiar with thorns. Celius, for instance, describes sixteen varieties of thorny plants. Large thorn bushes—called *nabk*, from which tradition says the crown of thorns was woven—sprang up like fruit trees all over. In the Plain of Gennesaret thistles grew so tall and thick a horse could not push through them.² Palestinian farmers used thorn hedges to divide fields and discourage intruders (cf. Mt. 13; Mk. 4; Lk. 8). From the Garden of Eden to the cross of Calvary, thorns played a part in

God's plan for man. Interestingly, when Satan accused God of putting a hedge around Job, God didn't deny it (Job 1:10). (He denied that the hedge was the reason Job served Him.) Isaiah pictured God's people as a vineyard that received God's attention. When they failed to remain faithful He threatened to "take away the hedge thereof" (Isa. 5:5). God hedges us in with His love and powerful care.

. . . a shield. The LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). The Psalmist rejoiced to know that the ". . . LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield" (5:12). The Christian's armor includes the "shield of faith" by which we quench the fiery darts of the wicked (Eph. 6:16). This "shield" (*thureos*) was large, oblong, made of wood, and covered with hides.³ Roman soldiers lined up in formation with these shields in front as a literal wooden wall against the initial onslaught of enemy arrows. Listening to a student read Psalm 23 in chapel, Joseph Sittler, blind with advancing age, heard something he'd never heard before. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me . . ." "The text does not speak," said Sittler, "of the valley of death but the valley of the shadow of death. There is a difference . . . The wonderful truth . . . is that God is with us now. It is not simply that God will be with us in the experience of death itself; it is that God will walk with us through all of life, a life over which death sometimes casts its shadow."⁴

. . . a wall of fire. Campers in the extreme northern U.S. and Canadian wildernesses have been known to build several campfires in a circle around their sleeping bags to put a "wall of fire" between them and timberwolves. Compare Zechariah's record: "For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (2:5). As late as the nineteenth century, a superstition existed about fire among European peasants. Fire started by the primitive method of friction was regarded as having supernatural protective properties. Cattle driven through this fire would come to no harm, provided all

nearby fires were put out when it was kindled. Such superstition points to man's desire; Scripture points to God's meeting that desire for His people. Just as David's men served as a "wall of protection" around Nabal's shepherds in the field (1 Sam. 25:16), so "the angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psa. 34:7).

. . . a mother hen. If you've been on a farm you've probably watched a hen's chicks scatter looking for insects and worms. As they peck here and there some distance may come to separate them. But let a cat or hound come in their direction, and the hen's excited clucking brings the chicks under her with startling rapidity. As they hide, she puts herself between them and the perceived danger. This is how Jesus pictured His care for Jerusalem. He wanted to call them to Him and shield them from harm, but they would not (Mt. 23:37). God's arms are even pictured as "underneath" us (Deut. 33:27). To use Whittier's words,

I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.⁵

. . . a crocodile's hide. God is "a buckler to all them that trust in him" (2 Sam. 22:31). The word "buckler" (*magen*) is often translated "shield" but can also mean "the scaly hide of the crocodile." God can give us "thick skin" when we need it to turn toward those who unjustly criticize (Ezek. 3:9).

We'd all sleep better if we stopped at 1 Peter 5:7 before closing our eyes: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." God is there. He is awake. "He that keepeth thee will not slumber" (Psa. 121:3b).

¹American Kennel Club. "To Verify," *Leadership Magazine*.

²McGarvey, *Commentary on Matthew*.

³It comes from a root word, *thura*, meaning "door."

⁴Quoted by Martin Marty in "Context," August 1 and 15, 1984. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 30, no. 2.

⁵John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Eternal Gardens*. WOT

THE INTEGRITY CRISIS

B.J. Clarke, Southaven, Mississippi

Certainly, one of the most glaring evidences of a lack of respect for God's instructions is seen in the lack of honesty and integrity on the part of many human beings today. A lack of integrity is manifested in any number of ways: cheating, stealing, lying, etc.

Cheating

For example, *USA Today*, (3/11/96) reported that more than a fourth of students at some of the nation's best colleges admit cheating on a test even though they have an honor code. Brux Austin, the editor of *Texas Business*, has written that the only sign America seems to be looking to for direction is the dollar sign: "We have no built-in beliefs, no ethical boundaries. Cheat on your taxes, just don't get caught. Cheat on your wife, just don't get AIDS." Our high-tech society, he writes, has given us everything—"everything but a conscience."¹

In 1991, James Patterson and Peter Kim released *The Day America Told the Truth*, a study based on an extensive opinion survey which guaranteed the anonymity of its participants. And the truth was shocking! The survey revealed that 91% lie regularly, both at work and in their homes; most American workers admit to goofing off for an average of seven hours, almost one whole day per week; and half of our work force admits that they regularly call in sick when they feel perfectly well. One particular question on the survey really grabbed me: "What are you willing to do for \$10 million?" 25% would abandon their families; 23% would become a prostitute for a week; 7% would murder a stranger!

Stealing

According to Paul Harvey, in 1989 CBS sent a camera crew to Ft. Worth, Texas, to do a special story on big city crime. As the crew was unloading its equipment, their \$30,000 camera was stolen. What a good introduction for

their story! Of course, one reason why stealing is such a widespread problem is that less than one out of seven burglaries results in an arrest. Couple this fact with legal delays, backlogged courts, and overcrowded prisons and it's possible for even the dumb burglar who gets caught to get off with a minimal sentence or none at all.

As Georgia Supreme Court Justice Charles L. Weltner put it, "Right now a person who has been through the system and is contemplating a crime probably views things as follows: (1) If I do it I won't get caught; (2) If I get caught I won't get prosecuted; (3) If I get prosecuted I won't get convicted; (4) If I get convicted I won't go to prison; (5) If I go to prison it won't be for very long." The words of Ecclesiastes 8:11 explain a lot about why our society is headed on a downward spiral!

If we have been guilty of stealing, we must make full restitution. A new convert went to his preacher and said, "Before I was saved, I stole a rope from my neighbor's barn. After reading the story of Zacchaeus, I decided to return it. Yet my neighbor still isn't reconciled to me." The preacher, noticing his downcast eyes, questioned him a bit further. "Are you sure that's all you took from him, or is something else wrong?" Embarrassed, the man replied, "I guess that's the problem. You see I didn't bring back what was attached to the rope—the man's prize calf!"

Lying

Congress has one more lesson to learn from Watergate: some new means must be found to ensure that witnesses before congressional committees tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but. As it is, not even swearing in a witness and therefore putting him in peril of perjury charges guarantees a committee will get complete, or even reasonably accurate, testimony.

Richard Helms, in the course of explaining his 1973 testimony, told a

recent Senate hearing that despite the fact he had sworn to tell the "whole truth," he believed he had some latitude in the manner in which he gave his answers. As one prosecutor put it, "You can lie without committing perjury; you don't have to tell the whole truth to avoid committing a crime."

Proverbs 6:16-19 proves that a lying tongue is an abomination unto the Lord. Unfortunately, some are like the mother who, when asked the question, "Mommy, what is a lie?" answered by saying, "Son, a lie is an abomination unto the Lord . . . but a very present help in time of need!"

It's sad to say, but too often we teach a similar pattern to our children. George Munzing, a minister, tells of a time he went to counsel a family about their son's drug use. The father was distraught as he described the impact of drugs upon his relationship with his son. He said, "The thing that bothers me most about his being into drugs is the fact that drugs have made him a liar." Moments later the phone rang and his wife went to answer. She came back into the room with the message that the call was for the father. He told her, "Tell him I am not at home." Munzing then commented that drugs had not made the boy a liar; the father had. Let's be careful to model clearly what we teach with our lips. (Consider Col. 3:9; Jer. 5:1).

The importance of "character"

The author of Proverbs declared that "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver or gold" (Prov. 22:1). Horace Greeley had a quote that Harry Truman used to like: "Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, riches take wings, those who cheer today may curse tomorrow, only one thing endures—character." (Prov. 20:7; 1 Sam. 16:7).

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "A good character is the best tombstone. Those

who loved you, and were helped by you, will remember you when forget-me-nots are withered. Carve your name on hearts, and not on marble.” As someone has written, “Integrity is a better long-term investment than the best Certificate of Deposit known to man!”

The importance of passing good character traits onto our children is well seen in considering a story from Chinese history. In ancient China, the people desired security from the barbaric hordes to the north, so they built the great Chinese wall. It was so high they knew no one could climb over it and so thick that nothing could break it down. They settled back to enjoy their security. During the first hundred years of the wall’s existence, China was invaded three times. However, not once did the barbaric hordes break down the wall or climb over the top. Each time they bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right through the gates. The Chinese were so busy relying upon the walls of stone that they forgot to teach integrity to their children (Psa. 25:21; Psa. 101:2).

The meaning of integrity

Simply put, integrity is doing what you

said you would do. It means you keep your promises. When you promised to be faithful to your mate, integrity says you’ll stay with that person no matter what—for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health. If you promised a friend that you would return a call, integrity means you return it. If you promised your child that you would spend Saturday together, integrity means you keep that appointment. A promise is a holy thing, whether made to a chairman of the board—or to a child.

A good example of integrity is seen in the following story. Mark was very poor at spelling. On examination day he was stumped by many difficult words. Softly the tempter whispered, “Look at Jane’s paper; she’s an honor student and always gets them right!” Mark heeded the suggestion and copied several answers. The teacher noticed his actions and was greatly surprised, for she had always thought of him as an honest boy. When it came time to collect the completed work, she observed that Mark was having an inner struggle. After bowing his head for a moment, he suddenly tore up his paper. Although at

first he had yielded to temptation, he finally decided to take a zero rather than be dishonest. Calling the boy to her desk, the teacher said, “I was watching you, Mark, and I want you to know that I’m very proud of you for what you did just now. Today you really passed a much greater examination than your spelling test!”

Adam Clarke was a sales clerk in a store that sold fine silk to people of the upper classes in London. One day his employer showed young Adam how he could increase sales and profits by subtly stretching the silk as he measured it out. Young Adam Clarke looked his employer straight in the eye and said, “Sir, your silk may stretch but my conscience won’t.” What a wonderful comment! May all of our lives be “providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21).

¹The statistics and illustrations used in this article come from a resource called *Bible Illustrator for Windows*, a software program distributed by Parsons Technology. WOT

EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY—AN URGENT NEED FOR EVERYONE

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

(Editor’s note: consult the author’s excellent web site—www.christiancourier.com—for dozens of well-written, sound articles such as the one below)

It was never the will of God that direct, supernatural communication—from heaven to earth—be a perpetual phenomenon throughout this planet’s history. Rather, “the things of God” (cf. 1 Cor. 2:11) were to be committed to a series of inspired documents, collectively known as the Bible. The Holy Scriptures were designed to provide men with all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), and to furnish devout students completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the value of the Bible to the human family. The most brilliant minds of

history have praised the “Book of books.” Our second president, John Adams, called the Bible “the best Book in the world.” Lincoln characterized the Scriptures as “the best gift God ever gave man.” Sir Isaac Newton thought the Bible to be “the most sublime philosophy” known to humanity. The list of laudatory testimony is almost endless.

The value of Bible study

There are multiple values inherent in a study of the sacred Scriptures. Meditate upon the following.

1. The Bible is the only source of valid knowledge as to the origin of the human family. The baseless theory of evolution is so riddled with such a vast variety of factual inaccuracies that it assaults the analytical ability of any thinking person (see Mastropaolo). Darwinism stands in bold contrast to the sublime Genesis record of human commencement.

2. The Scriptures provide the only explanation for man’s purpose upon the planet. David Hume, the Scottish skeptical philosopher, wrote:

Where am I, or what? From what

causes do I derive my existence and to what condition shall I return? . . . I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty (Smith, 553).

3. Aside from the illumination of the Bible, man's future would be but a dark, terrifying enigma. When Pierre Curie was killed in a tragic accident, his wife, the renowned Madame Marie Curie, who had abandoned her earlier faith, exclaimed: "Pierre is sleeping his last sleep beneath the earth; it is the end of everything, everything, everything" (Curie, 249). When the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the body, the Lord informed them that their problem, in part at least, was their ignorance of the Scriptures (Mt. 22:29). It is only through the gospel of Christ that "life and immortality" have been fully revealed (2 Tim. 1:10).

4. Without a knowledge of the Bible, human beings are bereft of any religious or moral compass to direct the affairs of life. Evolutionist George G. Simpson of Harvard wrote:

Discovery that the universe apart from man or before his coming lacks and lacked any purpose or plan has the inevitable corollary that the workings of the universe cannot provide any automatic, universal, eternal, or absolutely ethical criteria of right and wrong (Simpson, 180).

If there is no absolute moral code, every man becomes his own "god," and may write his own ethical rules. In that event, chaos prevails, because every man entertains a "way" within himself that "seems right" to him (Prov. 14:12).

5. Without an objective code of conduct, that stands apart from our own conscience, we do not have the sufficient *motivation* for exalted living. David stored the word of God in his heart that he might not sin against his Maker (Psa. 119:11), because, as Jeremiah observed, "it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps" (Jer.

10:23). Moreover, without adequate information concerning "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), we become the victims of religious confusion.

Some procedures for effective Bible study

Effective Bible study is not a random process; rather, it is a science. The following suggestions are made for those whose goal is efficiency in their investigation of God's Word.

1. Sometimes it can be helpful to know something of the *author* of a biblical book or passage. While this is not always necessary (Hebrews was left anonymous purposely), such information can be beneficial.

For instance, the most extended discussion of the virginal birth of Jesus is in Luke's Gospel record (2:27ff). Since a "virgin" birth had never occurred before, it is comforting to know that Luke, a very careful historian (1:1-4), was also a *physician* (Col. 4:14). If a scientist could be convinced by clear evidence that the virgin birth of the Lord really occurred, one may have firm confidence in the reliability of the historical narrative.

2. Frequently it is imperative that the student know something of the *background* of a particular book or passage with which he is dealing, if he is to appreciate the full impact of the text.

Unless one understands, for example, that Jeremiah was attempting to prevent Judah from having to suffer the Babylonian Captivity, or that Ezekiel was warning his people against the false hope of an early return from Chaldea, he scarcely appreciates the thrust of these inspired documents. In studying Psalm 51, which is saturated with tears of penitence, it is helpful to know the background story about David's adulterous relationship with the provocative Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12).

3. One needs to have some familiarity with the *nature* of the book he is studying. Is the document historical narrative (Genesis)? Is it poetical in form (Psalms)? Is it largely characterized by prophecy (Isaiah)? Is it

highly charged with symbolism (Revelation)? A host of errors have resulted from a failure to distinguish between the different styles of biblical writings.

Some, in order to accommodate evolution, have viewed Genesis 1 as poetry; others have attempted to literalize the figures in Revelation (e.g., the 1,000 years in chapter 20). Such approaches have been responsible for significant confusion in the religious community.

4. One of the most important factors in Bible study is a consideration of the *context*. Without a knowledge of context, the student can be in a maze of confusion.

For example, why does Paul advise *against* marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 (see vv. 8, 27, 38, 40), when elsewhere the Scriptures teach that it is "not good" to be alone (Gen. 2:18), and that marriage is desirable (1 Tim. 5:14)? One must understand that the apostolic counsel provided in the Corinthian narrative was in view of an *impending distress* (an era of persecution; see vv. 26, 29, 32, 35, 38, 40). The inspired advice was never intended to apply with equal force, in every place, and at all times.

Here is another example. A consideration of the data in Acts 10 and 11, and the unique circumstances associated with the conversion of Cornelius (and the introduction of the first Gentiles into the church), would correct the common error that "Holy Spirit baptism" is a divine gift to be experienced throughout the entire Christian age. Context makes a world of difference in such a case.

5. One of the crucial principles of sound Bible study is that of scriptural *harmony*. The Bible, as the verbally inspired revelation from God, will be consistent in all its instruction. Thus, the sacred narrative must be studied synthetically, i.e., the teaching of the Scriptures on any given subject must be brought together. Various contexts dealing with a particular theme can provide the fullness often required to understand a subject more completely.

For instance it requires a consideration of *several* contexts to discover that the Lord's supper

involves: (a) the eating of bread and fruit of the vine; (b) on Sunday of every week; (c) in memory of the body and blood of the Savior; (d) as a pledge of the Lord's final return (cf. Mt. 26:26ff; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23ff, etc.).

If one does not understand something of the principles of methodical study, he cannot gain the maximum benefit from his endeavors.

Practical habits for Bible study

In addition to the "mechanics" of effective study, it is helpful to think also along the lines of study habits. I would like to offer some suggestions that have been helpful to me across the years.

1. If at all possible, create for yourself a special "study" in your home. In a spare room, the attic, the basement, etc.—find yourself a "study nook" that can be yours. Furnish it with a comfortable chair, a desk, good lighting, and some book shelves. Make it your *special place* and plan to visit it regularly on certain days of the week (e.g., an hour each morning before work time).

Early morning is really the most ideal time for study. Discipline yourself to get in the habit of *regular* study. This is a difficult chore. If one is not preaching, teaching a class, or engaged in some activity that demands research, it is hard to carve out the time—particularly if it is a labor, rather than a love. But if one gets into the study mode, virtually every day, it will pay rich dividends—not only in his personal life, but in qualifying him to help others.

In addition to devotional reading in the Bible itself, for example, one might select a popular (as opposed to technical) commentary that he will read through in the coming year. I try to keep a good book handy to read whenever I have a spare moment away from regular duties. For instance, if I know I am going to have to spend time in the doctor's waiting room, rather than browsing magazines, I may take a book with me.

2. Every Christian should build at least a modest library of good books. Handy tools, such as a complete concordance, a Bible atlas, some biblical dictionaries or encyclopedias, a few good

commentaries, some volumes on Christian evidences, church history, etc., are vital for a well-rounded range of knowledge. One should subscribe to at least a couple good brotherhood periodicals—those that *teach* (as opposed to merely haranguing).

3. Study the Scriptures from several different vantage points. Survey biblical books. Galatians falls into three natural divisions:

Personal - A Defense of Paul's Credibility (1-2);
Doctrinal - Justification through the Gospel (3-4);
Practical - Walking by the Spirit (5-6).

Explore the biographical data of great Bible characters. Articles in Bible dictionaries (e.g., *The Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*) on Abraham, Joseph, Jesus, and Paul will enrich your life. Learn to do "word studies." Words are the vehicles of intelligent communication. Even the non-specialist can learn something of the treasures of the original languages of the Bible.

4. In this day of mobility, a good student can take advantage of good Bible lectureships by listening to tapes as he drives about from place-to-place. It is important to utilize every possible opportunity to learn God's word. The Christian who is ever learning will become a valuable resource to the congregation of which he or she is a member.

The preacher and study

Perhaps we could conclude this discussion with a comment relative to the preacher and his study habits. The man who stands before the congregation to preach to lost souls and to edify his kinsmen in the Lord, should overflow with the riches of Sacred Scripture.

Unfortunately it is the case today that too many preachers desire (or are strongly encouraged) to become proficient in everything but the Bible. They are office efficiency experts, church flunkies, visitation specialists, counselors, education directors, errand-boys for the elders, etc. Some (or all) of these chores may be quite necessary in

their place, but they are not the work of a gospel preacher.

Every preacher must engage in his own spiritual activities (e.g., as visiting the sick, helping those in need, etc.), but that is not his principal area of emphasis. As Johnny Ramsey is fond of saying, "The work of the preacher is threefold: to preach, to preach, and to preach." I would add to that: "To study and preach, to study and preach, to study and preach!"

Elders should encourage their preachers to spend more time in seclusion, studying and storing up great segments of information so that when they mount the pulpit, they are able to draw vast resources from the library of their minds. In such cases, the audience becomes excited about the beauty and value of God's written truth. I have, on occasion, spent hours digging out a golden nugget of truth (which may take only a minute or so to present) in the hope that it will challenge my brethren to deeper study. This is what results when teaching the Mind of God becomes a *passion* rather than a *profession*. When the preaching and teaching are stagnant, attendance will eventually decline. Moreover, a studious preacher provides the sort of example that inspires greater Bible study within the congregation.

Conclusion

We cannot but mention that if the church of today was a more studious body, she would not be plagued with as many problems as she now encounters. Knowledge is a powerful antidote to error. Let us encourage one another to return to the thrilling adventures within the Word of God.

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ONE FLESH

Sam Willcut, Munford, Tennessee

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce in Matthew 19, Jesus went back to the very first marriage and quoted God's vision of such: "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh" (Mt. 19:5; cf. Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31). The experience of two people becoming "one flesh" is indeed a powerful transformation. While this includes intimacy reserved for husband and wife (cf. 1 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 13:4), this could certainly encompass the whole marriage relationship. Yet, the problem is not *becoming* "one flesh" . . . it is *remaining* "one flesh." Attacks on the home are ripping husbands and wives apart—those that began as "one flesh" are now separating at alarming rates. Many husbands and wives are simply cohabiting, no longer living as "one flesh." Notice three concepts that can help keep marriages as "one flesh."

1. Communication is essential for marriage to be "one flesh." The necessity of communication between husband and wife cannot be stressed too much. The problem no doubt began when God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Someone has said that to discover the secret of communication, one must undertake the Herculean task of sailing between Scylla and Chrybidis, using the sword of Damacles to cut the Gordian knot that it may fit its Procustean Bed! Nevertheless, it is a difficult task to transfer ideas from one person to another effectively. It is not only essential in the success of a marriage, but also in any venture of life—church, occupations, other various relationships, and such like. How many problems, both in and out of the home, could be avoided with effective communication? For a husband and wife to remain "one flesh," communication throughout their marital lives must flourish.

2. Closeness is essential for marriage to be "one flesh." One must be intimately close with the other; in fact, Paul gives strict regulations during the times that they withhold (1 Cor. 7:3-5). God designed the husband and wife to be intimate (Gen. 1:27-28; Heb. 13:4). We can see through inspiration God's idea that closeness is necessary for a husband and wife to remain one flesh (Song 4:1-16).

3. Commitment is essential for marriage to be "one flesh." Husbands and wives need to be true to their vows. Jesus draws the natural conclusion to God's vision of marriage: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt. 19:6). Husbands need to know their wives are committed to them; wives need to know their husbands are committed to them; children need to know their parents are committed to each other. Trust within the marriage is so important for a husband and wife to remain "one flesh."

May God bless each marriage as it strives to remain "one flesh." WOT



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for an associate minister. All interested men should send their résumés to Sixth Avenue to the attention of the elders.

The Words of Truth

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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.



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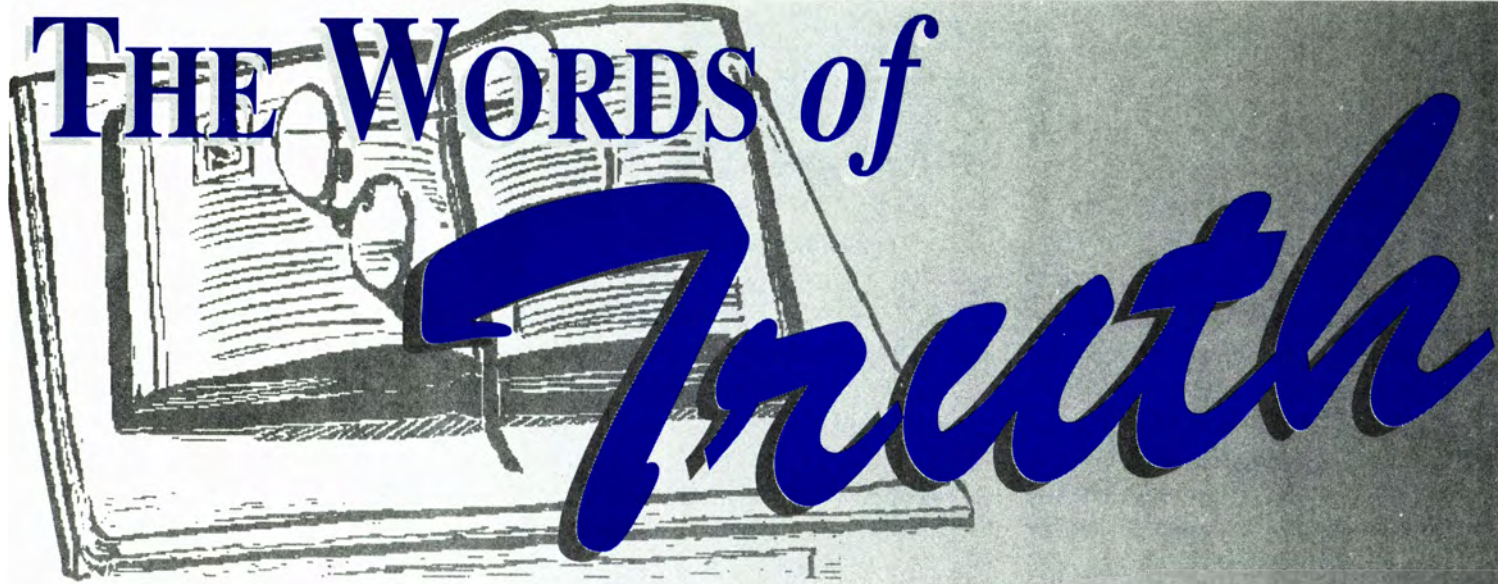
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THE WORDS of Truth

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

Vol. 39 No. 3

March 2002

EXACTLY WHAT WE NEED

Jason Jackson, Stockton, California

Hebrews 7:26-28 forms a grand conclusion to the discussion concerning Jesus Christ, "... a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (cf. Psa. 110:4; Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 17, 21). The passage begins in this way: "For such a high priest became us..." (Heb. 7:26).

Throughout chapter seven, the Hebrews writer addressed the priesthood of Christ. He warned Hebrew Christians of defecting from the faith to a preparatory and inferior system. In order to accomplish this, he showed them the superior nature of Christ as our high priest through a series of contrasts.

Christ is superior to the Aaronic priests in that he is "after the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek symbolized the kind of priest that Christ would be. The names associated with both Melchizedek's person and place typified what Christ's character and reign would be (and now are) in an absolute sense—king of righteousness and king of peace. That Melchizedek is "without father, without mother, without genealogy," refers to the nature of his priestly office. He did not receive it by ancestral succession. He was not born into a priestly family. His priesthood was of a different kind than that of Aaron's, which was a priesthood of family order. Therefore, in the sense that Melchizedek was a priest of divine appointment, he represented a kind of

priesthood that cannot die out—unlike an inherited priesthood. In that way, "he abideth a priest continually." In these respects, Melchizedek "was made like unto the Son of God."

Christ, as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, is clearly superior to the priests of the Old Law. This is further demonstrated by the fact that Levi, representatively through his father Abraham, paid tithes to Melchizedek. In turn, the king and priest blessed Abraham. Therein, the greater of the two is set forth.

Christ's priesthood is also superior in that *after* the priesthood of Aaron was 400 years old, God spoke of another (cf. Psa. 110:4). When God spoke of another priesthood, He demonstrated that the Levitical priesthood was not perfect—it was not fully capable of bringing us into the presence of God (cf. Heb. 6:20; 7:19).

Christ's priesthood is superior in that God instituted it with an oath, thereby showing "more abundantly the immutability of his counsel" (cf. 6:17). God's "oath-taking" was not because His word is uncertain; rather, He, in a sense, condescended to man's need that we might understand the unchangeable nature of His word. It is significant that the Levitical priesthood was made without oaths (7:21). God never indicated that the Levitical priesthood was perpetual; but, He showed that it was temporary (cf. 7:11). Since

Christ's priesthood was, however, inaugurated with God's oath, the Father therein showed the perfect nature of Christ's priesthood, for now there is no need for another. Christ is "able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (7:25).

Now, verse 26. The inspired writer says, "Such a high priest does indeed fit our condition" (NEB). Jesus Christ is exactly what we need! He can in reality bring us into the presence of God, effectively dealing with our sins. For, as the writer summarizes, He is holy, without any moral or spiritual imperfection. Nothing in His character or work interferes with His ability to help us, as He intercedes for us to God. In fact, He is so high and holy that no other men are like Him. Though a man, He was and remains (perfect tense) "separate from sinners." Thoroughly qualified to function on our behalf, He was made higher than the heavens. Having ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on High (1:3), He occupies a place of utmost authority and honor.

Jesus Christ will deal with our sins—if we will let Him. In order to have the benefits of Christ as our high priest, we must submit to Him, obey Him, and faithfully serve Him (5:9; 10:22-25; 12:1-3; 13:1ff). He is exactly what we need!

WOT

REPENTANCE (3)

Chuck Webster, Editorial

In the first two articles in this series we noted that biblical repentance includes both an emotional element and a commitment to turn away from sin. When we sin, in other words, we need to be affected emotionally and commit never to sin again. But what about sins in which there might be harm done to another (financially, emotionally, or otherwise)? If I steal a car, is it enough simply to be overwhelmed emotionally and commit never to steal again? Or must I return the car to its original owner? If I slander a brother in Christ, can I simply repent privately to God and never say a word to the brother? In this final article of this series we address the pertinent matters of *restitution* and *confession*.

Restitution

The notion of restitution for certain sins appears frequently in Old Testament texts. One who stole an ox or a sheep was to restore five-fold (for an ox) or four-fold (for a sheep) (Ex. 22:1). In other matters, the guilty party was to pay double what he had taken (Ex. 22:9). Some actions required one to “restore [the object] in the principal, and [to] add the fifth part more thereto, and give it to him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of the trespass offering” (Lev. 22:1-6). In other words, he must return the item, along with an additional 20% of its value, to the owner (cf. Num. 5:7). King David recognized the law’s requirements in this area, as seen in his response to Nathan’s convicting parable: “The [rich] man . . . shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity” (2 Sam. 12:6). Proverbs admonished thieves to restore “sevenfold” (Prov. 6:31). Zaccheus also understood restitution. He said to

Christ: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Lk. 19:8).

It appears self-evident that restitution must occur if possible, as in the case of stolen goods; i.e., if someone steals a car, true repentance requires that he return the car. But what about areas in which the stolen item is less tangible? What about a student who “steals” a grade in a class by cheating, presenting the answers of another as his own or plagiarizing a research paper? Is he not obligated to “return” the stolen goods? Perhaps his best course is to notify the instructor of his actions and accept the teacher’s decision.

What about a man who has stolen another man’s wife (e.g., Herod and his brother’s wife, Mk. 6:18)? Can he, as many suggest, simply “repent” (i.e., say, “I am sorry”) and continue in the marriage? It seems clear that the age-old illustration—“He must give the car back”—is parallel to this situation: the man must return the other man’s wife; he has no right to her.

With many sins, though, the response is less clear-cut. A slanderer cannot tangibly return someone’s untarnished reputation. An intemperate husband cannot simply present to his wife her unharmed feelings. One guilty of dividing the church cannot—with a signed check—restore unity. In many cases, complete *restitution* is impossible. What then?

Confession

In true repentance, confession always occurs. Private sins require confession only to God; there’s no need to publicize our private sins by

confessing them to a small group or to the entire congregation, unless, of course, we’re engaged in a difficult struggle and we desire our church family’s prayers on our behalf (cf. Jam. 5:16). As we walk in the light, we “confess our sins, [and] he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9).

Sometimes, though, confession to God, though necessary, is insufficient. Take, for example, the case of slander mentioned above. If a man slanders his brother, is it sufficient simply to confess the sin to God and ask His forgiveness? This confession should occur, of course, but it alone is inadequate. The Lord addressed this matter when He taught His disciples how to handle sins of offenses (i.e., sins committed *against* one another):

It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him (Lk. 17:1-4).

Notice carefully how Christ defines repentance. He first says that if the brother “repents” we are to forgive him (v. 3). He then extends His reasoning to a repetitive, rather than a singular, offense, saying that the brother “turns again to thee, saying, I repent . . .” (v.

4). The two statements are parallel, and the obvious conclusion is that repentance (“repent,” v. 3) of a personal offense includes saying “I repent” (v. 4) to the offended party.

The pattern is clear: If you sin against a brother, you are first affected emotionally because you realize you’ve sinned against God. You humbly ask His forgiveness, realizing that though you have sinned against another person, your sin is primarily against God (cf. Psa. 51:4). But you also realize that another person has been harmed by your actions, and thus you are indebted to him as well. You contact him immediately and confess your sin to him (“I’ve sinned against you—I repent”). Both God and the brother forgive you.

It is this principle that has resulted in the tradition of sinners’ “coming down the aisle” during the invitation song and “asking for the prayers of the church.” Sometimes a person may have committed a sin against more than one person, and it is impossible to go to each person individually and ask for his or her forgiveness. Or, in some cases, a believer may have sinned against an entire congregation and thus

needs to repent publicly. In these cases, a public response needs to be made.

On the other hand, the public response has been misused by some who would rather respond publicly than confront an individual privately, no doubt because it is uncomfortable to look someone in the eyes and say, “I’ve sinned against you; will you forgive me?” But we must understand that the Lord’s plan is for personal matters to be handled privately. There is no biblical example or precedent for our confessing to the assembly what should be addressed privately.

One final matter needs to be addressed. In certain cases, the guilty party may not realize he has sinned against someone else or may, out of stubbornness, refuse to approach the one he offended and confess his wrongdoing. In such cases, Jesus says the offended person must go alone to the sinner and confront him. If this fails to evoke sorrow he takes one or two with him, and, if all else fails, he brings the matter to the assembly (Mt. 18:15-18).

What, then, is repentance? Defined very simply, repentance is changing one’s mind toward sin. Its broader

meaning, though, includes both emotional and volitional elements: we hurt emotionally because we’ve sinned; thus we confess to God our sin and commit never to sin again. God forgives completely, and we rejoice as a result. If the sin was committed against someone, however, we must try to make amends for our misconduct. Perhaps we need to make restitution and ask his forgiveness, or, if restitution is impossible, we must confess our sin to the one offended and ask for his forgiveness.

Repentance, though sometimes difficult, is well worth whatever sacrifice it entails. We serve a God whose most comforting characteristic is His mercy. As the recipients of God’s abundant forgiveness we exclaim with Micah: “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:18-19). *WOT*

REMEMBER HIS REVELATION!

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

One fourth of all the material within the epistles of 1 and 2 Thessalonians addresses the subject of the second coming. A close investigation of the Scriptures reveals at least two reasons for this striking emphasis in Paul’s correspondence: 1) There seems to have been a general misunderstanding within the Thessalonian church regarding Christ’s return (i.e., the *parousia*—1 Thess. 4:13ff); 2) Members of the congregation were facing severe persecution due to their faith (2 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; Acts 17:1-9).

These, along with other factors, prompted the apostle to send an inspired message of clarification and encouragement.

Despite the fact that these two letters were penned around A.D. 51-52, they continue to be as fresh and as relevant as ever (2 Pet. 1:3). Consider but one excerpt from the apostle’s inspired hand:

... When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire

taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe . . . (2 Thess. 1:7b-10a).

What was Paul’s point? Don’t

despair—remember Christ’s revelation! Carefully study the following:

The word “revealed” (v. 7, Greek—*apokalupsis*) has reference to an unveiling or disclosure,¹ the uncovering of a secret;² the term implies concealment.³ Christ will be hidden or concealed until such time as the Father chooses to disclose Him (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7,13; 4:13). “His presence, which is a reality for Christian men here on earth, will at His Coming be made known to all”⁴ (Rev. 1:7). Now note the three-fold nature of this promised revelation:

1. It will be a revelation of Christ’s AWESOME POWER (vv. 7b-8a)! “From heaven . . .” (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16). The phrase emphasizes not only Christ’s origin, but also His authority. “He comes from the dwelling place of God with the authority of God to execute judgment and recompense.”⁵ “With His mighty angels . . .” (Psa. 103:20). These divine agents will escort the Lord at His return (Mt. 24:31; 25:31; 1 Thess. 4:16). Their purpose will be to execute His bidding (Mt. 13:41,49). “In flaming fire . . .” Literally, the phrase is “fire of flame,” and refers to a “ball of fire that lashes out flames.”⁶ This is a vivid depiction of both divine majesty as well as judgment (Ex. 3:2; 19:16-20; Isa. 29:6; 66:15; Psa. 50:3; 97:3; Acts 7:30; 1 Pet. 3:10).

2. It will be a revelation of Christ’s TERRIBLE VENGEANCE (vv. 8b-9)! The word “vengeance” (Greek—

ekdikesis) means to vindicate (Lk. 18:7; Rom. 12:19; 2 Cor. 7:11).⁷ “The literal meaning of which is ‘out of justice or righteousness,’ indicating this is not out of vindictiveness nor from a feeling of indignation, but a righteous punishment for evil deeds” (Rev. 16:7).⁸ The word “conveys the idea of a firm administration of justice.”⁹

Note the identity of the recipients of divine vengeance: “. . . those who do not know God,” and “those who do not obey the gospel” (Rom. 1:28; 10:3,16; Jn. 8:55; 17:3; Rom. 11:30). Note also the nature of divine vengeance: a) punishment (Greek—*dike*) refers to execution of sentence;¹⁰ b) destruction refers not to annihilation, but ruination;¹¹ not a loss of being, but the loss of well-being;¹² “When we say a car is ‘destroyed’ in a wreck we don’t mean there is nothing left (i.e., annihilation), we, rather, mean that what is left is destroyed (i.e., ruined) so that it won’t serve the purpose it is made for . . .”¹³ and c) exclusion tells us that those who do not know God will not be in the presence (Mt. 7:23; 8:12; 25:41) of the Almighty, nor will they behold His glory (Greek—*doxa*, radiance, majesty, and might, cf. Isa. 2:1ff).

3. It will be a revelation of Christ’s UNSURPASSED GLORY (v. 10)! The phrase “to be glorified” (Greek—*endoxazo*) suggests that those who have believed will reflect, demonstrate, and exhibit His glory. Likewise, “to be admired” (Greek—*thaumasthanai*) denotes the idea of wonder or

amazement.¹⁴ Children of God will participate in this glorification and admiration because they have believed!

The second coming was a source of confusion and sadness to the Thessalonians. Recognizing this, Paul forwarded a message of correction and hope to lift their troubled spirits. We, too, need these uplifting words! “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

¹Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 1973.

²Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 1972.

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WOT

“I GO TO CHURCH ON SATURDAY”

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

A friendly neighbor, when I asked him to go with me to church on Sunday, said, “I go to church on Saturday, just as Jesus did, for he kept the Ten

Commandments.”

Indeed, Jesus, being “a Jew” (Jn. 4:9), went “to the synagogue on the sabbath” (Lk. 4:16), according to the

fourth of the “Ten Commandments” (Ex. 20:1-17). But that does not mean that Jesus’ disciples today (“Christians,” Acts 11:26, both “the

Jew and the Greek,” Rom. 10:12) are to “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8).

When Jesus died “He set aside the law, with its commandments and regulations” (Eph. 2:15). “He erased the handwriting, with its decrees, that was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). “Therefore, let no one judge you in food and drink, or with regard to a feast or a new moon or of sabbaths” (Col. 2:16).

Thus all ten of the “Ten Commandments,” originally written on “two tables” of “stone” by “the finger of God” (Ex. 31:18), have, in God’s wisdom, been “set aside” (Eph. 2:15), “erased,” and nailed “to the cross” (Col. 2:14).

However, the meaning of nine of the ten God has transplanted into the “new covenant” of Christ (2 Cor. 3:6), a “better covenant” (Heb. 8:6). “If the ministry of death, engraved in letters on stones, was glorious, . . . will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?” (2 Cor. 3:7-8).

Yes, the meaning of nine of the ten is in the “New Testament”: 1. Ephesians 4:6; 2. 1 John 5:21; 3. 1 Corinthians 10:31; 5. Ephesians 6:2; 6. 1 John 3:15; 7. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10); 8. Ephesians 4:28; 9. Ephesians 4:15; 10. Colossians 3:5.

But the fourth of the ten has not been replaced by another “holy” day. Sunday, the first day of the week, though of special memory because it was the day of the Lord’s resurrection (Mk. 16:9), and apparently called “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10), is not set apart in the New Testament as the Jews were commanded to “remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.”

A Christian who “considers a certain day as more sacred than other days” is doing it “in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5), not by divine instruction. “He who regards a day highly does so for the Lord” (Rom. 14:6), but not by

divine instruction. What he does in itself is harmless, doing it of his own thinking, “for the Lord,” and “he thanks God” (Rom. 14:6).

But what he is doing is dangerous. Paul was “afraid that I may have labored for you [the congregations in Galatia] in vain,” because they were “observing days and months and seasons and years” (Gal. 4:10-11).

The statement by my friendly neighbor that he goes to church on Saturday because Jesus kept Saturday sacred is inconsistent in three ways:

(1) He would also have to say that male babies eight days old are to be circumcised today because Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old (Lk. 2:21). But circumcision was one of the commandments that was nailed “to the cross” (Col. 2:14). “Christ liberated us for freedom. Therefore, stand firm, and do not wear a yoke of slavery. I, Paul, assure you, if you receive circumcision, Christ will not profit you at all. Again I testify, to every man who receives circumcision, that he is a debtor to keep all of the law” (Gal. 5:1-3). “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is worth anything” (Gal. 6:15).

On the other hand, “What counts is a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). Christ circumcises sinners today, male and female: “You [all Christians] were circumcised by him without hands: Christ’s circumcision strips off the sins of the flesh. You were buried with him in immersion, in which also you were raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:11-12).

(2) My friend would also have to say that Christians today must eat of the Passover feast (Ex. 12:11,17,43) because Jesus ate of the Passover feast (Mt. 26:17-19; Lk. 2:41). The Jewish Passover feast, a remembrance of God’s bringing their fathers “out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 13:17), pointed to Christ “our Passover Lamb” (1 Cor.

5:7), bringing us out of the guilt of sin (Mt. 26:28). Accordingly, Jesus asks His disciples to partake of the Lord’s Supper, saying, “Do this in memory of me” (1 Cor. 11:24).

(3) My friend would also have to say that Christians today must not only eat of the Passover feast because Jesus did so, but they also must go to Jerusalem for that feast because Jesus did so (Jn. 2:13). Even non-Jews understood that for Jews it was “necessary to worship in Jerusalem” (Jn. 4:20).

But Jesus showed that His “last will and testament” (Heb. 9:16) was to become operative after His “death” (Heb. 9:17), saying to a Samaritan woman, “the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither in this mountain [Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem . . . The hour comes when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such worshipers. God is spirit, and they who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:21-24).

Though earthly Jerusalem religiously today is not sacred, the name “Jerusalem” is more meaningful than ever, and will be throughout eternity. Over against “the Jerusalem which now is” is heaven, “the Jerusalem which is above” (Gal. 4:26) to which Jesus has gone to prepare: “many rooms are in my Father’s house” (Jn. 14:1). The “Father’s house,” said God, is “my throne” (Isa. 66:1). It is called “the heavenly Jerusalem” where are “myriads of angels” and “the church of the firstborn people (who are enrolled in heaven)” and “Jesus (the mediator of the new covenant) and “the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14; 12:22-23). Also pictured is “the holy Jerusalem” (Rev. 22:10), “the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven” (Rev. 3:12; 21:2) to meet the saved “in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17).

COMPROMISE

Gus Nichols (1892-1975)

[Editor's note: First preached by brother Nichols at the Lipscomb Lectures in 1947, these words are amazingly relevant 55 years later. They serve as a challenge to all of us who call ourselves "preachers."]

As far as the denominational world is concerned, our greatest danger, no doubt, lies in the temptation to compromise and become a sister denomination with the sects around us. People want to be like the crowd. It was this desire that led Israel to demand a king (1 Sam. 8). When we were weak the sects blustered and challenged for debate. They publicly reviewed our sermons and fought us openly and bitterly; but they soon found that their doctrines and practices were no match for the "Thus saith the Lord" which our preachers hurled back at them with withering force and power. They next began to fight us to our backs and secretly organize against us, and tried to create all the prejudice against us they could; but they saw us grow in spite of their campaign of villainy against us. Now that we are waxing popular, they are making love to us. They are now using their most powerful weapon. It is compromise. They want us to exchange pulpits with them, and, of course, be too nice to preach the truth or point out any of their errors. They want us to join with them in the Ministerial Alliance, where compromise is the order of the day. They want us to join with them in Union Revivals where sectarians, ignorant of God's plan of salvation, do the preaching. They want us to call on them to lead our prayers, when they are in our services, regardless of whether they have been baptized into Christ or not (Rom. 6:3). They want us to recognize them as right in doctrine and practice, as though contradictory doctrines could all be right. They want us to preach on the things which all alike believe and leave off doctrinal preaching, as they call it. Now, if you do not believe there is danger in this appeal of compromise, look around and

you may be surprised to find that some of us have already fallen into this sort of thing.

During the war many boys, scattered to the four winds in the service of their country, married out of the church (1 Cor. 7:39). These in-laws are all the way from Catholics down to nothing in religious beliefs. They present another temptation to compromise. Of course, our children do not want their companions to dislike "our religion" and "our preacher"; therefore, we are requested to tone down the preaching, so as not to contradict anyone's belief nor disturb the conscience of those in error, lest trouble come into the home. Thus a new gospel is demanded, with all the power of the gospel of Christ extracted from it (Rom. 1:16).

Then some brother in society, standing high in the business world, brings his friends to hear "our preacher." He wants his friends to like "our church." He, too, wants the saving power taken out of the message. If the preacher preaches it straight, as it is in the Book, the love of God and His precious promises, together with the facts of sin and death, hell fire and brimstone, and some are offended and heard to express dissatisfaction with the preacher and the church, some may put on a move to change preachers. Here is a danger facing the church, and it tends to corrupt the gospel and please the people, rather than try to save them and please the Lord (Rom. 15:3).

All of this has brought about a temptation to lecture, instead of "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). In order to hold their jobs, many preachers are tempted to preach so as to bring great crowds and break all past attendance records. Brethren, they might as well stay at home, as far as salvation is concerned, if they are not going to preach the gospel to them in all its saving power (Rom. 1:16; Mk. 16:15-16). Crowds mean nothing if you have to compromise the truth to draw them. Pretty little flowery speeches, copied

from some sectarian book of sermons, is not what this crooked generation needs. They need to be shown that every man and woman upon the earth is lost and "in danger of hell fire" and can only be saved by hearing the gospel, believing in Christ, and obeying His commands as revealed in the gospel. Now, they may like this, or they may not; but no man can preach the gospel without preaching this, regardless of where he starts. To give one's own unsupported assertions in the pulpit is not preaching "the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Tell what the Bible says about the matter under study. If you cannot quote the words of the Lord, stop and "read it to the people." Let God get His "say" in before you start giving them human wisdom. Let God be heard, and let us "preach the word." If any preacher does not know the "Word" let him quit having running fits long enough to study about five hours per day for the next ten years and he can then tell his audience what God says, or at least turn and read it at once. If anyone says he does not have time to study, as Paul commands all preachers to do (2 Tim. 2:15), it may be because he is spending his time running around making little "pop" calls where there is no one to be taught or converted, or no one sick. Brethren, you can never know the Bible if you are going to be a sectarian "pastor" in a church of Christ. If you can "preach the word" then preach it, but if not, get down and out and let some old brother get up and read the Scriptures to the dear people who have come to hear the Word. I don't mind flowers on the table, but when I am hungry I want first of all plenty of good substantial food. I can't live on flowers. If you can "preach the word" and make a pretty speech out of it, well and good, but otherwise, just "preach the word." Don't compromise the truth for anyone, under any circumstances. Of course, let wisdom and prudence direct you as to the best way to preach the truth.

WOT

TEACHING OUR CHILDREN TO BE SPIRITUAL

Betty Burton Choate, Winona, Mississippi

We live in physical bodies in a secular world. In generations past even here in America, most people lived in rural areas, drawing their living from the ground or from other forms of manual labor. From sun up till sun down, the days had to be spent largely in work aimed at sustaining physical life. In Third World nations, most of life is still spent, day by day, feeding, housing, and clothing the body.

Yet, within each physical body dwells the persistent, resilient spiritual being who is the real person. Throughout life that spiritual being tries to be heard, crying out for spiritual nourishment, creating a sense of dissatisfaction and emptiness in the person who insists on concentrating solely on the demands of the physical body.

Parents, in order to be *good* parents, must realize that the new being their love has created is a dual being; that the little physical body they hold in their arms is only the house for the real spirit person who dwells inside. Therefore, though the baby cries for physical nourishment, never allowing the needs of that body to be forgotten, it is the responsibility of the parents to nurture and develop the spirit being even more carefully.

The “how” of doing this, and of keeping a balance while living in a physical, secular world is the challenge. Even in the ideal situation in which the father goes out to earn the living and the mother stays home to nurture the family, all of the physical responsibilities, the community involvements, the children’s school and extracurricular activities—the unending demands of the physical world—may seem to leave very little time for nurturing the spiritual person.

There are specific things that can be done on a regular basis, as unswerving commitments to spiritual development.

- Being a faithful member of the Lord’s church.
- Never failing to be present for the assemblies.
- Praying before meals.
- Having a time of daily family Bible

reading or study.

- Beginning the day with prayer for God’s help.

Many Christians who do all of these things realize, though, that their home still lacks the depth of spiritual tone it needs. How can they change spirituality from *a form to a living thing*?

Much of the answer lies within our own perspective as parents. We convey far more to our children out of *the well of what we are* than out of the overt words or actions we choose for them as examples. In Matthew 23:4 Jesus said of the Pharisees of His day, “. . . whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not according to their works; for they say and do not do.” Without realizing it, parents may send two conflicting messages to their children regarding spiritual things. Their words may say that God is important, yet their manner of dealing with the spiritual may say that it has no real relevance to daily life.

- Does “faithfulness” consist of little more than “going to church”?
- Are the children told they “have to go” to the assemblies, yet no other reference is made to them during the week?
- Are prayers at the beginning of the day and before meals obviously no more than a form of words?
- Is the daily Bible reading a “conscience form,” a gesture that must be made?

If we want our children to be truly and deeply spiritual, that must be the perspective out of which we ourselves live.

I must realize that being a part of the Lord’s family changed my true status from physical to spiritual; and that daily, minute by minute, I function out of that relationship with God. It does not determine only what I do at ten o’clock on Sunday, but it determines how I respond to a problem on Monday, the patience with which I deal with frustrations, my honesty toward daily situations, my respect for authority, the

purity of my thought and language. If my own perspective is my relationship with Christ, and if I freely and naturally attribute my behavior to that relationship, then daily Christ-like thought and behavior will be passed on to my children as a way of life.

Worship in the presence of God being such an important thing to me, out of that perspective my children will grow to realize what a privilege it is to be allowed to worship. They will hear, throughout the week, natural references to points learned in the classes and the sermon. They will grow to understand that strength is gained from those corporate gatherings which will sustain them from one meeting to the next.

If, as I go through the days, my mind flows naturally from involvement in whatever I must be doing in the physical world to a communion of thought to God, about my work or something else in my heart, then prayer is a living tool for me. Worded prayers, then, will not be stylized forms but relevant conversation to God which even my children will recognize as being crucial to their daily well-being. To pray about decisions, problems, thankfulness for an unexpected good thing, protection, and any other daily need or concern—and stopping to talk to God any place, any time, for any cause—will make prayer a natural part of the thinking of a child, and a useful tool in his days.

It is a scientific fact that non-living matter cannot beget life, in the physical world. It is also a spiritual fact—a *law*—that non-living souls cannot pass life to others. The only way parents can ensure that their children be healthy spiritual people—*living souls*—is to be spiritually alive and healthy themselves. This leaves no room for a “form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5).

A living relationship with God has the power to change us from carnal souls to spiritual people who live and think, act and react, as His children, according to divine nature. This is what we must strive to be, in Him, so that we can pass this precious life on to our dearest possessions—our children. *WOT*

LET'S OUTDO THE EXPERTS

Clyde H. Slimp, Conway, Arkansas

People like to be known for their expertise. When people say you are an expert in some area they are basically saying, "Of all the people in the world who do this, you are one of the best," or "You are highly qualified to speak to this issue and we want to hear what you have to say." We all know that seeking expert advice can bring great benefits.

We might imagine that it would be a high compliment for Jesus to say, "You are experts." Unfortunately, some people become experts in the wrong kinds of things. Some people are experts at sinning. Before we start thinking of people who are adept at committing crimes that could get them locked up for life, let's consider this "compliment" (criticism) offered by Jesus to the Pharisees and scribes in Mark 7:8-9: "'Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.' He was also saying to them, 'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition'" (NASB). After giving an example of how they callously side-stepped God's law, Jesus said they were guilty of "invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that" (v.13).

There is a word of warning for the church in this criticism from Jesus. We dare not become highly skilled at holding on to our traditions while we neglect God's clear commands. Another lesson we should draw from Jesus' words is that we have no right to create or to practice any tradition that is at variance with the word of God. Every tradition must be held up to the light of God's revealed truth.

God was sorely displeased with the way the Pharisees and scribes were hurting the very people God's commands were intended to protect. God is still the champion of those who deserve our love, honor, and care.

Let's outdo the experts:

- Let's demonstrate our love for our God and our neighbor (Mt. 22:37-40).
- Let's do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God (Mic. 6:8).
- Let's abide in Jesus and walk as He walked (1 Jn. 2:6).

As we do all of these things we will be able to discern truth and tradition and maintain a balance of conviction and compassion that will please God. *WOT*



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for an associate minister. All interested men should send their résumés to Sixth Avenue to the attention of the elders.

The Words of Truth

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

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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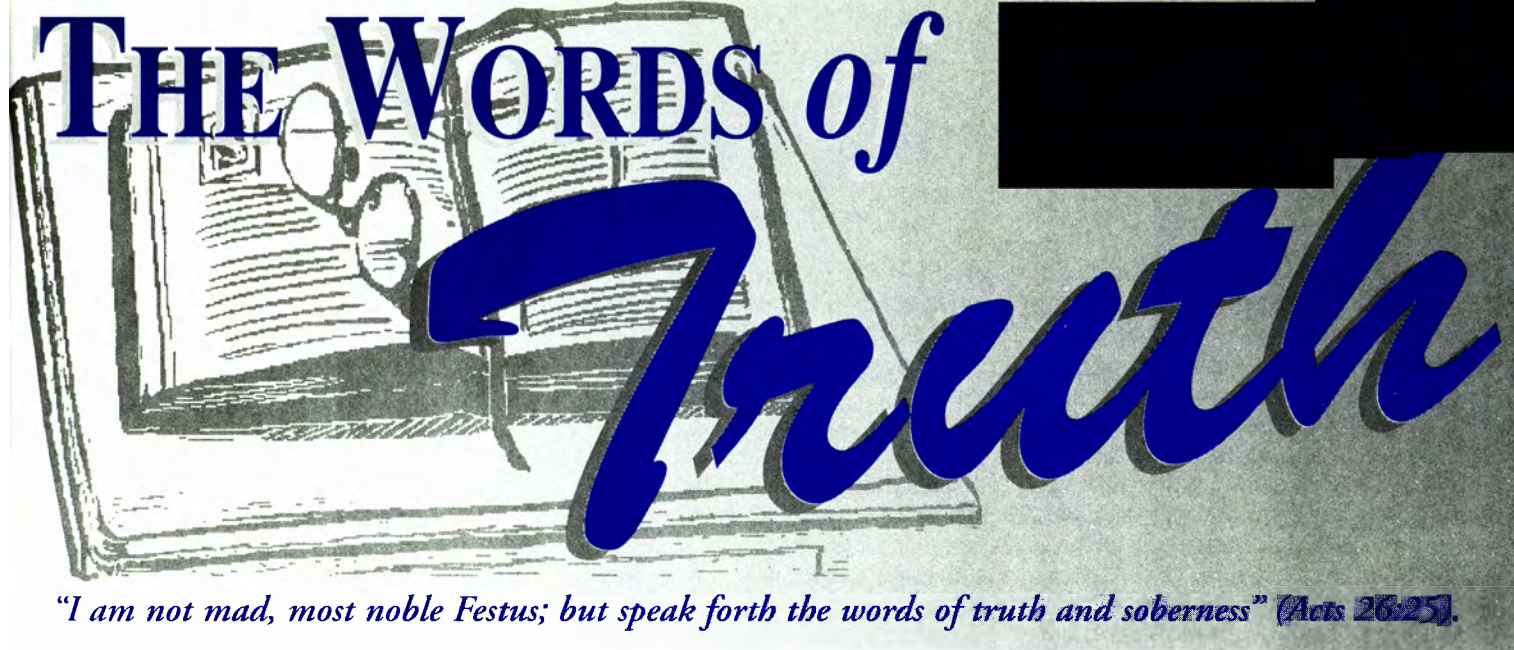
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GOD'S PREACHERS

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

The great prophets of the Old Testament were truly men of God. Regardless of the difficult circumstances of the day, Jehovah could count on Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, and Habakkuk to unselfishly stand for the right way. Oblivious to comfort and ease, such stalwart men of valor placed their very lives in jeopardy to promulgate truth in the midst of a decadent world. Rulers could not bribe them; weak brethren could not deter them; the world was not worthy of them (Heb. 11:38). God's preachers today are challenged to evince the courage of deep conviction also.

- 1 Peter 4:11: Speak as God's oracles!
- 2 Timothy 4:2: Preach the Word urgently!
- Titus 2:1: Sound doctrine is demanded!
- 1 Corinthians 2:2: Christ must be heralded!
- Romans 1:16: The gospel must go forth!

God's preachers cannot compromise the message of salvation in order to please the world. Sinners can never be saved by watering down the story of redemption. Striving to please men nullifies the thrust of heaven's message. God's preachers have integrity, backbone, and loyalty toward the message of the cross. What are the ingredients that provide the proper composite traits for preachers of righteousness? True evangelists are God's:

- Mouth (Jer. 1:9)
- Minister (Acts 5:9)
- Messenger (1 Kng. 22:14)
- Man (Lk. 9:23)
- Mirror (Acts 4:13)
- Magnifier (Phil. 1:20)

When we genuinely believe, we will just *have* to speak up for Jesus (2 Cor. 4:13). Preaching those things we know to be true (Acts 4:20; 26:25) will draw honest seekers to the Savior. Compassion for lost souls will demand

we speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

It may be that we will need the boldness of Nathan as we rebuke those in high places or the tender power of Daniel to stand up for God in the midst of infidels. We may have to courageously call for national penitence as Amos did or remind multitudes that they stand in the valley of indecision as Joel did long ago. Whatever God's preachers need to accomplish, under His will by heaven's power, we must humbly be ready to do!

We will, as evangelists stirred by the mandates of glory, preach so clearly that those who run can comprehend it and pass it on (Hab. 2:2). While others rise up early to commit iniquity we will be busily engaged in noble service to our King (Zeph. 3:7). As watchmen on the walls of Zion, we will give the world clear warning from the God we serve (Ezek. 3:17). God's preachers will never waver but rather grow bolder as heaven draws nearer!

WOT

CHRISTIANS AND THE OCCULT

Chuck Webster, Editorial

People have always been fascinated with the occult. “The sorcery craze of the ‘60s crept into the mainstream through pathways as diverse as shopping-mall candle shops, the TV sitcom “Bewitched,” the card game “Dungeons and Dragons,” and the heavy-metal music of Led Zeppelin (which embellished its album covers with runic allusions to the misty mountains of Celtic myth).”¹ It takes little more than a quick glance at the mind-boggling success of the books chronicling the exploits of the bespectacled young sorcerer, Harry Potter, to conclude that the “craze” has become even more fever-pitched in the last forty years. As Connie Neal writes,

Harry Potter has settled over the literary and cultural world with unprecedented coverage. No other book or series has seen such immediate publishing success (sales top forty-eight million copies sold within four years), worldwide fanfare (with editions in 110 countries and nearly forty languages), or literary acclaim (awards too numerous to mention). The series’ impact has awakened a love of reading among children unparalleled in this generation.²

The fascination with Pokémon, a game/television show whose characters are endowed with sorcery and other supernatural abilities, is also phenomenal. According to *Newsweek*, when “Pokémon: The First Movie” premiered in November, 1999, a Los Angeles disc jockey announced a phone-in contest to win tickets to the premier of the movie. Almost instantly the switchboard was receiving 70,000 calls a minute. “The message got through. Pokémon is still a monster.”³

Are *Harry Potter* and Pokémon harmless, as their supporters allege? After all, many of us remember with fondness watching the good-natured “magic” of “Samantha,” the leading character on “Bewitched,” understanding it to be done completely in fun. We also understood that the “force” in *Star Wars* was nothing more than the product of the keen imagination of George Lucas.⁴ In

spite of this exposure to the occult, albeit apparently innocuous, few of us have become infatuated with satanism, witchcraft, or some other occultic practice.

On the other hand, though, others strongly disagree with the implication that anything related to sorcery, no matter how apparently innocent, is harmless. They cite recent news reports and media emphasis which seem to suggest that our culture is becoming overly fascinated with sorcery and magic, even to the point of embracing the occult as a viable, *religious* pursuit.

Are these critics right? Is *Harry Potter*—and similar characters and products such as Pokémon, Dungeons and Dragons, and other fantasy games—“harmless,” or is there something more sinister?

Harry Potter has attracted the most attention from the critics. Professor Alan Ingalls, a seminary instructor in Pennsylvania, charges that the books are flawed in several particulars. His allegations are:

Potter desensitizes our society to the occult. *Harry Potter* treats the occult and its practices as neutral and in some cases as useful. *Harry Potter* has become a poster boy for witchcraft, and the pagans are delighted that he is creating a good image for them. Those who read *Harry Potter* uncritically may be desensitized to a way of life that God condemns in the strongest possible terms.

Potter promises curiosity and experimentation with the occult. There is a danger that some will decide to experiment with the occult [by reading the material].

Potter removes God and moral absolutes. The books have no Creator God who reveals His will and His ways to mankind.⁵

Cindy Jacobs is adamantly opposed to *Harry Potter* and Pokémon, suggesting that parents should “make it clear you do not want your children involved with

either one of these.”⁶

The word “occult” comes from the Latin word “occultus” and carries with it the idea of things hidden, secret, and mysterious.⁷ Hoover lists three distinct characteristics:

1. The occult deals with things secret or hidden.
2. It deals with operations or events which seem to depend on human powers that go beyond the five senses.
2. It deals with the supernatural, the presence of angelic or demonic forces.⁸

Included in the occult are such practices as witchcraft, magic, palm reading, fortune telling, ouija boards, tarot cards, satanism, demons, and the use of crystal balls.⁹

In this series of articles, we intend to give a survey of the occult as it is practiced today, explaining why some are so sensitive when faced with any sort of dabbling in sorcery or magic, even if done entirely in fun. We will then give a biblical, and what we believe to be a reasonable, response.

ENDNOTES

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³Malcolm Jones, *Newsweek*, November 15, 1999.

⁴Only recently did I learn that Lucas actually *believed* in some sort of “energy field generated by living things,” as seen in his statement: “When you are born, you have an energy field around you. You could call it an aura. . . . When you die, your energy field joins all other energy fields in the universe, and while you’re still living, that largery energy field is sympathetic to your own energy field. . . . When people die, their life spirit is drained from them and incorporated in a huge energy force joining the ethereal oneness of the Force” [quoted from *The Infiltration of the New*

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away just feeling that everything is shoot-em-up, but that there's also a little something to think about here in terms of yourself and your surroundings" (quoted by B.J. Clarke, *Ibid*, p. 230. Original source is Aman and Geisler, *Ibid*, p. 8).

⁵*Christian News*, March 12, 2001, p. 2. Quoted by Wayne Jackson, "What About the Harry Potter Books?" [Http://66.33.75.203//questions/harryPotteRQuestions.htm](http://66.33.75.203//questions/harryPotteRQuestions.htm), accessed April 8, 2002.

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WOT

JUDGING

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

All judging, as well as all debating, is condemned by some people because their finer nature, their love and kindness, are the opposite of unfair, ugly, and slanderous judging. Summarily then they conclude, "All judging is sinful."

Indeed some judgments are sinful. If a person finds little faults in others while ignoring major ones in himself, Jesus marks him as a "hypocrite" and issues the blunt command to him, "Judge not" (Mt. 7:1-5).

If a person is given to running people down, the inspired James asks him, "Who are you to judge your neighbor?" And the inspired writer issues a command: "Do not slander [*katalaleite*, speak evil of, defame] one another" (Jam. 4:11-12).

As to whether or not one is a vegetarian, "who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls" (Rom. 14:4). As to whether or not a person considers one day as more sacred than another, judging is ruled out: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). "So whatever you believe about these things," foods or days, "keep between yourself and God" (Rom. 14:22).

On the other hand, though some judging is sinful, one misleads himself to affirm that he never judges at all. Everyone makes judgments, night and day: when to get out of bed, what and when to eat, what and when to do anything. One judges every oncoming car whether or not it is on the right side

of the road. Only a robot does no judging.

But a man said, "Judging is discerning good and evil, but we are not to condemn anybody." He has forgotten that Paul condemned Hymenaeus and Alexander, "whom I have handed over to Satan, to be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:20). John condemned "Diotrephes, who loves to be first . . . I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously" (3 Jn. 9).

Then one is shocked by Paul's questions, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!" (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

"The things of this life" include morals, regarding which one not only judges himself (1 Cor. 6:18), but also how other people are living. Of a fornicating Christian, Paul wrote: "I have already passed judgment on him" (1 Cor. 5:3). Further, he rebuked Christians who refused to judge: "Are you not to judge those inside? . . . Expel the wicked man from among you" (5:12-13).

Christians sit in judgment not only on questions of morals, but also on other matters of doctrine: "Mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine that you have learned, and turn away from them" (Rom. 16:17; cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 9-11).

On Peter's refusing to eat with a Gentile, Paul's remark to him was not, "I am tolerant of everyone's viewpoint.

Unity in diversity is the name of the game. Who am I to judge? Be at peace, my brother." Instead, Paul "opposed him to his face, because he was in the wrong," and his rebuking Peter was not in private, but "in front of them all" (Gal. 2:11).

Occasionally the Holy Spirit led Paul to condemn wrong-doers with cutting words, as he spoke to Elymas, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10).

In our time the inspired apostles are not here, so our judgments have to come from our own thinking. Therefore all of us must pray for wisdom in the personal and sensitive business of judging (Jam. 1:5). But if a preacher says "I will stay completely out of the business of judging" he is not God's preacher, for God's preacher is commanded: "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning" (1 Tim. 5:20). Elders sometimes are to condemn wrong-doers "sharply" (Tit. 1:13).

But most of the time sharp words and "railing judgment" (2 Pet. 2:11; Jude 9, ASV) are out of place. Though Paul was scorching in his words to Elymas, he was mild with Alexander the metalworker, a man who had done Paul "a great deal of harm" (2 Tim. 4:14). Of him the apostle simply said, "The Lord will repay him for what he has done (2 Tim. 4:14). Such a reaction is certainly

an example for us.

And Jesus, also, though He used burning words for hypocrites, “You snakes! You brood of vipers!” (Mt. 23:33), remember how gentle he was in judging a sinful woman, “Neither do I condemn you . . . Go now and leave your life of sin” (Jn. 8:11). In this case, he who knows hearts (Jn. 2:24) knew the woman had repented, without which forgiveness was impossible (Lk. 13:3), but I do not know hearts. Therefore, I cannot say Jesus’ comforting words to sinners until they tell me they have repented and want to be baptized, or have repented and want to be restored (Acts 2:38; Gal. 6:1). We are commanded to “snatch” some “from the

fire and save them; to others, show mercy, mixed with fear” (Jude 23).

However, Jesus’ command to “judge not” (Mt. 7:1) was not given to sincere loving people, but to hypocrites (Mt. 7:5). Some Jews, affecting to be exact followers of the law of Moses, condemned Jesus for healing a man on the sabbath day, but they did not condemn the priests for circumcising a child on the sabbath day. This was hypocritical, and showed no love for a man who had been crippled, unable to walk, for 38 years (Jn. 5:1-9). So Jesus said to them,

If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath (that Moses’ law not be

broken [“On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised,” Lev. 12:3], why are you angry with me when I heal a man on the sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment (Jn. 7:23-24).

So, according to Jesus, one kind of judging is wrong and one kind of judging is right.

As regards our final destinies, we are commanded, “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes” (1 Cor. 4:5). The final judgment is out of our hands, even out of God’s hands, for He has “given all judgment to the Son” (Jn. 5:22; Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10). *WOT*

WHO IS THE ANTICHRIST?

Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama

As the twentieth century has faded and the twenty-first century has dawned there has been a proliferation of statements from various religious leaders warning man of the coming of the antichrist and the end of time. A popular description of the antichrist suggests that Christ’s return to the earth will be immediately preceded by the appearance of some powerful political personality who will make a dramatic appearance in history. One prominent preacher says, “Overnight, he will become the by-word of the world. He is going to be distinguished as supernatural . . . He will have a magnetic personality, be personally attractive, and a powerful speaker.” Through the years the antichrist has been variously identified as Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Kruschev, Castro, Kissinger, and Hussein, among others. There has never been agreement among proponents as to the identity of the so-called antichrist.

However, the Bible plainly identifies the antichrist, and he doesn’t fit the description commonly attributed to him by various religious leaders of today. The term “antichrist” is found only five times in scripture, and they are all in the epistles of 1 John and 2 John (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7). Note

the description found on the pages of divinely inspired literature.

- 1. The antichrist is a contemporary with the apostle John.** John says that “even now have there arisen many antichrists” (1 Jn. 2:18). He further states with reference to the antichrist, “and now it is in the world already” (1 Jn. 4:3). John did not speak of him in terms of a person or organization that would exist in some remote future such as describes the current propaganda regarding the antichrist.
- 2. There were many antichrists who lived in John’s day (1 Jn. 2:18; 2 Jn. 7).** Present-day proponents try to attach a single mysterious figure, political ruler, or dictator to the identity of the antichrist. Such attempts are in error.
- 3. The antichrists are former Christians who left the faith.** John mentions that the antichrists “went out from us . . .” (1 Jn. 2:19); in other words, they were individuals who had at one time been part of God’s spiritual family, but were no longer so. They had renounced the gospel by which they were saved. Thus, the antichrist is not some world political leader who is yet to come. They were people who were alive in John’s day and had turned away from the Lord’s church.
- 4. The antichrist was one who denied**

the deity of Jesus. John asks, “Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist . . .” (1 Jn. 2:22). Any person, then or now, who denies that Jesus is the Son of God is against Christ.

5. The antichrist was one who denied the incarnation of Christ. John says the person who did not confess that Jesus is come in the flesh is the antichrist (1 Jn. 4:2-3; 2 Jn. 7). One of the most amazing facts of the redemption story is that the divine Son of God was born of the virgin Mary, and both lived and died as a human (Phil. 2:5-8). To deny the humanity of Christ is to be at odds with divine revelation.

Christians need not fear the political, economic, or military developments of the present day. The Bible does not speak of a world political figure that will suddenly appear on the scene in advance of the second coming of Jesus. In fact, there will be no “early warning system” in advance of Christ’s coming. We are urged by Christ to “be ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mt. 24:44). Just live each day as if it were the last. By so doing, we prepare ourselves for the end of time.

WOT

IN ONE ACCORD

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

I have never believed that a man must know the Greek or Hebrew language in order to study the word of God, obey it, and go to heaven. I am fully persuaded that we have reliable translations in English which we can confidently use as our standard for belief and practice.

Nevertheless, a Bible student can surely grow in understanding some impressive details of scripture by sometimes pursuing a Greek word used in the New Testament. Let's enjoy one such word today.

The English word is "accord." Watch how the Holy Spirit carefully placed the word in these verses in the book of Acts:

- "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14).
- "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1).
- "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" (Acts 2:46).
- "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they

were all with one accord in Solomon's porch . . .)" (Acts 5:12).

- "It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 15:25).

The hard-to-pronounce Greek word is *homothumadon*, and it is found twelve times in the New Testament. Eleven times it is translated "with one accord," and one time it is translated, "with one mind."

Of this word *Strong's Lexicon* of the Greek Language says this: "A unique Greek word, used ten of its twelve New Testament occurrences in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community."

Homothumadon is a compound of two words meaning to "rush along" and "in unison." The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church.

Listen Christians. The Lord wants us to live and work in sweet harmony, in

symphony, in *one accord*.

Observe that the apostle Paul commands such in Philippians 2:2 when he writes, "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." To work in unison with my brethren is not then a mere matter of preference if I choose to follow Jesus faithfully. I must do this.

When the church meets for worship and Bible study during each week, are we in one accord? Do I fulfill my duty to be present and ready?

When the elders challenge the church with new programs of service, are we in one accord? Do they know they can count on me? "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

Do we make a conscious effort to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15)?

There is a sense of security and hope which comes from working in symphony with other Christians. And it is reciprocal. That is, we derive the joy, while at the same time giving the joy. God made Christians to live in one accord.

WOT

WHAT IS "CONVERSION"?

J.C. Choate, Winona, Mississippi

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, "convert" means "to turn around, to transform, to change from one belief to another." *Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines "convert" as "to turn about; the word implies repentance, a turning from and a turning to, as in turning away from a life of sin and turning to God."

There are three phases of conversion: a change of heart, a change of life, and a change of state.

We are talking, of course, about conversion to Christ, what it means to become a believer in Him, submitting to Him, changing to conform to His teaching, turning from sin and wrong to live the kind of life Christ wants us to

live.

We are not talking about being bribed to pretend to be following Christ, or taking money and other material things so that one can be counted in a list as being a "Christian." Neither are we talking about "converting" so that our children can attend some superior school, or that we might receive other rewards.

Actually, if one is willing to wear the name "Christian" or to pretend to obey Christ because of such gifts or rewards that might be offered, he is not converting to Christianity, but he is simply going through a routine or pretending to become a Christian. Such things do not actually make one a Christian in the sight of God. They are an

insult to Him and to all who wear that precious Name.

There is not enough money in the world to buy a single soul for Christ! If one is willing to sell his soul for material gain, he deceives himself and mocks God.

To their own terrible shame, there are some who falsely call themselves "Christian" who would stoop to offer material things or advantages in order to influence people to "convert" to Christ. Their behavior is contrary to everything Christ and His disciples taught, contrary to everything written in the New Testament. True Christians do not take or give bribes. We can safely mark it down that if a person would offer a bribe,

trying to buy converts to Christ, he is not a representative of Christ but of Satan. 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 describes such a person: "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

Christ said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Lk. 9:23).

To be converted to Christ one must hear the word of God (Rom. 10:17), believe in God and in Christ as the Son of God (Heb. 11:6), believe the facts of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4), be willing to repent or turn from the old life of sin (Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30), confess with his mouth before others that he believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Mt. 10:32-33), and be baptized in water for the forgiveness of his sins (Acts 2:38).

On the day of Pentecost when the Lord's church had its beginning, after the people had been taught of Christ and had become believers in Him, they wanted to

know what they must do in order to be saved. Peter and the apostles answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

A few days later, as the apostles were speaking to another group of people, they said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). In this passage, "baptism" of Acts 2:38 is replaced with the word "converted," and "the gift of the Holy Spirit" is said to be "the times of refreshing." But in both of these verses, conversion is the subject being discussed.

Eleven cases of conversion are recorded in the book of Acts. In every case, the gospel—the good news that Christ had come to save man from his sin—was preached, the people heard and became believers, repented (turned away from sin and turned to God), confessed their faith in Christ as the Son of God, and were baptized in water for the remission of sins. This was true

conversion.

In being converted, **they changed their minds** from not believing in Christ to believing that He is the Son of God; **they changed their lives** from living in sin to following the goodness and purity of Christ; **they changed their state** from being lost in Satan's kingdom of darkness, to being saved in Christ's kingdom of light. This change of state was accomplished as they were born again spiritually (Jn. 3:3,5) through baptism (Mk. 16:16). In doing this, they entered Christ, being baptized into His death and raised to walk that new life with Him (Rom. 6:3-4). This birth through baptism put them into Christ's family, His church, so that they could live the remainder of their lives as the children of God (Rev. 2:10).

This is true conversion to Christ. It is done sincerely, from the heart, and it is a lifetime commitment to worship and serve the Lord daily, according to all that He instructed in the New Testament.

Have you been converted to Christ?

WOT

AREN'T ALL CHURCHES BASICALLY THE SAME?

Brad Harrub, Ph.D., Montgomery, Alabama (Apologetics Press)

The fight has taken place in many places: pulpits, newspapers, backyards, subways, or even at the dinner table. What makes a church **the** church? Are all churches the same, and if not, how can we prove it? Members of denominations stand firm in their belief that all churches are basically the same, and therefore the attitude prevails that "you have yours and I have mine." Unfortunately many Bible studies end at this juncture, because Christians are not sure how to proceed. Should they simply accept this answer in an effort to "keep the peace," or should they dig in their heels and prepare for the fight that might well ensue? Thankfully God's Word makes the decision much easier. Using just seven short scriptures, it is a simple matter to lay out the history of the **one true church**, which then allows Christians the opportunity to ask: "Are you a member of this church that the Bible describes?" This same idea has even drifted into the Church of Christ, as individuals seek to please men and build houses of entertainment under the guise of "community churches." I encourage

you to write down the following scriptures, which will prove to be a useful tool in answering the question, "Aren't all churches basically the same?"

1. Matthew 16:13-18. In this passage, Christ states: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." We learn first and foremost, that Christ is going to be the founder of **His** church.

2. In Mark 9:1, we read that Jesus "said unto them: 'Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.'" This verse teaches that the church was started during the lives of men who walked with Christ. Where does that leave the denominations that were started long after the first century had passed?

3. Christ, speaking in Luke 24:46-47, said: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, **beginning at Jerusalem.**" Quite simply, Christ informs us that the church was to begin in Jerusalem. Thus, any church that had its origins in America, or any other place besides Jerusalem, is not **the** church being discussed by Christ.

4. Acts 2. This entire chapter holds many great teaching examples. We learn in verse 5: "And there were **dwelling at Jerusalem** Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven"—indicating that the events taking place were occurring in Jerusalem. Verse 14 states: "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, 'Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.'" Peter thus had begun to preach the first gospel sermon in Jerusalem. Verse 41 indicates: "They that gladly received his word were

baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls,” demonstrating the necessity of baptism. Verses 46-47 inform us: “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, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And **the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**” We learn at the end of chapter 2 that the Lord adds us to the church—we do not “join” the church.

5. In speaking to the first-century Christians in Rome, Paul wrote in **Romans 12:4-5**: “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: **So we, being many, are one body in Christ**, and every one members one of another.” This teaches us that we (members of the church) are the body.

6. **Ephesians 4:4-6**. “**There is one body**, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in

one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. These verses clearly indicate that **there is only one body**.

7. **Colossians 1:16-18**. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. **And he is the head of the body, the church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” The head of the church is Christ, not someone like a “pope.”

From these few verses, we learn four simple, yet important, facts that identify the true church:

- It was founded by Christ, not men.
- It was started during the lives of men who had walked with Jesus Christ.

- It began in Jerusalem, and then went out to the world.
- It has Christ as its head, not men.

Sadly, many of our own brethren mistakenly believe that Christ did not possess enough knowledge regarding founding and organizing a church, and so they feel the need to add manmade traditions or entertainment. Or in an effort to gain numbers, men will often resort to gimmicks not sanctioned by Christ. And yet we were told in Matthew 16 that the gates of hell would not prevail against the true church. It will be here long after the gimmicks, entertainment, and manmade churches have perished. The next time someone asks you, “Aren’t all churches basically the same?,” show them these verses, pointing out these four conditions that identify Christ’s unique church. The only question that then remains is this: Are you a member of the church that is described so vividly in the Bible? WOT

A PASSION FOR PREACHING

Bill Burk, Seagoville, Texas

The gospel sermon, for some, is the height of drudgery. They, like the Israelites of old, declare, concerning this item of worship, “Oh, what a weariness” (Mal. 1:13). To a considerable number, the best sermons are the shortest. And for others, the only time the need for participation in the discourse arises is when the preacher proclaims, “Let us stand and sing.” It’s interesting that, if the baseball game goes into extra innings, or the football game heads into overtime, or if one’s favorite singer returns to the stage for one more encore, folks just don’t seem to care. Yet if the preacher has something on his heart that takes him a little longer to say than normal, then let the sighing begin.

True, there are a great host of brethren who thrill at the preached message. When they sing “Give me the Bible” they mean it. For them, it cannot be preached too plainly or too often. Why, though, do some folks not possess a passion for preaching? Certainly, the preacher needs to look at himself. Does he study diligently (2 Tim. 2:15)? Does he pray fervently (Jam. 5:16)? Does he live what he preaches (Acts 1:1)? When it is time to preach, does he, with passion, proclaim the unsearchable riches

of Christ? If any of these ingredients are missing, the preacher shouldn’t be too surprised when he finds a lackluster reception to what he has to say. However, even when a man of God exhausts himself in order to bring the most applicable, spiritually exhilarating lesson he can, there are still those who are not going to be particularly interested. Why?

Perhaps some misunderstand the importance of preaching. It was God’s desire for this message to be preached to all the world (Mk. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:19-20). Paul reminds us that God “manifested His word through preaching” (Tit. 1:3). And let us not forget that “it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). **Perhaps some fail to consider the list of Bible preachers.** The Bible teaches us that the vast majority of the heroes of faith were preachers. Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). Moses preached the message of God to Pharaoh (Ex. 5-11). The prophets were first and foremost preachers (Jer. 20:9; Amos 3:8; 2 Chr. 36:15). John the Baptist was a preacher (Mat. 3:2). The apostles were preachers (cf. the book of

Acts). And most importantly, Jesus was a preacher of the gospel (Mk. 1:14,38). This company of preachers says something about the importance of the task.

Perhaps some forget the power of preaching. When God’s word is preached, the very saving power of God is unleashed (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18). The message of the cross has the ability to change a sinner into a saint, to change one who is lost into one who is saved, and to translate one from darkness into light (cf. Col. 1:13). Any thoughtful child of God will remember sermons he has heard that dramatically affected his heart, soul, and life. Preaching is powerful, yet the listener must allow the fuse of God’s dynamite to be lit in his heart (Rev. 22:17).

The preaching of the gospel has literally changed the world. Through it Christians have been made and saints have been preserved for some 2,000 years. Let us, therefore, develop a passion for the word of God. May we crave it like our necessary food (Job 23:12), and let us love it with all of our hearts (Psa. 119:97). Let us develop a real passion for preaching. WOT

IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?

Sam Willcut, Munford, Tennessee

When we put our absolute faith and trust in God, we will not need to worry or fear whatever happens in our lives. In understanding the providential care and power of God, there are several great lessons to learn as illustrated in the Bible.

Numbers do not matter. In a world filled with wickedness to the point God was determined to destroy it, he found one faithful man named Noah (Gen. 6:8). Think about *one* family among so many wicked. We also learn this lesson from Gideon in Judges 7. God Himself viewed the army of 32,000 Israelites as too many, whittling the army down to just 300, to fight against the Midianites that "came as grasshoppers for multitude; for they and their camels were without number" (Jud. 6:5). What a great victory ensued, because with God, numbers do not matter.

Size does not matter. When the Israelites and the Philistines were at war with each other (1 Samuel 17), the Philistine champion named Goliath challenged the Israelites to a simple one-on-one match for supremacy. Yet at the barking words of this heathen, all of God's people "were dismayed, and greatly afraid" (1 Sam. 17:11). It took a "youth" (1 Sam. 17:33) named "David" with enough faith in God to defeat this massive man who was over nine feet tall.

Age does not matter. In the midst of some of the most wicked kings of Israel and Judah's history, a boy named Josiah of just eight years took the throne of Judah (2 Kng. 22:1). When he was a teenager of sixteen, "he began to seek after the God of David his father," and when he was twenty, "he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images" (2 Chr. 34:3). When he was twenty-six, the book of the law was found in the temple, and he revolutionized the nation by cleansing the country of idolatry and reestablishing the Passover. "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kng. 23:25).

Gender does not matter. While one might think most of the faithful heroes recorded in the Bible are male, do not forget about the wonderful females that exemplified God's righteousness. Esther literally saved the Israelites single-handedly. Deborah was the savior of the people, serving as one of the judges of the land. The mother of Moses, Jochebed, hid her son against the laws of the Egyptian land. Rahab saved the Israelites from the Canaanites. A woman named Jael contributed to the victory of the Israelites by killing the enemy captain Sisera (Jud. 4:17-21).

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).



Note to our readers: The Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is looking for an associate minister. All interested men should send their résumés to Sixth Avenue to the attention of the elders.

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.

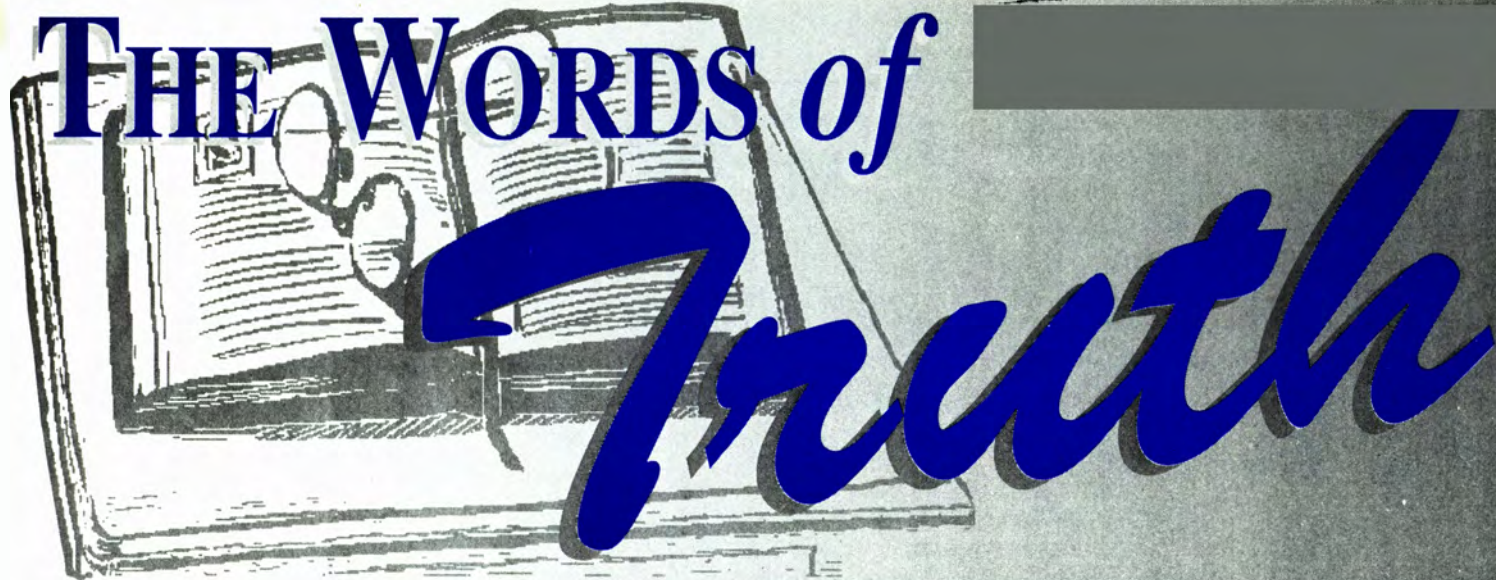
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THE WORDS of Truth

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

Vol. 39 No. 5

May 2002

LEGALISM OR LOVE?

Duane Patton, Wylie, Texas

In 1 John, the apostle wrote concerning the need for Christians to keep the commandments of the Lord. In reality he declared that such was a test of fellowship with God (cf. 1:7; 2:4). The practice of righteousness is expounded upon over and again in John's miniature treatise on what love is truly all about (2:9; 3:10, 17; 4:20-21; 5:1-3).

Nevertheless, ignorant and misled men have falsely charged Christians of being "legalistic" in their approach to loving God. This accusation may well be conveniently made in order to escape the personal responsibility of being "doers of the word and not hearers only" (Jam. 1:20-21). Perhaps cunning orators have sincerely beguiled some of these accusers, but most have simply not studied to be wise. While it is true that no man can save himself by himself, and also a mere performance of rules merits no favor with God, it simply is not true that doing anything fails to contribute to the Christian's salvation. Paul

reminded the Christians at Ephesus that their salvation was "by **grace** through **faith**" (Eph. 2:8-10, emp. added). In other words, when God's amazing grace meets man's obedient faith, salvation will be the result.

The problem arises when the accusation of legalism is contrasted with God's demand to love Him. Some contend that for a Christian to perform anything at all adds to the grace of God, and thus grace is no longer grace but work, thereby leaving God in the position of indebtedness to him who works. Romans 4:1-4 is often cited in a vain effort to support such a false claim. God wants men to love Him enough to do from the heart exactly what He says. Furthermore, it has always been the case that God is displeased with the disobedient—the New Covenant is no exception (Matt. 7:21ff; Luke 6:46; et al.). In order for one to be a "legalist" he would have to: (1) expect to be saved by the mere external obedience to the law; (2) bind on others, and perhaps on himself also,

where God has not bound, thus making his traditions equal to God's commands; and (3) practice hypocrisy, wittingly or unwittingly, while believing himself to be saved due to the vast amount of "good" that he is otherwise doing.

Friends, I know of no faithful gospel preacher, including myself, that believes or teaches legalism. Jesus rightly condemned the Jews of the first century due in part to their legalism, not because they kept the law. On the other hand, the apostle John clearly defined for us what real love is: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments . . ." (1 John 5:3). For this cause Jesus declared, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). No man can ever merit God's grace. But, when a man obeys Christ out of a heart full of genuine desire he will receive the blessings of God's grace, immediately and continually as long as he genuinely and faithfully obeys the Lord! *WOT*

CHRISTIANS AND THE OCCULT (2)

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Last month's editorial addressed the rising popularity of occultic practices, especially among young people, and introduced reasons why some are extremely skeptical of anything that relates in any sense to the occult, no matter how seemingly harmless. In this article we survey modern occultic practices, which include five broad categories:

Divination. A woman with a soothing voice appears on the television screen, gazing intently at cards on a table before her as she speaks to a caller. She reveals information about the caller's romantic relationships (to the caller's amazement) and offers advice. A voice-over encourages viewers to call the 1-800 number on the screen for a "free, five-minute psychic reading" . . . Such "psychics" are part of a form of the occult known as divination or fortune-telling. This psychic's particular area of "expertise" was cartomancy, i.e., reading tarot cards. Other kinds of divination are palmistry (or chiromancy, palm-reading), mirror mantic (gazing into crystal balls, mirrors, rock crystals, or still water), and psychometry (holding some material object such as an article of clothing and making statements and identifying characteristics concerning the owner of the article, or even foretelling his/her future).

One of the most famous so-called psychics was Jeane Dixon (1918-1997), who told her biographer that "The same spirit that worked through Isaiah and John the Baptist also works through me."¹ Incidentally, Ms. Dixon's "prophecies" included the following:

- World War III would begin in 1954.
- China would be admitted to the United Nations in 1958 (it didn't occur until 1971).
- On October 19, 1968, she predicted Jacqueline Kennedy was not thinking of marriage (the next day Ms. Kennedy married Aristotle Onassis).²

Even if God's Word didn't repeatedly prohibit divination, the fact that she prophesied falsely identifies her as a false prophet (Deut. 18:21-22). Add to that the fact that the Bible specifically condemns it: "They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, . . . behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 13:6-9).

Astrology. What's your sign? Cancer? Aries? Leo? The scary thing is, most of us know, which suggests how popular astrology has become. In fact, the vast majority of occultists are involved in astrology. According to McDowell, one company called the American Astrological Association has some 339,660 individuals who have bought horoscopes for an average sale of between \$3.50-\$9.95.³ Astrology (not to be confused with astronomy, a legitimate science) is:

an ancient practice that assumes that the position of the stars and planets has a direct influence upon people and events. Supposedly, one's life pattern can be charted by

determining the position of the stars and planets at the time of one's birth. The chart that explains this is known as a horoscope.⁴

From a purely scientific perspective, astrology is untenable. In September, 1975, 186 prominent American scientists, along with eighteen Nobel Prize winners, spoke out against "the pretentious claims of astrological charlatans," saying, among other things, that there is no scientific basis whatsoever for the assumption that the stars foretell events and influence lives."⁵ God chastised the Israelites for their dependence on the occult: "Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; . . ." (Isa. 47:13-15).

The fatalistic approach of astrology, which says our lives are determined by the stars, is contradicted by Scripture, which holds us responsible for our destiny. Astrology and Christianity are simply incompatible.⁶

Spiritism (also called spiritualism or necromancy). Thousands of teenagers have sat in dimly lit rooms, huddled around a Ouija board that "answers" their questions by communicating with the dead. Most realize a Ouija board is nothing more than a game; others, however, take it quite seriously. Gaynor describes it:

A Ouija board is an instrument for communication with the spirits of the dead. Made in various shapes

and designs, some of them used in the sixth century before Christ. The common feature of all its varieties is that an object moves under the hand of the medium, and one of its corners, or a pointer attached to it, spells out messages by successively pointing to letters of the alphabet marked on a board which is a part of the instrument.⁷

Spiritism, incidentally, is not limited to Ouija boards; those who practice it believe that the spirits of the dead have the capacity to communicate with people here on earth through mediums, individuals who act as intermediaries between the material world and the spirit world. Mediums usually claim they have a “spirit-guide” who is their initial primary contact in the spirit world, who puts them in contact with the person with whom they would like to speak.

The best-selling nonfiction book of 1998 was a how-to book on necromancy—*Talking to Heaven* by James Van Praagh. “That it’s peddled as a happy, religious, ‘spiritual’ book—‘Talking to Heaven’ instead of ‘Talking to Hell’—is . . . chilling, a sign of the public’s dangerous spiritual naiveté.”⁸

Again, God’s Word condemns any sort of dabbling in spiritism: “Regard not them that have familiar spirits . . .” (Lev. 19:31). “And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people” (Lev. 20:6). “A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit . . . shall surely be put to death: their blood shall be upon them” (Lev. 20:27; cf. Deut. 18:9-12).

Witchcraft/Magic. “Magic is an attempt to gain control over nature by supernatural means. It consists of

spells, charms, and other techniques intended to give man what he cannot achieve with his normal human powers.”⁹ It is generally divided into two types: (1) White magic is said to be the use of magical powers and abilities in an unselfish manner for the benefit of others (e.g., curing sickness). (2) Black magic is the use of magical powers to cause harm to others.¹⁰

All forms are condemned by Scripture: “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee” (Deut. 18:10-12).

Satanism. We see the depravity of Satan worship in one of its initiation rituals. On one occasion two girls were told to go to a graveyard in the middle of the night, walk across a man-sized cross, and denounce any belief in Christ. Afterwards, a ritual was performed, and the girls had to drink the blood of animals that had been skinned alive.¹¹ The Church of Satan was founded in 1966 by Anton La Vey and now claims over 10,000 members. Its creedbook—*The Satanic Bible*—has sold over 250,000 copies and is in its third paperback printing. The religion emphasizes materialism and hedonism:

It is a blatantly selfish, brutal religion. It is based on the belief that man is inherently a selfish, violent creature, that life is a Darwinian struggle for survival of the fittest, that the earth will be ruled by those who fight to win.¹²

God only, of course, is worthy of our worship (Matt. 4:10). We are to resist Satan (Jam. 4:7; cf. 1 Pet. 5:8) and despise everything he represents.

It’s tempting for us to respond to the occult with a cursory—“that will never affect me or my family”—attitude. Such an attitude is dangerous. Satan is doing everything within his power to condemn people to hell, and one of his tools is the occult. If he can get us interested in its “innocent” forms, and in some small way succeed in getting us to trust in it instead of Christ, he has succeeded. Next month’s editorial—the final one in this series—will give some guidelines to help us respond as Christians should.

Endnotes

¹Rene Noorbergen, *The Soul Hustlers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), p. 114.

²Josh McDowell and Don Steward, *Handbook of Today’s Religions* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 183.

³Ibid., p. 154.

⁴Ibid., p. 160.

⁵Ibid., p. 161.

⁶Ibid., p. 164.

⁷Frank Gaynor, ed., *Dictionary of Mysticism* (New York: Citadel Press, n.d.), p. 132.

⁸Roy Maynard, *World on the Web*, March 21, 1998, Vol. 13, Num. 11, http://www.worldmag.com/world/issue/03-21-98/cultural_3.asp, accessed April 11, 2002.

⁹Arthur S. Gregor, *Witchcraft and Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), p. 1.

¹⁰McDowell, p. 204.

¹¹Roberta Blankenship, *Escape From Witchcraft* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), p. 1.

¹²Neville Drury and Gregory Tillett, *The Occult Sourcebook* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1978), p. 78.

SAD SAYINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

Neil Richey, Lynchburg, Virginia

Can it be true? Are there really sad statements in a book that is intended to offer support and hope to the weary? Indeed, it *is* true. There are statements in the Bible that cause despair in the hearts of some and leave them with a feeling of dejection. Why did the Holy Spirit inspire men to write such sad statements in the Bible? Ultimately the question can be answered this way: Sad statements are placed in the Bible to offer words of warning to man that he might avoid eternal departure at the judgment. Consider these "Sad Sayings from Scripture":

It was a sad saying when Moses said, "He drove out the man" (Gen. 3:24). You will recall the circumstances. God told Adam and Eve that they could eat of every tree of the Garden except one, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:17). God made a promise to them and said, ". . . in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (2:17). With help from the tempting serpent, and her own lust of the eyes and pride of life, Eve ate of that forbidden tree and then "gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (3:6). They both knew that they had done wrong, and so they tried to hide from God. Of course, no one can hide from God. Furthermore, God keeps His promises, and He therefore delivered His judgment upon Adam and Eve. Finally, God drove them out of the garden, and away from the tree of life. This was a sentence of death, just like God promised.

It was a sad saying when David said, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes" (Psa. 119:136). In this, the longest chapter of the Bible, are some of the most touching words ever penned. These sad words of David are not expressed because of personal sorrow, but because of his concern for his own people who often rejected the words of the Lord. The children of Israel were God's chosen people, and yet they appeared in almost every way to be leaving their God. If David were alive today, would rivers of waters pour from his eyes because of the

condition of so many in the Lord's church? So many are just like the children of Israel who "keep not the law of the Lord."

It was a sad saying when David said, "No man cared for my soul" (Psa. 142:4). David wrote these heartbreaking words while he was fleeing from Saul. David was depressed, distressed, and desperate. He wanted to be delivered from his current condition. He wanted some help. There was no refuge for him, no place of safety, and he could find no comfort from his fellow man. The only place that he could find hope was in the Lord. Likewise, we can only find hope in the Lord. If we faithfully cleave to His outstretched arms in humble obedience to His words we can find hope.

It was a sad saying when Jeremiah said, "They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer. 8:12). When the children of Israel chose to worship idols rather than the one true God, they turned their heads away from the very One who led them out of bondage. This was indeed bad enough, but all the more worse was their lack of remorse or regret for what they had done. They chose not "to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom. 1:28), and thus there was nothing in the world they would not do. This is the reason they were unable even to blush. It is likewise true with us when we refuse to keep God in mind, then we will abort unwanted babies; wear little to no clothing for the whole world to see; engage in social drinking; find enjoyment at parties with dancing, drinking, and drugs; practice homosexuality, and any number of sexual sins. When we fail to store the Word of God in our minds (Psa. 119:11) we will engage in sin and not even blush.

It was a sad saying when Peter said, "I know not the man" (Matt. 26:74). When we consider godly men of the New Testament, Peter comes to mind. Though he was a man of God, he was also a man of flaws. We see one of

those flaws when Jesus had been led from the garden to stand before the high priest. Peter was outside the palace being questioned by a damsel. She said, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee" (26:69). Shortly thereafter a maid approached him, and then a group of people, all saying "You were with Jesus." Three times Peter said, "I don't know Him." By the third time, Peter remembered the Lord's telling him that "thou shalt deny me thrice" (26:75). We see the sorrow in Peter's heart when he realized what he had done, for it says that "he went out, and wept bitterly" (26:75). Though Peter was a righteous man, he still made mistakes. Like Peter we make mistakes. Sometimes we make the same mistake of denying the Lord. Do not allow your pride and cowardice to cause you to deny the Lord.

It was a sad saying when Jesus said, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). After going through the illegal trials, being beaten and mocked, Jesus then suffered the most agonizing physical pain He had ever endured. While hanging there He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Lord was not suggesting that the Father turned His back on His Son, nor was the Father ignoring the suffering of His "Only Begotten." Jesus was teaching those present, and us through the pages of the written Word, a valuable lesson on trust. Throughout all of this, Jesus trusted in the Father. We too must learn to trust (obey) in God and He will save us, if not physically, then spiritually and eternally.

It was a sad saying when Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me" (Acts 26:28). Like most of you I have had the privilege of conducting several Bible studies. Sometimes you think the message is really getting through to the student, and it appears as though he wants to obey. However, so many times excuses for failing to do that which is required to obtain salvation begin to arise. Then you think back to the words of Agrippa, a student of

Paul, who said “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Friends, try not to get discouraged when those you love and teach refuse to obey the gospel. You cannot control what they choose to do. Your power is in teaching.

It will be a sad saying when Jesus says, “Depart from me” (Matt.

25:41). When describing the judgment scene, Jesus said that there would be two categories of people. First, there would be those to whom the Lord will say “Come.” The second category of people will be the ones to whom the Lord will say “Depart.” Can you imagine standing before the judgment bar of Christ and hearing the words

“Depart from me”? Now imagine that you knew how to avoid hearing those words, but you heard them anyway because you had refused to obey the gospel of Christ and live faithfully to it. Do not allow the final words that you hear to be sad sayings from the Lord.

WOT

WHAT IS A TRUE FRIEND?

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

What makes for a true friend? According to the Bible:

1. He always loves you. “A friend loves at all times . . .” (Prov. 17:17a). “A friend is one who knows all about you and loves you just the same.”
2. He sticks by you. “A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24; cf. Gal. 6:2). “A true friend is like ivy that adheres to the tree in its decay.”

Sam Davis was a Confederate spy executed at Pulaski, Tennessee, for his crime. When captured by the Union army, he had in his possession some papers of vital importance. After examining the case closely, the officers in charge knew he must have had an accomplice in securing the papers. He was court-martialed, led out before the firing squad, and blindfolded. Then the officer in charge put forward a proposition: “If you will give us the name of the man who furnished you this information, you may go free.”

Davis did not hesitate in his reply, “If I had a thousand lives I would give them all before I would betray a friend.”

3. He tells you what you need to hear. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend . . .” (Prov. 27:6a; cf. 28:23; Eph. 4:25). “A friend is one who stands up for you in public and sits down on you in private.”

4. He helps you by offering his insight. “Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel” (Prov. 27:9).

5. He brings out the best in you. “As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend” (Prov. 27:17; cf. 12:26; 1 Sam. 23:16).

6. He is there when you need him. “Do not forsake your own friend . . . for better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away” (Prov. 27:10). “A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.”

Horror gripped the heart of the World War I soldier as he saw his lifelong friend fall in battle. Caught in a trench with continuous gunfire whizzing over his head, the soldier asked his lieutenant if he might go out into the open area between the trenches to bring his fallen comrade back. “You can go,” said the lieutenant, “but I don’t think it will be worth it. Your friend is probably dead and you may throw your own life away.” The lieutenant’s words didn’t matter, and the soldier went anyway.

Somehow he managed to reach his friend, hoist him onto his shoulder, and bring him back to their company’s trench. As the two of them tumbled in together to the bottom of the trench, the officer checked the wounded soldier, then looked kindly at his friend. “I told you it wouldn’t be worth it,” he said. “Your friend is dead, and you are mortally wounded.” “It was worth it, though, sir,” the soldier said. “How do you mean, ‘worth it’?” responded the Lieutenant. “Your friend is dead!” “Yes, sir,” the private answered. “But it was worth it because when I got to him, he was still alive, and I had the satisfaction of hearing him say, ‘Jim, I knew you’d come.’”

It occurs to me that Jesus possesses

these very same characteristics. He is a true friend.

1. He always loves you. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are my friends . . .” (John 15:13-14a; cf. Rom. 5:6-10).

2. He sticks by you. “. . . I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5b; cf. Luke 7:34).

3. He tells you what you need to hear. “. . . I have called you friends for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15b; cf. 8:32; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Ex. 33:11).

4. He helps you by offering His insight. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (Jam. 1:5).
5. He brings out the best in you. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13; cf. John 15:5).

6. He is there when you need Him. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30; cf. Luke 15:4).

If a good friend came knocking at your door, what would you do? Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart at this very moment (Rev. 3:20). Will you answer and let Him in? Will you be His friend in return (John 14:15)?

WOT

TRAITS OF A FALSE TEACHER

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

John warns, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world . . ." (2 John 7). The particular deceivers in that passage denied that Jesus came in the flesh. Looking at the religious landscape today, John would no doubt repeat himself. There are so many deceivers who are leading people away from the truth. Consider several identifying marks of false teachers which the Holy Spirit makes known.

They turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 4). They distort what grace is, making it a blanket that hides blatant, willful sin, lust, and materialism. With many, sin is rationalized and condoned. The false assurance is that God's grace will cover it, a failure to abhor sin and genuinely repent notwithstanding.

They cry "peace, peace" when there is no peace (Jer. 8:11). Superficial comfort is given to people in their sin. How many preachers, rather than confronting sin, tell people they are okay? What a dangerous methodology!

They overthrow the faith of people (2 Tim. 2:18). Obfuscating Bible truth, lowering respect for the inspiration and perfection of the Bible, and allowing higher criticism to strip the Bible of its power have undone the faith of so many people. Teaching which distorts or waters down the potency of Scripture is to faith what a virus is to the immune system. Liberalism destroys people's faith in God.

They teach for doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7). If it contradicts or nullifies revealed

truth, it is of man rather than God (cf. Acts 5:29). Looking at Christendom today, so much of what is widely embraced and assumed to be true are blatant departures from the Bible. Such doctrines as "faith only saves," "once saved, always saved," "God's law of marriage is for believers only," "join the church of your choice," and the like are the inventions of false teachers.

They cover up their true intentions (Matt. 7:15). Jude describes the various motives of false teachers. Some do so for the sake of being accepted. Some do so for illicit gain. Some do so out of an arrogant sense of self-importance. Yet, they almost always insist that they are trying to help people get closer to God. Jesus insists that they deliberately hide their agenda.

They are well liked (Luke 6:26). This is a potentially haunting passage. Jesus says, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you . . ." Few preachers relish offending people or upsetting them. Yet, preaching the "whole counsel" of God means that sometimes some will not like it (cf. Acts 20:27). Is it thought that Stephen was obnoxious, a man whose methods were rejected by the Lord? What about Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-25)? Preachers and teachers should proclaim the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), but truth taught will sometimes offend no matter how pleasantly and gently it is delivered. Those who compromise the truth to placate their hearers may have their acceptance, but God will reject them.

They secretly introduce their teaching (2 Pet. 2:1). This is a distinct method false teachers often adopt. Why? Were they to publicly proclaim such ideas, they would be exposed. Their ideas can only survive if spread to weak-faith individuals who are not so discerning in more intimate settings. Truth is not afraid of inspection. Error grows in darkness rather than Sonlight. **They are destined for eternal torment (Rev. 20:10).** No matter what success false teachers achieve in this life, there will be an eternity to pay for it. Take soberly the warning of James 3:1. "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment."

Preachers (and teachers), have backbone. Preach the truth, even it is difficult and opposed. Have faith. Whatever it costs to be faithful to the Word, know that heaven will surely be worth it all. Have conviction. Do not let circumstance determine content. "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:2-5). WOT

A WEDDING RING

Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama

The most treasured material possession of the youthful bride and the aging widow is her wedding band. More sentiment attaches to this small item than all the heirlooms of two families. It is to her much more than just costly gold and diamonds. It is a symbolic

expression of love.

Exchanging rings is an ancient practice. Why has it continued? What is a wedding ring?

A wedding band secures a permanent commitment. A ring is made of materials which symbolize the

permanence of the marriage relationship. In times when marriage has become a revolving door, rings dogmatically say, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). A sad smile appears when considering what some

have said: "I took a band of gold and made a twenty-four carat mistake"; "Too much matrimony ends in alimony"; "I found out we were not fit to be tied." The ring constantly repeats the vow "Till death do us part."

In early times, kings pressed state rings into wax seals to make documents official (cf. Gen. 42:42; Est. 8:8). Two scripturally eligible people exchange rings on entering into an official lifetime relationship recognized by the state, society, and the Savior (Rom. 7:2).

A wedding ring symbolizes pure love. As the gold of which rings are

made has been refined and purified, so the love of two people has been refined and strengthened during the courtship period. It will continue to grow purer through the years of matrimony as each learns better to: "love, cherish, and nourish." "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5:28-29). The wedding band stands for self-sacrificing love, not self-gratifying lust (cf. Matt. 5:28). It stands for love

which will remain "in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth, for better or for worse." As the ring is an endless circle, so the love of two people will go on throughout life.

A wedding ring serves as a practical reminder. Each time husbands and wives look to the third finger on their left hand, they are reminded that they belong to one another. The ring says to others, "I am not free to flirt because I am lovingly committed to my mate."

May God help all to see the significance of wedding rings! *WOT*

AFTER I'M GONE

Joseph D. Chase, Pittsburg, Texas

Hebrews 11:4 records these amazing words, "he being dead still speaks." This passage reveals that the good testimony of Abel lives on even though he has gone the way of all the earth (Josh. 23:14)—a living legacy from the grave. What will we leave behind to speak for us when we are dead? Will it be like Joshua's influence that lived on in the generation after his death?

"And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old. . . . And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel" (Josh 24:29-31).

Egypt prospered after Joseph's death until a king rose up who decided not to know Joseph or follow his goodness.

Some people are soon forgotten. Others we try to forget. Only few are indelibly marked upon our minds because of their good and noble characteristics.

Methuselah lived 969 years but little else is known about him. Jesus lived only a brief 33 years and we remember much about Him. When we leave this world what marks will we leave behind?

The equation for remembrance is

quite simple. To leave behind an example worthy of emulation we must live a life dedicated to God's service (2 Tim. 2:21). Few passages summarize this better than Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Although this plan is simple few are selfless enough to follow it. To do justly really means to do what is right. The Psalmist declares that all of God's commandments are righteous (Psa. 119:172). Our days should be filled with doing what God tells us to do.

"O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). "Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day" (Psa. 25:4-5).

The lovers of mercy are gems among the stones—seldom do we find them. Our Lord taught us about the high price of being unmerciful (Matt. 18:33-35). The merciless usually are those who have discounted the mercy God has already shown to them. The ungrateful and implacable always team up with the unmerciful in the devil's army. If I truly love the mercy God has given me I'll try my best to show it to others.

The greatest servant is the most humble servant. That is a truth turned upside down from what men practice. The prideful king Nebuchadnezzar even learned this lesson. "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down" (Dan. 4:37).

Pride has destroyed many men and many nations (Obad. 3-4). Man cannot fend for himself. We breath God's air, eat His food, and cool in His breezes. To deny such is impudence of the grossest kind.

"Walking humbly" reminds us of the blessed Savior's example. He came not to do His will but to do the will of God who sent Him (John 5:30). He became poor so that we might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9). In His humility He bore the burden of the sins of us all (Isa. 53:1-7). You and I can follow in His steps by submitting to God's will and not our own (Matt. 26:24).

After I am gone people will speak of me . . . but for how long? What deeds will follow me (Rev. 14:13)? Will I have made a difference for the cause of Christ?

Only one life, It soon will pass,
Only what's done for Christ will
last. *WOT*

WHEN YOU GET TO WHERE YOU ARE GOING, WHERE WILL YOU BE?

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

The story is told of an Army chaplain who was asked to preach at a church some twenty miles from the base. He took his family along but had neglected to tell his six-year-old daughter where they were going. After a few miles on the road, she asked, "Dad, when we get to where we're going, where will we be?" A good question! It's also one all of us should try to answer for ourselves.

Paul told the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:5). Certainly each of us should examine his life on a regular basis. Think of your journey of life. When you get to where you're going, where will you be? If you continue in the direction you are going in the physical sense, where will you be next year? In five years? Twenty years from now? What will you look like physically? How much money will you have saved for the future? How many of your goals will you have accomplished?

More importantly, consider your spiritual life. If you continue in your current direction, where will you be spiritually in five, ten, or twenty years? How many people will be able to point to you as a positive influence in their lives? What will your record of contribution to the Lord's cause reveal? How much will you have grown? Just where will you be when you get where you are going?

Still more important is the subject of eternity. Since there are only two possibilities regarding it (Matt. 25:46), in which place will you be when you get where you are going? The Lord will one day come "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:8). Would you be among that number if that day should be today? Have you obeyed the gospel of Christ? If not, consider just where you will be when you get where you are going.

WOT

The Words of Truth

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

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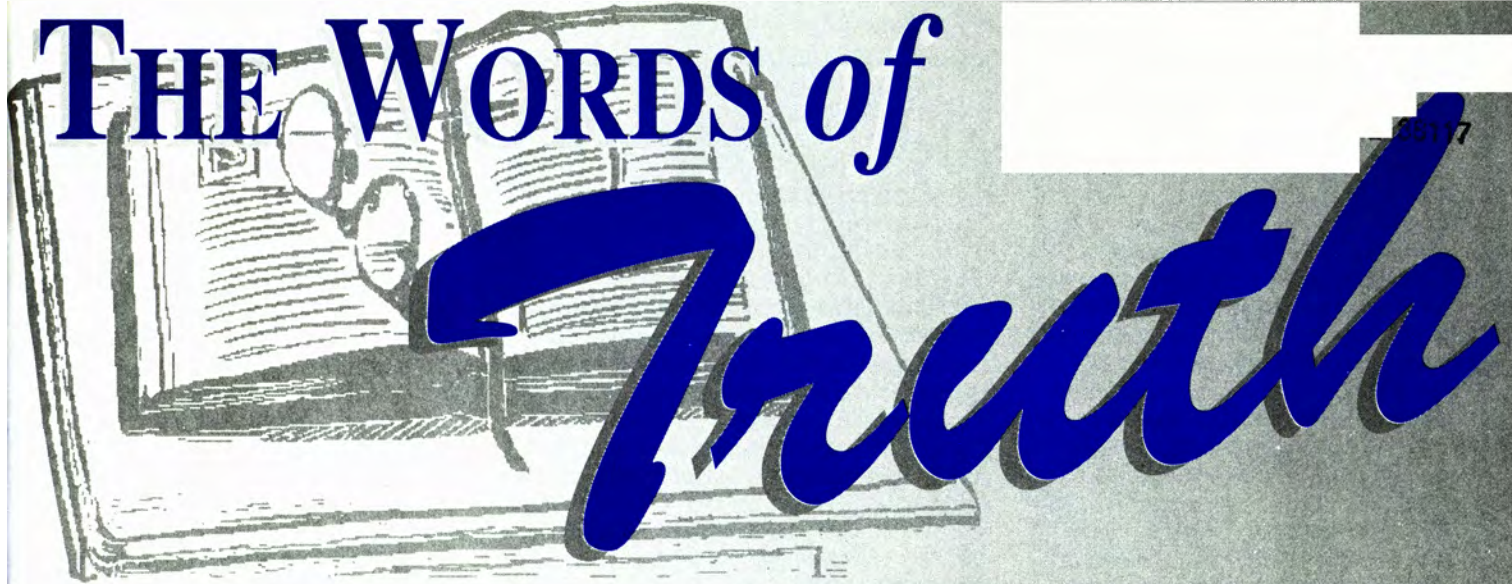
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

Vol. 39 No. 6

June 2002

THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

Tim Hockersmith, Green Cove Springs, Florida

Many denominations point to Cornelius' conversion as evidence that baptism is not required for salvation. They say that Cornelius and his house received the Holy Ghost baptism [and therefore salvation] *before* they were baptized. Is that so?

The conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion living in Caesarea, is actually related twice in the New Testament. The first account is told by Luke in Acts 10 and the second account by Peter relating the same story to the other apostles and the brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18).

The fact that Cornelius and his house received the Holy Ghost *before* they were baptized cannot be denied, and is confirmed in Acts 10:44 and in Acts 11:15. But was it the act of receiving the Holy Ghost that saved them? The Bible itself answers that question.

In five instances within these two accounts we are told that Cornelius would be told by Peter what he ought to do.

- In Acts 10:6 the angel of God said to Cornelius, "... he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do."
- Then, in verse 22, as the three men sent by Cornelius to Peter related their story, they said that Cornelius, "... was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee."

- Again, in verse 32, as Cornelius related the account of the angel to Peter, he said, "... who [referring to Peter], when he cometh, shall speak unto thee."
- And in 10:33, Cornelius ended his explanation with, "... Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."
- And lastly, Peter himself related the most profound description when he said in Acts 11:14, "Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

It is therefore evident that it was Peter's words [instructions] that would lead Cornelius to salvation, not the receiving of the Holy Ghost. This must be the case, or else the angel of God lied to Cornelius, and Peter lied to the other apostles and brethren in Jerusalem.

And what were Peter's instructions to Cornelius and his house? Look at Acts 10:48: "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." This is the command given to Cornelius by Peter, and must therefore be the "words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

This then raises the question: Why did Cornelius receive the Holy Ghost prior to baptism? Up to this time, the gospel had

only been made available to the Jew. Remember that through the vision God revealed to Peter that he should not call any man common or unclean (Acts 10:9-16). This was in total opposition to what Peter had been taught his whole life as a Jew. But he was now being taught that the Gentile was not to be considered unclean (Acts 10:28), which is why he accepted the call from Cornelius to come to Caesarea (v. 29).

Far more importantly, it was seeing the Holy Ghost fall upon these Gentiles that convinced Peter that salvation through Jesus Christ was being presented to the Gentiles. As he explained to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17).

The fact that the Holy Ghost fell upon Cornelius and his house before they were baptized is undeniable, but its purpose was to convince the apostles that the gospel of Jesus Christ was now being offered to the Gentiles, not to save Cornelius.

Cornelius and his house were saved exactly the same way that you and I are saved today—by hearing and believing the gospel, repenting of our sins, confessing the name of Jesus, and being baptized for the remission of our sins.

WOT

CHRISTIANS AND THE OCCULT (3)

WHAT ABOUT *HARRY POTTER*?

Chuck Webster, Editorial

One of this summer's hottest movies is "Minority Report," a futuristic thriller about a police operation known as "Pre-Crime," a system which prevents murder by using the premonitions of three "psychics" who have visions of pending murders.¹ This film's box office draw is just another indication of the tremendous popularity of the occult in modern culture. In the two previous articles in this series, we have introduced the occult, as well as noticed its various manifestations (divination, Satanism, etc.). In this final article we first offer a response to the occult in general and then to the immensely popular *Harry Potter* books.²

Responding to the *practice* of the occult is simple: we must avoid every form. While astrologists want us to believe that our future is somehow predestined—that we are simply pawns in the hands of cosmological forces—we put our faith in God to guide our paths as we follow His will. Our natural curiosity to know the future is assuaged by our confidence in the One who holds the future in His hands; thus astrology and divination hold no temptation for us. Though on some purely emotional level we may wish to speak to a departed loved one, we take comfort in our relationship with Christ—who has conquered the unseen realm and now "ever liveth to make intercession" for us (Heb. 7:25). We avoid witchcraft and sorcery, understanding their pagan and faithless origin. Thus the Christian's attitude toward occultic practice is absolute—we shun it.

But what about purportedly "innocent" forms of magic and sorcery such as those pictured in *Harry Potter*, one of the most visible and popular book series in today's culture? In this area the response seems to be less clear-cut. Some allege that *Harry Potter* is anything but "innocent" or harmless, while others suggest with equal conviction that its "magic" is completely innocuous. Our purpose in this editorial is to help Christians make an *informed* decision. Thus, we include information about *Harry Potter* and include numerous quotes from those on both sides of this question.

HARRY POTTER 101

So who is this Harry Potter anyway? Put quite simply, Harry is the main character in a series of books by J.K. Rowling—magical stories centered on one boy's adventures at Hogwarts, a school for

witchcraft and wizardry. His parents were murdered by an evil wizard when he was one year old, but he survived, mysteriously ending the wizard's reign of terror. He was then sent to be reared by his aunt and uncle, and at age eleven was invited to attend Hogwarts to discover his heritage and destiny. The books detail his exploits while at Hogwarts, where he perfects his wizardry and overcomes myriad challenges.

SOME SAY *HARRY POTTER* SHOULD BE AVOIDED.

Opponents set forth three primary objections to *Harry Potter*:

1. *Potter* desensitizes our society to the occult. Alan Ingalls suggests:

Harry Potter treats the occult and its practices as neutral and in some cases as useful. *Harry Potter* has become a poster boy for witchcraft, and the pagans are delighted that he is creating a good image for them. Those who read *Harry Potter* uncritically may be desensitized to a way of life that God condemns . . .³

John Andrew Murray agrees, suggesting that

by disassociating magic and supernatural evil, it becomes possible to portray occult practices as "good" and "healthy," contrary to the scriptural declaration that such practices are "detestable to the Lord." This, in turn, opens the door for kids to become fascinated with the supernatural while tragically failing to seek or recognize the one true source of supernatural good—namely God.⁴

Alison Lentini suggests that *Potter* has caused us to abandon a "biblically informed caution about all things magical." She continues:

Magic in all ages has always represented a deep, unholy distortion of the divinely ordained relationships between creature, Creation, and Creator. Thus, we see the Holy One of Israel's "zero-tolerance" policy regarding magical practices, explicitly addressed in the giving of the law (Lev. 19:31; 20:27), . . . For those who

seek conformity with the teachings of the [Bible], "safe magic" is wishful thinking, intellectual dishonesty, and an invitation to the spiritual deviations that the Hebrew prophets bluntly referred to as "harlotry," and the New Testament apostles forbade. As such, the "safe magic" of *Harry Potter* offers a message that is as morally confusing to a generation of children as the current ideology of "safe sex."⁵

2. *Potter* promises curiosity and experimentation with the occult. Because *Potter* sometimes presents sorcery as fun and exciting, many are fearful that it will lead children toward dangerous forms of the occult.

3. *Potter* removes God and moral absolutes. Ingalls suggests that "the books have no Creator God who reveals His will and His ways to mankind." The books promote a

kind of dualism—the idea that there are two equal, uncreated, antagonistic forces, one good and one evil, and that choosing between the two is purely a matter of personal opinion. Rowling's readers are ultimately left in a morally confused world.⁶

As another author puts it, the books "don't acknowledge any supernatural powers or moral authority at all."⁷

Not all people who hold to a conservative approach to Scripture, however, agree with the negative conclusions set forth above.

SOME BELIEVE *HARRY POTTER* IS HARMLESS.

Potter apologists have responded to the criticisms levied above. To the possibility of our becoming desensitized to the occult, Colson counters:

The magic in these books is purely mechanical, as opposed to occultic. That is, Harry and his friends cast spells, read crystal balls, and turn themselves into animals—but they don't make contact with a supernatural world."⁸

Lindy Beam suggests that "children who read about Harry will probably discover little to nothing about the true world of the

occult.”⁹ Beam continues by asserting that even though we know God hates the practice of witchcraft (Deut. 18:10), “we have committed a fault of logic in saying that reading about witches and wizards *necessarily* translates into these occultic practices.”¹⁰ Others agree that we should be wary of an overly positive portrayal of magic, but believe that the *Potter* books do not fall into that category: “in them magic is often fun, often surprising and exciting, but also always potentially dangerous.”¹¹ Another author agrees:

Modern witchcraft is indeed an ensnaring, seductive false religion that we must protect our children from. . . . But the literary witchcraft of the *Harry Potter* series has almost no resemblance to the I-am-God mumbo jumbo of Wiccan circles. Author J.K. Rowling has created a world with real good and evil, and Harry is definitely on the side of light fighting the “dark powers.”¹²

In response to the charge that *Potter* may stimulate curiosity in the occult, Beam sees that as a potentially positive thing: “I would propose instead that reading *Harry Potter* produces *curiosity* and that it is what we do with that curiosity that makes all the difference.”¹³

Supporters of *Potter* disagree with the assertion that *Harry Potter* sets forth a negative moral framework:

I think good and evil and clear and absolute in the books, just not fully explained—yet.¹⁴ . . . Rowling’s moral compass throughout the novels is sound—indeed, I would say, acute. . . . The clarity with which Rowling sees the need to choose between good and evil is admirable, but still more admirable to my mind, is her refusal to allow a simple division of parties into the Good and the Evil. *Harry Potter* is unquestionably a good boy, but, as I have suggested, a key component of his virtue arises from his recognition that he is not *inevitably* good.¹⁵

In addition to answering critics’ charges, they set forth several positive reasons for embracing the *Harry Potter* books:

1. *Potter* teaches positive lessons. One eleven-year-old girl wrote a letter entitled, “Top Ten Things I Learned from the *Harry Potter* Books”: (1) Witchcraft: Don’t try this at home! (2) It’s your choices that make you who you are. You may come from a bad family or a good family; but it’s choices you make that make you who YOU

are. I come from a good family, but I still have to make good choices to keep it going. (3) Don’t think someone is bad until you hear the whole story. You could be wrong. (4) Don’t let enemies provoke you. (5) Don’t judge people by their race. (6) Gossip hurts people, badly. I decided never to spread or believe gossip. (7) Lots of entertainment, little bit of money! I used to entertain myself by playing video games or watching television. Now, I learned the joy of reading. I’m also reading *Chronicles of Narnia*. (8) Don’t take vengeance. You may feel like it, but don’t. Harry could have lost his godfather if he had given in to his feelings of vengeance against someone he *thought* betrayed his parents to Voldemort. (9) Be on guard against evil. I saw different ways evil can hide itself to look good. So, I learned to beware. (10) Choose your friends carefully. They influence which way your life goes. Pick good friends and keep them.¹⁶

Though Harry *is* pursued by followers of a murderous wizard (Voldemort), as the author, J.K. Rowling, points out, “the theme running through all of these books is the fight between good and evil.” Colson argues that the plots

reinforce the theme that evil is real and must be courageously opposed. . . . Harry and his friends . . . develop courage, loyalty, and a willingness to sacrifice for one another—even at the risk of their lives. Not bad lessons in a self-centered world.¹⁷

2. *Potter* encourages children to enjoy reading. Few argue with the fact that many children who have never enjoyed reading have been drawn into the world of literature by the *Potter* series.

3. *Potter* stimulates curiosity that may lead to searching God’s Word for answers. Some suggest that the books present a tremendous opportunity for parents to teach their children about God. Questions about sorcery will naturally arise, and discerning parents will make certain their children turn to the Bible for the answers.

In response to these arguments, however, opponents suggest that even if they are true, the potentially negative effects remain. Children might learn positive lessons from a sexually explicit book as well, but that does not make it beneficial. Children’s enjoyment of reading may increase, but what if they become fascinated with the occult? Positive arguments for almost any form of entertainment could be advanced, but that certainly does not mean we should embrace them without considering the potentially

devastating effects otherwise.

Conclusion

So what are we to do with *Harry Potter*? At the very least, the numerous Scriptural warnings concerning the occult should raise a red flag and cause us prayerfully to consider whether the risks are worth the potential rewards.

The easiest response is to disregard any potentially harmful effects and embrace whatever our culture believes is enjoyable and exciting. Discerning Christians, however, want to make sure that they aren’t falling prey to worldly pressure to desensitize themselves toward things which God abhors.

At the same time, we should try not to react negatively without being fully informed; such a knee-jerk reaction harms the cause of Christ. We encourage our readers to be cautious, discerning, and informed with everything we allow into our homes. Paul’s admonition is appropriate: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

Endnotes

¹See http://www.screenit.com/movies/2002/minority_report.html for a description of this movie, including a discussion of several objectionable elements—profanity, sexual references, etc.

²For a fair-handed treatment of *Harry Potter* from a “Christian” perspective, see Connie Neal, *What’s a Christian To Do With Harry Potter?* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001). Most of the quotations cited in this article are referenced by Neal.

³Alan D. Ingalls, “A Christian Perspective on the Harry Potter Phenomenon,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology*, Vol. 5 (2001), pp. 69-88.

⁴John Andrew Murray, “Harry Dilemma,” *Teachers in Focus* (February 2000). <http://www.family.org/cforum/teachersmag/>.

⁵Alison Lentini, “Harry Potter: Occult Cosmology and the Corrupted Imagination . . . an excerpt,” Spiritual Counterfeits Project. <http://www.scp-inc.org/publications/journals/J2304/PotterArticle.htm>.

⁶John Andrew Murray, “Harry Dilemma.”

⁷Lindy Beam, “Exploring Harry Potter’s World.” From *Focus on the Family* magazine, Vol. 24, No. 5 (May 2000): 15, published by Focus on the Family, 2000. Beam advocates a cautious

approach to *Potter*, but does not oppose the series.

⁸Chuck Colson, "Witches and Wizards: The Harry Potter Phenomenon." Adapted from BreakPoint (www.christianitytoday.com/breakpoint) by Connie Neal, *What's a Christian To Do With Harry Potter?*

⁹Lindy Beam.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Alan Jacobs, "Harry Potter's Magic," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* (January 2000). <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0001/reviews/jacobs.html>.

¹²*Christianity Today* editorial, "Why We Like Harry Potter," *Christianity Today* (1999). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/001/29.37.html>.

¹³Lindy Beam.

¹⁴Michael G. Maudlin, "Virtue on a Broomstick," *Christianity Today* (September 4, 2000): 117-9.

¹⁵Alan Jacobs.

¹⁶"Letters to the Editor," *Christianity Today*. <http://www.christianitytoday.com>.

¹⁷Chuck Colson.

WOT

SCIENTIFIC ACCURACIES IN THE BIBLE

Brad Harrub, Ph.D., Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama

Somewhere buried in the recesses of my brain are the smells of paste, the textures of construction paper and No. 2 pencils, and the sounds of chalk writing out lessons on a chalkboard. Those memories of elementary school recall to mind teachers' names and faces, and the classroom textbooks—textbooks such as the McGraw-Hill history book that I used in the fifth grade. Somewhere concealed in those pages was the story of Christopher Columbus and his famous journey to America. I remember, as most Americans do, being taught that ancient people during Columbus' day believed the Earth was flat. As such, textbook pictures often showed a map with a boat at the edge ready to either fall off or be devoured by a wicked sea creature. While we do not know the exact date when people began accepting the fact that the Earth was round, we do know that the images that NASA provided—images from astronauts who had turned their cameras back towards the Earth—left little doubt in the minds of most people of the circularity of our home planet.

The Earth is round—and here in the year 2002 we can pat ourselves on the back for recognizing such. Yet God's Word foretold this fact literally thousands of years ago. Isaiah, in speaking of God, stated: "It is he who sitteth upon the circle of the earth" (40:22). The Hebrew word Isaiah used for "circle" is the word *khug*, which means literally something with "roundness," a "sphere." But, of course, the people of Isaiah's day thought the Earth was flat. And that was the concept of the many generations of people who followed Isaiah. Isaiah had been correct all along, even when the people of his day emphatically stated the opposite. How did Isaiah know the Earth to be a sphere? Lucky guess?

In trying to teach people about God and the Gospel, we often run into people who question the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible. Most of us probably can name someone who does not accept that the Bible is truly God's Word—that it is the **only** inspired book, and as such should be

followed. So what do we tell them? How do we move from simply stating opinions, to convincing them to accept the Truth? What are some tools with which each one of us can equip ourselves in order to teach our friends, family, and neighbors about the accuracy of God's Word? We sometimes fail to realize that if individuals understand and accept the Bible as inspired, then teaching them to obey the Gospel becomes much easier. One of the best tools to enforce the inspiration of the Bible is the scientific accuracies that are found within the pages of God's Word. While space will not permit a full review of every incidence of scientific foreknowledge contained in the Bible, the following examples provide strong evidence for The Book's inspiration.

While most of us can remember studying the planets and their orbit around the Sun, how many of us are familiar with the **Sun's** orbit? Psalm 19:5-6 contains several interesting scientific facts. In speaking of the Sun, the psalmist suggested that "his going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." For years Bible critics scoffed at Bible believers, stating that this verse taught the false concept of geocentricity (i.e., the Sun revolves around the Earth). Then on June 1, 1999, at 9:40 p.m., radio astronomers measured the **Sun's** orbit throughout the Milky Way galaxy. We learned that rather than being fixed in space, the Sun actually is in an orbit of its own. In fact, it is estimated to be moving through space at the rate of 600,000 miles per hour, in an orbit so large it would take approximately 220,000,000 years to complete just one orbit. How did the psalmist portray such accurate statements—when people of his day, and for years afterward, taught that just the opposite was true? And, by the way, there is another gem packed away in these two verses. The psalmist hinted at the fact that the Sun is the source of energy for the Earth ("and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof"). An amazing statement, is it

not, considering when it was written and by whom?

Electric light, one of the everyday conveniences that affect our lives, was invented in 1879 simultaneously by Thomas Alva Edison in the United States and Sir Joseph Wilson Swan in England. By the 1950s, most new homes were being wired for electricity so the owners could take advantage of this new discovery. In discussing light and darkness, the Lord asked Job: "Where is the way to the dwelling of the light? And as for darkness, where is the place thereof?" (38:19). The Lord described the travel of light in a "way" (Hebrew, *derek*, which is literally a traveled path or road; cf. Gen. 16:7), whereas darkness was described as a "place" (Hebrew, *maxim*, meaning a place, a spot, as standing; cf. Gen. 1:9; 28:11). Until the seventeenth century, it was believed that light was transmitted instantaneously. Then, Sir Isaac Newton suggested that light is composed of small particles that travel in a straight line. Christian Huygens proposed the wave theory of light, and Olaus Roemer measured the velocity of light as evinced by its delay while traveling through space. Scientists now know that light is a form of energy called radiant energy, and that it travels in electromagnetic waves in a straight line at the speed of over 186,000 miles per second (660 million miles per hour). For example, it takes about eight minutes for light to travel its "path" from the Sun to the Earth. Some evolutionists, who deny the chronological data found in the Bible, have suggested that light, which spans the distances from stars to us, proves the Universe is billions of years old. They overlook, of course, the fact that God created the heavenly lights already in place (Gen. 1:14-16) to serve as a "witness" of His infinite power and for man's benefit (Psa. 19:1). God, in making His perfect, mature Universe, formed the stars so that their light could be seen on Earth.

Jehovah also inquired of Job, "By what way is light parted?" (38:24). The word "parted" is from the Hebrew *halaq*,

meaning to divide, allot, apportion (cf. Num. 26:53). Though the Lord simply may have been asking the patriarch if he knew how light is distributed on Earth, nonetheless it is an amazing scientific fact that light literally can be parted. When a narrow beam of sunlight passes at a slant into a triangular, transparent prism, the sunlight is broken into a band of seven colored lights referred to as a spectrum. Sir Isaac Newton eventually discovered this, yet the writer of the book of Job knew it first.

Long ago, Solomon wrote, "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again" (Eccl. 1:7). This statement, considered by itself, may not appear all that significant. But when considered with additional evidence and other biblical passages, it becomes all the more remarkable. Having lived just outside of Memphis, Tennessee, for many years, I had many opportunities to observe the massive Mississippi River. When it is moving at normal speed, scientists have calculated that the river dumps approximately 6,052,500 gallons of water per second into the Gulf of Mexico. So where does all that water go? The answer, of course, lies in the hydrologic cycle so well illustrated in the Bible. Ecclesiastes 11:3 states that "if the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." Amos 9:6 informs us that "He . . . calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; the Lord is His name." The idea of a complete water cycle was not fully understood or accepted until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first substantial evidence came from experiments of Frenchmen Pierre Perrault and Edme Mariotte. These scientists demonstrated that the flow of the Seine River could be accounted for by precipitation. Astronomer Edmund Halley

also contributed valuable data to the concept of a complete water cycle. More than 2,000 years prior to their work, however, the Scriptures had indicated a water cycle. How?

If you never had journeyed to the depths of the ocean (or heard news reports about such), what would you expect the appearance of the bottom of the deep to look like? Most of us would relate that body of water with other bodies of water with which we are familiar. As such, we likely would envision something similar to ponds, lakes, or pools—i.e., a flat, muddy, or sandy bottom. God asked Job, "Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?" (38:16). The Hebrew word for "recesses" (or "trenches") refers to that which is "hidden, and known only by investigation." What were these "recesses of the deep" (the Hebrew word for "deep" is the word for seas or oceans)? In 1873 a team of British scientists working in the Pacific Ocean found a "recess" 5½ miles deep. Later, another team of researchers discovered another trench 35,800 feet deep (over six miles down). Extensive studies have now been conducted on the Mariana Trench off the coast of Guam. The bathyscaph *Trieste* has traveled down almost seven miles into that trench. Today we have found trenches in all three major oceans. We also have discovered freshwater springs emptying into the oceans. How did Job know about these "springs" and "recesses in the deep," when we did not discover them until centuries later? Another lucky guess?

While the Old Testament placed no restrictions on the eating of fruits and vegetables, severe limitations were given for the eating of certain meats. Among land animals, only those that had a split hoof and chewed the cud were approved as edible (Lev. 11:3). Of the water-living animals, only those with fins and scales

were acceptable (Lev. 11:9; of interest is the fact that poisonous fish have no scales). Birds of prey were prohibited, as were almost all insects. But perhaps the best known among these biblical injunctions was eating the meat of a pig. To the Israelite, pork was considered unclean, and thus was inedible. Today, we know there is good scientific reasoning behind such a prohibition. The pig is a scavenger and will eat almost anything. In so doing, on occasion it ingests the parasite, *Trichinella spiralis*, which is the cause of trichinosis in humans. Left untreated, this disease can be debilitating and even deadly. Pigs also are known carriers (as intermediate hosts) of the tapeworm *Taenia solium*, and of the parasite *Echinococcus granulosus*, which causes tumors in the liver, lungs, and other parts of the body. Raw or undercooked pork can be quite dangerous when consumed by humans. Pigs can provide safe meat if they are fed properly and if the muscle tissue is cooked correctly. But such conditions often did not prevail in ancient times.

In the early 1900s, American infidel Robert Ingersoll claimed regarding the Bible: "In fifteen years, I will have this book in the morgue." But, as history records, Ingersoll ended up in the morgue, while the Bible lives on. Governments come and go. Nations rise and fall. People live and die. Jesus warned that "heaven and earth shall pass away" (Matt. 24:35), but went on to note: "My words shall not pass away." Isaiah wrote: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever" (40:8). The Bible is truly the only God-breathed book in existence, and literally is filled with examples that support its accuracy and authenticity—examples that simultaneously strengthen our faith and make excellent teaching tools. WOT

BEHOLD, BEHEMOTH!

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

[for a storehouse of excellent material, visit the author's web site—"Christian Courier on the Web"—at www.christiancourier.com]

In the second phase of the concluding encounter between God and Job (see Job 38:1ff), the Almighty said to the patriarch: "Behold, now behemoth, which I made . . ." (Job 40:15). The Lord then described a monstrous creature that was beyond man's ability to control and thus a wonderful example of the superiority of Heaven's power compared to man's.

Earlier in this marvelous book, the famous patriarch of Uz had become the victim of a series of devastating blows that

would have crushed most men. He had lost his material prosperity (which was considerable), his children (all ten of them) were killed, his health failed (he was afflicted with a loathsome disease), and there was the disdain of his wife and friends. All in all, he felt this was a punishment quite out of proportion to any weaknesses he had.

He complained, therefore, that his Maker was mismanaging the affairs of this earth. Time and again, he challenged the

Lord to meet with him, in order to debate this matter. The noble patriarch felt sure he could prevail in the event of such an encounter.

Finally, after Job had "rattled on" for a sufficient time, Jehovah issued a response to his frustrated servant. He began by asking Job a series of penetrating questions (roughly sixty) – first, relative to the inanimate creation (38:4-38), and then with reference to the animate world (38:39-39:30).

Eventually, God paused in His intensive interrogation (which the man of Uz royally “flunked”), and gave the patriarch opportunity to respond (40:1-2). But Job could say nothing, choosing, rather, to “rest his case” on the arguments previously introduced (40:5). The patriarch had made some progress, but he had not come as far as he needed to. And so the Lord brings him to “Round Two.”

In effect Jehovah said to his servant: “Job, by your criticism of me, you seem to think you are qualified to ‘be God.’ Very well, why don’t you adorn yourself with the apparel of deity (excellency, dignity, honor, and majesty – v. 10)? When you have demonstrated your ability to act as God, I stand ready to listen to you” (cf. v. 14).

This appears to be the Lord’s argument. If one exalts himself to the status of God (asserting his right to criticize his Maker), then he also must be as powerful as God. The Creator’s plenitude in wisdom and power are co-equal. If Job is as wise as he apparently thinks he is, he should be exceedingly strong as well – but *is he?*

The Lord then proceeded to introduce two terribly powerful creatures – one of the land, behemoth (40:15-24), and the other of the sea, leviathan (41:1-34). Neither of these massive creatures is subject to control by man – including Job. Consequently, the irresistible conclusion that must follow is this: *man is not qualified to criticize God’s moral operation of the earth.*

With this brief background sketch, we will henceforth focus upon behemoth. Is it possible to identify this monstrous creature?

Behemoth, Chief of the Ways of God

The English word “behemoth” is an anglicized, plural form of the Hebrew *behema* (found nine times in the Old Testament). The word basically means “beast,” and the term commonly is used generically (cf. Gen. 6:7). In Job 40:15ff, however, the description provided by the inspired writer clearly indicates that a specific animal is in view. The plural format is generally regarded as a device to *intensify*, i.e., “great beast.” As one writer notes, the significance is “super beast,” i.e., “the noblest and strongest beast” (Hartley, 523). T.K. Cheyne suggested the meaning of “a colossal beast” (1.519).

Exactly what sort of creature was this “behemoth,” to which the Lord so powerfully appealed in his humbling examination of Job? Let us note what the text actually says.

“Behold now, behemoth, which I made

as well as you; he eats grass like an ox. Look, his strength is in his loins. And his force is in the muscles of his belly. He moves his tail like a cedar: The sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are as tubes of brass; his limbs are like bars of iron. He is the chief of the ways of God: only He who made him gives him his sword. Surely the mountains bring forth food for him – where all the beasts of the field do play. He lies under the lotus trees, in the covert of the reeds and the marsh. The lotus trees cover him with their shade; the willows of the brook surround him. Behold, if a river overflows, he does not tremble; he is confident, though a Jordan [swift river] swell even to his mouth. Shall any take him when he is on the watch, or pierce through his nose with a snare?”

Over many years numerous attempts have been made to identify this awesome creature. The purpose of this discussion is to weigh the merits of the most prominent ideas, thus attempting to arrive at a reasonable conclusion.

A Myth or Symbol

Liberal scholars dismiss the account as a mere mythological fantasy of antiquity (Cheyne, 520; Terrien, 1186). Such a view will be rejected summarily by the reverent Bible student. Jehovah could hardly have pressed his case with Job if the patriarch knew that behemoth was simply a fictitious creature. This theory, therefore, warrants no further attention.

Others, with an equally weak case, similarly suggest that behemoth was not a real animal, but merely a “symbolic” creature, with exaggerated features borrowed from the hippopotamus (Smick, 1048-49).

An Elephant

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), a noted theologian of the Roman Catholic system, thought that behemoth was an elephant. This view, however, has never entertained much credibility among scholars, and for several reasons. The elephant is not by any means the “chief” of those beasts that have roamed the earth. Too, the elephant’s strength is in his neck, head, and tusks, not in his “belly.” In fact, he is most vulnerable in the abdominal region. Finally, the elephant’s tail does not remind one of a “cedar” tree—even remotely.

Crocodile

The New English Bible, published in the Old Testament format in 1970, presumptuously rendered behemoth by the term “crocodile.” That identification can

scarcely be accurate, however, since behemoth was clearly a grass-eater, while the crocodile is carnivorous. Moreover, it hardly seems reasonable to speak of a river “swelling even to his mouth,” in contemplating the crocodile.

In addition, the Lord emphasized that only behemoth’s Maker could vanquish the creature; certainly man could not take him (vv. 19b, 24). By way of contrast, Herodotus (c. 484-425 B.C.) described how the Egyptians captured the crocodile, tamed it, venerated the beast, and even adorned it with jewelry (II.69-70).

Hippopotamus

The most popular view is that behemoth was the hippopotamus (see footnotes in ASV, RSV, ESV, etc.). But there are objections to this theory as well. Behemoth is ranked as the “chief” of the Lord’s creatures (v. 19). The Hebrew term suggests “one of the hugest creatures” (Delitzsch, 361). Barnes observed that “chief” signified “first” in “size and strength” (250). The fact is, the hippopotamus is third in line among the larger varieties of earth’s creatures, being surpassed by both the elephant and the rhinoceros. He is not the “chief” in the modern world, much less the ancient one.

Rawlinson, who argues on behalf of the hippo, concedes this is a problem for the hippo theory – since the elephant is larger. He opines, however, that the author of Job may not have known of the elephant. A scholar as erudite as he should not need to be reminded that *God* was the author of this description!

It might be mentioned as well that whereas the hippo weighs a bit under three tons, some of the animals of the dinosaur kind weighed many times as much. The Brachiosaurus is estimated to have weighed about eighty-five tons, standing at the equivalent of a five-story building (see Weishampel, 206ff). The hippo is hardly “chief” compared to this gentleman!

In addition, the hippo’s tail is only about twenty inches long. It certainly does not resemble the cedar tree, the most massive tree known in the Palestinean region of old, often attaining the height of some 120 feet (see Bromiley, I.626). Though Anderson favors the hippo as the best candidate, he nevertheless admits: “It is hard to see how his tail can be compared to a cedar, for the tail of the hippopotamus is small and short” (289).

Finally, Rawlinson noted that the Egyptians, “from very early times, used to attack the hippopotamus and slay him” (642). The Greek historian Herodotus said that the ancients would dry the tough skin of the hippo and from it make javelins (II.71). There are Egyptian tile mosaics that

depict the men of that country spearing the hippo from their boats. One Egyptologist states that it was a “customary thing with the old Egyptians to thus attack these animals” (cited by McClintock, IV, 279).

Dinosaur

Why do you suppose that a dinosaur is rarely proposed as a candidate for behemoth? The answer is very simple. The common perception is that dinosaurs became extinct long before man arrived upon this planet (some 65 million years, it is alleged). Accordingly, behemoth could not be a variety of dinosaur – because the chronological disparity prohibits such. Dr. Henry Morris has addressed the matter in this fashion.

Modern Bible scholars, for the most part, have become so conditioned to think in terms of the long ages of evolutionary geology that it never occurs to them that mankind once lived in the same world with the great animals that are now found only as fossils (Morris, 115).

But the fact of the matter is this. There is unequivocal biblical testimony that human beings and dinosaurs inhabited the same early environment of the earth, and there is not a shred of scientific evidence that proves otherwise. The following points are but an abbreviated summation of the biblical case for human and dinosaur coexistence.

In the first chapter of Genesis, Moses describes the land creatures that were brought into existence on the sixth day of the initial week of Earth’s history. Three Hebrew words are employed to summarize these animals – *behemah* (livestock, i.e., domestic animals), *remes* (creeping things), and *hayath-ha’ares*, (beasts – literally “living creatures,” i.e., wild animals).

Stigers has observed that these terms are very broad and are “capable of quite wide interpretation. All subclasses are included” (61).

[T]he threefold distinction does no more than describe the animals in accordance with the way the average person looks at these creatures. At the same time it is obvious that the intent is to include all the various kinds of land animals (Aalders, 68).

Later, *on the same day*, man and woman were created. Only a textual manipulation of the most egregious sort can evade the obvious import of the sacred narrative.

Later, Moses, the author of the entire Pentateuch, supplemented his earlier

record regarding the creation, with these words: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Ex. 20:11). Since both dinosaurs and humans were created things, and inasmuch as *all* Earth’s creatures came into being during the same week, it follows logically that dinosaurs and human beings were companions upon the primitive planet. If not, where is the flaw in the argument?

The Old Testament prophets did not subscribe to the modern view that man arrived upon this globe millions of years after its initial commencement. In a blistering rebuke of the idolatry of his day, Isaiah calls attention to man’s lack of knowledge relative to the nature of the true God. Such is inexcusable, the prophet implies, because the record of history is clear. The truth about the Creator had been available by means of testimony that extended “from the beginning,” yes, even from “the foundations of the earth” (Isa. 40:21). This places humankind at the dawn of creation.

The Son of God himself contended that the human family had its genesis during the creation week. In a dispute with the Pharisees regarding the nature of the family, he pointedly declared: “But from the beginning of the creation, Male and female made he them” (Mk. 10:6).

Cremer has shown that the expression “the creation” denotes the “sum-total of what God has created” (381; cf. Danker, 573). See also Mark 13:19.

The inspired apostles repudiated the notion that humankind was a late arrival upon the earth. Paul wrote that the invisible attributes of God, since the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being perceived in the things that have been made (Rom. 1:20). There are several important points to note.

First, there is a clear affirmation that the world (*kosmos* – universe) was “created,” i.e., it is not eternal, nor did it bring itself into existence from nothingness.

Second, in this visible universe, some of the invisible attributes of the Creator are discerned, e.g., His power and wisdom. Moreover these evidences are “clearly seen.” The Greek term *kathorao* signifies to draw a conclusion “with the eye of reason” (Danker, 493), which is further confirmed by the present participle, “being perceived” (*noeo*). This term means “to grasp or comprehend something on the basis of careful thought, perceive, apprehend, understand, gain an insight into” (Danker, 674).

These terms imply that human beings have been analyzing God’s handiwork

from the very beginning of time. The language absolutely excludes the idea that the world was in existence eons before the arrival of man.

Conclusion

When all of the evidence is in, a compelling case can be made for the view that the “behemoth,” to which the Lord appealed as an example of his creative power, was some form of dinosaur. There is no valid argument that eliminates that idea (evolutionary assertions to the contrary notwithstanding), and there is considerable evidence in favor of it.

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BAPTISM: THE DIVIDING LINE

Author Unknown (submitted by Hugo McCord)

Baptism is the dividing line between:

1. Sin-guilt and remission of sins under the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-18; Lk. 24:46-49);
 2. The unsaved and the saved (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21);
 3. Those whose sins have not been washed away and those whose sins have been washed away (Acts 22:16);
 4. Those without (Jn. 14:17) the gift of the Holy Spirit (the guarantor of heaven, Eph. 1:14) and those with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Gal. 4:6);
 5. Those whose father is the devil (Jn. 8:44) and those whose Father is the God of heaven (2 Cor. 6:18);
 6. Those who are not in Christ and those who are in Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27);
 7. Those who are not in the kingdom of God and those who are in the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5; Col. 1:13);
 8. Those who are not in the "one body" ("the church," Eph. 1:22-23) and those who have been "baptized into the one body" (1 Cor. 12:13);
 9. Those for whom God does not work all things together for good and those for whom God does work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28);
 10. Those who do not have "all spiritual blessings" and those who do have "all spiritual blessings" (Eph. 1:3);
 11. Those who do not have "life more abundantly" and those who do have "life more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10);
 12. Those who do not have a "never fading inheritance reserved in heaven" and those who do have a "never fading inheritance reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1:4).
- "Be not foolish, but understanding what is the Lord's will" (Eph. 5:17).

WOI

The Words of Truth

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

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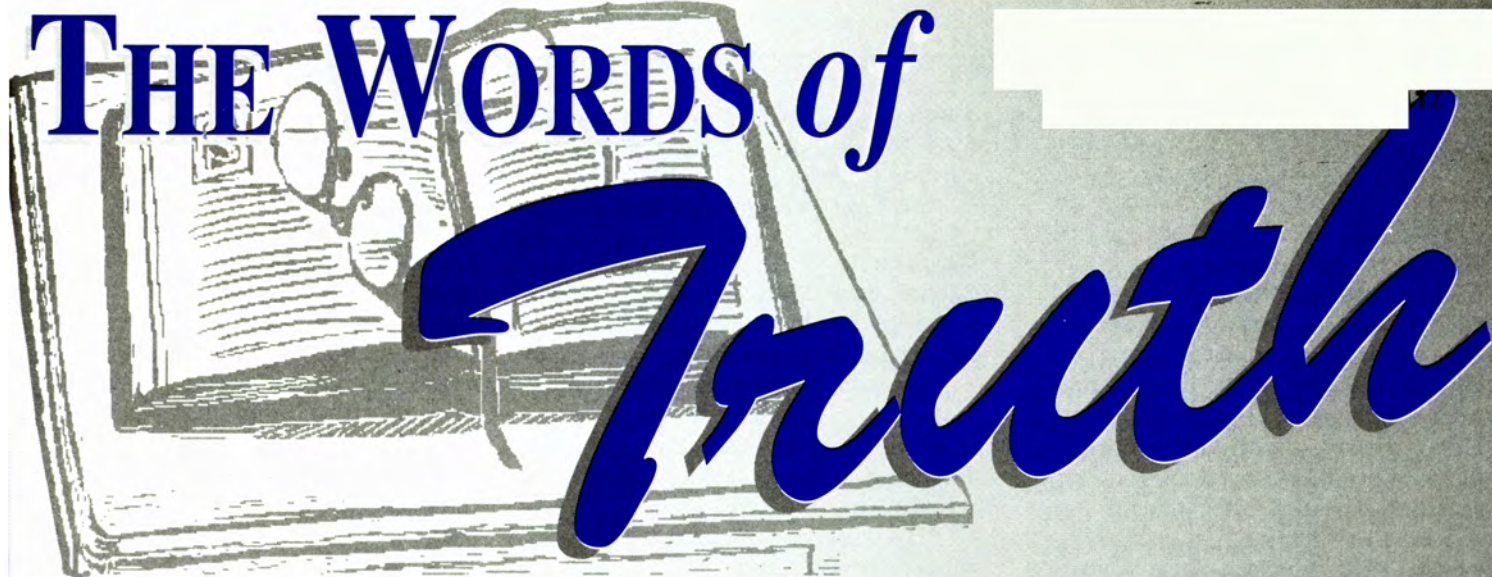
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

Vol. 39 No. 7

July 2002

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Keith Hinds, Downey, California

In Genesis 11:1-9 the Bible records the great story of the tower of Babel, which reveals why there are so many different languages in the world. This story fits between the account of the Flood and the life of Abraham. Genesis 11:1 says that "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech." Verse 4 declares men's plan: "And they said, Come, let **us** build **us** a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let **us** make **us** a name; lest **we** be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." These people were planning to build something greater than anything that had ever been built before. But instead of building in order to honor God, they were concerned only with themselves—"and let us make **us** a name."

In Genesis 11:6, God teaches us a great lesson: "And Jehovah said, Behold, they are one people and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do: and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do." God says that these people had the power and potential to accomplish anything they planned to do. However, they were making plans without including God, so God chose to interfere. Verse 7 says, "Come let us go

down, and there confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech." The fact that these people could accomplish anything was based on three truths. Just imagine what we could accomplish in the church today with God on our side. Notice from Genesis 11:6 three principles that would enable us to accomplish, with God's approval, whatever we purpose to do.

"They are one people." A group of people can accomplish much if there is unity. The early church was able to grow because of unity. Acts 4:32 says, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul . . ." There must be unity in the body of Christ, and we must follow Christ who is the Head of the body. The early church worked with one accord and were focused in the right direction. Division is sinful, and the Lord's work is hampered when it is allowed to exist.

"And they have all one language." They understood one another when they talked about bricks, mortar, the city, and the tower. In the church we need to be speaking the same language. We also need to talk to one another about God's Word, evangelism, and the work of the

church. If we don't talk about it, we won't do it.

"They begin to do." Plans and dreams and talk are good, but they can never be substituted for action. God gives us opportunities. We need courage and trust to take advantage of them. When we "begin to do" we can expect company—the Lord. Verse 5 says, "And Jehovah came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded." They were working without God's approval. If we work **with** God's approval, we can expect great things to happen. Nothing great happens overnight. We must continue to work patiently and steadfastly, and results will follow.

The people stopped building when they no longer spoke the same language. We must continue to speak the truth—the Word of God. We must strive to save the lost and worship acceptably. Let us "begin to do" God's will. We are building a tower as we work in and build up the Lord's church. This tower has God's approval, and it is leading us to heaven. Nothing can be withheld from us if we are united as "one," if we speak the same thing, and if we do the Lord's work.

WOT

IN THEM WE TRUST

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Against the backdrop of a distinguished gentleman in a tailored suit, *Worth* magazine boasted the above title for its cover article. Obviously a play on the familiar but seldom heeded inscription found on U.S. currency—"In God We Trust"—the bold heading carried the following subtitle: "The Top 250 Financial Advisors in America." In *them* we trust? Apparently so, at least according to the editors of this magazine designed for America's wealthy elite. These words, however, might actually be closer to the truth than we would like to admit, which itself brings up an interesting point. We all know that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10) . . . or do we? If so, then why is money such a thorny problem? Why all the grief and anxiety? Why all the broken homes?

Perhaps part of the reason is that money is neither inherently good nor evil. In fact, few things accomplish as much good as money. Governments use it to fund social programs, build highways, and promote commerce. Scientists lobby for it to fund their research for the cure of fatal diseases. Churches need it to feed the poor and evangelize the lost. Fathers work long hours to earn it and buy life's essentials for their families. Mothers need it to pay doctors and pharmacists to preserve their children's health. Concerned Christians invest it to protect their families in case of premature death, save it to pay for the education of their children, and give it to further the work of the church.

It seems odd, then, that something so essential could cause so much conflict. Perhaps nothing else is, at once, both innocuous *and* evil. Politicians are corrupted by it. High-level corporate executives lie about it. Athletes refuse to play until they get more of it. And, sadly, homes are destroyed by too much of it, too little of it, or the love of it. In one magazine poll, couples surveyed said the number-one thing they fight about is money [Robert Sullivan, "An Intimate Portrait: Americans and Their Money,"

Worth (June 1994), 60]. "Till *debt* do us part" is, in many marriages, closer to reality than the vows taken by the partners at their weddings.

The truth is, finances often create problems . . . problems which, when faced with biblical principles, can be overcome. In many cases, they can actually be prevented.

Here are two principles which, when fully embraced, will revolutionize the way we view money.

Embrace the concept of stewardship. We'll never treat material things properly until we fully grasp the biblical concept of stewardship, a concept which consists of two components.

The first is, simply put, *God owns everything*. We speak of "*our* money," "*our* cars," and "*our* clothes," but these things are not actually ours . . . they are God's. God spoke through the Psalmist, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10). David recognized this fact when he praised God, "But who am I, and who are my people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You. For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, As were all our fathers: Our days on earth are as a shadow, And without hope. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own" (1 Chr. 29:14-16). David says, in other words, "How can we give to You, God, because everything we have *You* gave us, so everything we give You is already yours?"

The second is equally important: *God has entrusted to us certain possessions . . . things which He expects us to oversee*. This commission appoints us as God's stewards—"managers" or "overseers" of His possessions (*New Unger's Bible Dictionary*). Though there is a deeper theological meaning to the Parable of the Talents, one unmistakable

implication is that we must take seriously our responsibility to care for *everything* our Master has given us (Matt. 25:14-30). Thus "talents" may refer to the gospel (1 Cor. 4:1-2), spiritual gifts (1 Tim. 4:14, though non-miraculous in the present age), time (Col. 4:5), and financial resources (a "talent" was a weight of money; cf. Matt. 25:14-30), among other things.

Follow the reasoning: (1) God owns everything, but (2) He has entrusted to us certain things, including financial resources. Thus the conclusion is undeniable: (3) We must be faithful stewards of *God's* money (1 Cor. 4:2).

This fact, once realized and embraced, will change the way we spend money. No longer is it, "In which area should we spend our money to bring us the greatest pleasure?" but rather, "How should we, as God's stewards, spend His financial resources to please Him and bring Him glory?" That will inevitably alter the proportions in which we spend. Where previously giving to the local church may have been something of an "obligation," a "burden," and even a "necessary evil" of Christianity, now giving back to God "that which is rightfully [His]" becomes more than an overused prayer cliché—it becomes our way of thinking. We adopt David's philosophy: "For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You" (1 Chr. 29:14).

Getting our grip on money begins by recognizing whose it *really* is. We need to understand that our attitude toward money has consequences greater than a comfortable retirement or the mere absence of constant financial concerns. This issue concerns stewardship—something of great concern to God.

Refuse to believe that greater possessions equal greater happiness. It is the biggest lie that has been foisted upon any generation. It is propagated in flashy, thirty-second commercials and subtly suggested in full-page advertisements. It is the motivation

behind big houses, sleek cars, and faddish clothes. It is the destructive lie that whispers in the ear of every American, "If you only had *this* car, *that* boat, *this* dress, . . . then you'll be truly happy." Companies pay advertising executives millions to convince consumers that they need their products in order to be content. It is not enough to convince people that they *want* it; they need to *need* it.

The sad truth is that the majority of Americans are falling prey to the deceit. Newly married couples want to have in three years what it took their parents thirty years to accumulate. And, because of the easy availability of quick credit ("no money down, no payments for twelve months . . ."), many times they can have it. If they are not careful, though (and many are not), they can quickly acquire more debt than they can repay, which results in a vicious cycle of borrowing, consolidating, borrowing again, etc., from which it is hard to recover.

But we must grasp the fact that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Lk. 12:15). It has always

been a struggle for God's people. In spite of an explicit prohibition, Achan thought that taking some of Jericho's spoil would contribute to his contentment, so he took some . . . and lost his life as a result (Josh. 7:21-26). Job implied that his woes would have been deserved had he made gold his "hope" or said to "fine gold, Thou art my confidence" (Job 31:24). In other words, he realized it was sinful to put your hope in material things.

This temptation is the reason the Bible sets forth numerous warnings:

- God abhors the covetous (Psa. 10:3).
- Do not set your heart upon riches (Psa. 62:10).
- Do not labor to be rich, God says, because "riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Prov. 23:4-5).
- One of the "thorns" that chokes the word out of Christians' lives is "riches" (Lk. 8:14).
- Covetousness is associated with other sins which we sometimes consider as worse than others:

fornication, extortion, idolatry, and drunkenness (1 Cor. 5:10-11); theft, slander, and swindling (1 Cor. 6:10).

- Let covetousness "not be named among you," Paul writes (Eph. 5:3).
- Put it to death (Col. 3:5).

A central reason why this sin is so harshly condemned is that it takes our hearts away from God. "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things . . ." (1 Tim. 6:9-11). We are encouraged to be content with what we have (Heb. 13:5).

Are *your* finances in disarray? Has your giving been pleasing to God? Is your contentment tied to the ebb and flow of the stock market?

Grasp these two principles—it will transform your life. WOT

CALVARY IRONY

Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama

More has been written about Jesus' life than any man who has ever lived. More has been written about His death than His life, yet the material is not exhausted. Writers can find no more appealing story, and readers never tire of the theme. A fascinating angle to explore is the irony these events portray as we contrast Jesus' moral strength and perfect character with those people and events He encountered on His last day.

Christ, judge of all men, stood in front of Pilate, a judge. He who will judge the world (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10) knows what it feels like to be judged. The Prosecutor knows what it feels like to be the defendant. Pilate executed justice before he crucified Jesus. Jesus had inherent authority, and Pilate had only delegated authority (Jn. 19:11; Rom. 13:1-6). Jesus thus gave Pilate his authority and then submitted to it. Further, He submitted

to abused authority. He who needed only justice did not even plead for mercy.

Jesus, the Judge, promises to be fair and merciful to His followers (2 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 2:17), something foreign at His trial. He will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou has been faithful . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21), to many imperfect and undeserving defendants. Even on earth, Jesus showed mercy to undeserving people (cf. Jn. 8:1-11). Though perfect and deserving, He heard no such words. He likely only heard, *Illum duci ad crucem placet*. William Barclay comments: "The Roman ritual of condemnation and routine of crucifixion were fixed. They did not alter. The judge said, *Illum duci ad crucem placet*, 'The sentence is that this man should be taken to a cross.' Then he turned to the guard and said, *I, miles, expedi crucem*, 'Go, soldier, and prepare the cross.'"

Jesus knows what it feels like to have a sentence of condemnation passed down. He watched Pilate deliberate and heard him condemn. He will understand the pounding of our hearts and the sweating of our palms. He wants to take the stress out of judgment by preparing us for trial. In fact, He pleads with sinners to repent and take Him as their Advocate before they have to face Him as their Judge (1 Jn. 2:1). How interesting it will be to watch Pilate come before Jesus at the one judgment that really counts.

Christ, friend of publicans and sinners, walked friendless down the Calvary Road. Jesus was accused, condemned, whipped, mocked, crowned with thorns, and rejected all before breakfast! Before 9 a.m., the soldiers put Jesus' clothes back on Him and led Him out of town to "The Place of the Skull." In this "parade," the prisoner, usually naked, was set in the

middle of a hollow square of four soldiers. The cross was laid upon his shoulders, and he was pushed along the road as he staggered to the place of crucifixion. People lined the streets and jeered the victim. Jesus—weak from loss of blood, sleep/food deprivation, fluid dehydration, and emotional strain—fell beneath the cross as He marched (Jn 19:17; Lk. 23:26).

At this point in the story, we might expect a hundred volunteers among those He had helped during His ministry to rush to His aid, perhaps arguing over who got the privilege of helping the Master in this small way. But no one stepped forward. Simon of Cyrene, evidently a stranger, had to be compelled to bear the cross after Christ. Jesus, who had always been a friend to the friendless (Lk. 7:34), walked alone to Golgotha. His disciples had fled into the night (Matt. 26:56), and now His acquaintances kept their distance in the morning.

Christ, whose yoke is easy, struggled beneath the weight of the cross. A Roman cross weighed about three hundred pounds, so prisoners were only made to carry the horizontal part (*patibulum*). (The vertical *stipes* was kept on site at Golgotha.) But even this weight of perhaps a hundred pounds was too much for Jesus in His weakened condition. It is interesting that Jesus struggled with that burden. He who made the world (Jn. 1:10) and holds it together by “the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3) struggled to carry a tiny part of it. He whose curse withered a live fig tree (Matt. 21:19), withered beneath Calvary’s dead tree. This points to His humanity—He set aside divine strength to die as a man.

Consider Jesus’ struggle beneath this weight in view of His famous invitation to sinners: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*” (Matt. 11:28-30). When Jesus saw us straining under the “patibulum” of sin, He offered to take it from our shoulders and put it on His own. In fact, He did exactly that as He walked in this shameful parade down “death row.” He carried His cross that we might not have to carry ours. He

became “. . . sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). The *burden lifter became the burden bearer* (1 Cor. 5:7).

Christ, who brought joy to the world, was followed by weeping women. Jesus is pictured as a happy person who generally “rejoiced in spirit” (Lk. 10:21). He took children into His arms (Mk. 9:36), attended weddings and happy Jewish festivals (Jn. 2; Matt. 26:17), and feasted with both poor and rich (Mk. 2:16; Lk. 7). He brightened whatever corner of Palestine He visited. Parents thrilled to have Him hold their babies (Matt. 19:13). Hopeless sinners went away from Him thinking that tomorrow was a new day (Mk. 12:37). The lame walked away from Him (Matt. 11:5), the deaf were able to hear His sermons (Matt. 15:30), the blind saw His face (Mk. 10:52), the sick rose from bed to wait on Him (Matt. 8:14-15), and grieving parents had dead children restored to them (Matt. 5:41; Lk. 7:22). An embarrassed woman had her dignity restored (Jn. 8); a short, hated tax-collector had the King stay at his house (Lk. 19); and exiled lepers no longer needed dermatologists when touched by His hands (Matt. 8:3). Think of all the happiness Jesus brought to earth!

Now contrast these scenes with the one on the Via Dolorosa, (“the sorrowful way,” the road between Pilate’s headquarters and Calvary). The first and worst “trail of tears.” Tender-hearted women cried in the cross’s wake (Lk. 23:26-31). They were bewildered, heart-broken, drenched in sorrow. They loved Jesus so much that they could not leave Him, although each glance at His mutilated body cut them to the quick of their hearts. Jesus did not tell them to “quit crying” (as many men would have), but, remarkably, told them to weep—only not for Him, but *for themselves!* Why? Because in A.D. 70, Rome would terrorize their nation. His thoughts are more with their pain yet forty years away than with His own in the immediate future! Do not miss the irony in the fact that He who came to this planet to bring happiness became a “man of sorrows” and left it “acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3).

Christ, the glad tidings of good things, trailed behind an accusing placard. Jesus’ favorite greeting was, “Be of good cheer!” (Matt. 9:2; 14:27; Mk. 6:50; Jn. 16:33). Wherever He went, the Gospel (Good News) spread. He spoke more encouraging words, with more positive results, than any before or since. It is interesting, then, to consider what was *not* said the day He died. Of all the words that could have been used of the Word (Jn. 1:14), no formal, flowery, funeral speech was made; no careful obituary was penned; no long write-up was published and circulated; and no memorable saying was etched into His tomb marker. The only words used—“the King of the Jews” (Mk. 15:21)—were those scratched by some soldier on a rough board and nailed over His head.

Christ, the Holy Son of God, rubbed elbows with two thieves. Crucifying Jesus between two known criminals was deliberately staged to humiliate Jesus. He who was purer than angels (Heb. 1:4) and as holy as God (Jn. 10:30; Mk. 1:24; Acts 2:27) was put between two judged as unfit to live among fellow humans. He who never once sinned (Heb. 4:15) was joined to men who sinned so often, and to such a degree, that their fellow sinners executed them. He who never once said a curse or unfit word died with His ears full of the profane curses of one who prostituted his God-given tongue with both (Lk. 23:39). He whose saliva had been used to heal (Mk. 7:33; 8:23), died with the dried spit of His enemies on His face (Matt. 26:67; 27:30). He who gave away everything He ever had died between men who took what did not belong to them (Mk. 15:27). He who was “. . . holy, harmless, undefiled” had those who were corrupt, dangerous, and tainted as His closest companions in His most passionate moments. He who was “separate from sinners” and who was “made higher than the heavens” died with those who were of the scum of the earth (phrases taken from Heb. 7:26). What a contradiction that the holy Son of God should die with the corrupt sons of men!

What a trip it was for Jesus from Pilate’s courtroom to God’s throne room via a gate marked “Death”!

THE CHRISTIAN'S TOOL BOX

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:12-13).

Obviously not all of our body parts serve the same function. We have eyes and ears and hands and legs all carrying out special duties to help us live. It is interesting that in this passage Paul considers all the different body parts, or "members," and shows that we can make each one an instrument of righteousness or unrighteousness. The Greek word for "members" means "a limb; a member of the human body." These members are like tools, belonging to God (1 Cor. 6:19-20), for us to use to His glory. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Perhaps it would be helpful to us in our efforts to do right and avoid wrong if we thought of our bodies as having individual members each able to serve God or serve the devil.

Remember the children's song, "Be careful little eyes what you see; be careful little feet where you go . . .?"

Two of my members are hands. Psalm 119:48 says, "My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes." It is good in God's eyes to work with our hands (1 Cor. 4:12). We can extend our hands in fellowship to others who serve Jesus (Gal. 2:9). We can write letters of teaching and encouragement with our hands (Gal. 6:11). Ephesians 4:28 says that we can use our hands to steal or use them to work that which is good. I

want to use my hands for nothing which is out of harmony with God's will.

Two of my members are feet. I can use my feet to bring the truth of Jesus to the people around me (Rom. 10:15); or I can use my feet to be swift in running to mischief (Prov. 6:18). I can direct my feet to do God's will (Psa. 119:59), or I can choose to trample Jesus and His truth beneath them (Heb. 10:29). Will I direct my feet to bring me to worship faithfully or will I direct them to carry me elsewhere when the church is meeting? I want to use my feet for nothing which is out of harmony with God's will.

Another of my members is my tongue. The tongue is special. Among our body's members the tongue is the only one with this powerful description: "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (James 3:5-6). In size it is a little member, but in strength and influence it is mighty. I want to use my tongue for nothing which is out of harmony with God's will.

Two of my members are eyes. The eyes, some have observed, are the mirrors of the soul. Yet they are also much more. They are windows to the heart— windows through which things pass and make an impression upon our soul. I must therefore be careful about what passes through my eyes. Take my reading material for example. Do these words I see edify me to be a better person, or do they war against my soul (1 Pet. 2:11)? Consider the kinds of things I watch on television—do these things help me or hurt me? Am I

soaking my soul with filth by watching things I ought not? Eyes can be so useful. Will I use them to look for opportunity to help others who really need me? Will I use them to read God's Word daily? Will I use them to express sympathy to those who suffer and joy to those who rejoice? I want to use my eyes for nothing which is out of harmony with God's word.

Some of my members are private. Many today live with members of the opposite sex to whom they are not married, and are committing fornication (Gal. 5:19-21). Some have married husbands or wives in spite of Christ's prohibitions and thus live in adultery (Matt. 19:9). Some are lascivious and wear clothing and attitudes which they shouldn't. On the other hand, the marriage bed is undefiled (Heb. 13:4)! A man should rejoice with the wife of his youth (Prov. 5:18-20). The intimacy of marriage is blessed by God. Proverbs 18:22 declares, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord."

While it is interesting to think of your body as a group of individual members, we should still remember that this is a package deal—I cannot be saved if I allow any one of my members to serve the devil. The fact that a man evangelizes with his voice but steals with his hands will not show him pleasing to God. James said that a man may use his tongue for blessing and cursing (Jam. 3:10), but he won't please God that way. All of our body's members must be totally given over to the Lord.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). *WOT*

THE FLOCK OF GOD

Brandon Jackson, Jasper, Alabama

[We're thrilled to announce that Brandon recently began working with us at Sixth Avenue. We know you will enjoy this article, as well as others to follow.]

Singing: "Bahh! Bahh! Black sheep have you any wool?" is about as close as most people are ever going to get to experiencing the bleat of a sheep and shepherding. In today's society we rarely come into contact with the things which would have been part of a normal and pervasive way of life a couple thousand years ago. A big part of life in biblical times was the raising, caring for, and harvesting of sheep to meet the needs of the family. It only seems natural that the penmen of the Bible would use such a common and easy-to-understand activity to talk about a godly way of life. Throughout the Old and New Testaments one can find references to sheep and their shepherds being used symbolically. Everyone is familiar with Nathan's parable about the little ewe lamb which ends with the resounding conviction of David, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12), and John the Baptist's declaration, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Peter compares the elders of the church to shepherds, the members he calls "the flock of God," and Christ is depicted as the chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-5). This would have been an analogy burned into Peter's conscience during the events which are recorded in John 21:15-17. In this text the Lord asks Peter the question "Lovest thou me more than these?", to which Peter answers "yes, Lord," and Jesus gives him the charge to "feed my lambs." This conversation is twice repeated, with the charge "feed my sheep" following Peter's answer to the Lord's question. Peter was accustomed to thinking about the church in terms of the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep.

The prevalent use of sheep and shepherds as an analogy leaves us with the responsibility to understand more about these amazing animals, the activity of caring for them, and how that translates into New Testament

principles concerning the church.

Sheep are amazing animals. They have personality, character, likes and dislikes, and they have the ability to think for themselves (although they rarely use it, choosing rather to follow the sheep in front of them). They are herding animals, having very little sense of direction. Therefore, they often get lost. The Lord taught a parable about a lamb which was lost and made application to the saving of souls (Lk. 15). Peter said, "For ye were as sheep going astray . . ." (1 Pet. 2:25). Spiritually we might picture ourselves as the sheep. We each have our own personality, character, likes and dislikes, and the ability to think for ourselves (although many choose not to use it, choosing rather to follow those around them). It is also true that we can lose our sense of direction. God has made the pathway clear by giving us His Word to direct our steps. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105). However, the tragic truth is that there are many who step from that path. "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" (Matt. 7:13-14). Sheep who wander from the fold of Christ are lost in the world of sin and must turn to Him for deliverance.

Sheep that lose their way also lose their shepherd. The shepherd cares for and guides the flock, and when a sheep becomes separated from the flock the shepherd is no longer able to care for or guide that lost sheep. Ezekiel 34 records the Lord's rebuke of those who had been charged with shepherding the flock but were not performing their task. "The diseased have ye not strengthened neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost . . ." (Ezek. 34:4). In this text we are able to see what will happen to a sheep that has no shepherd. The

diseased will surely worsen, the sick will weaken, the broken cannot be mended, and the lost cannot be regained. We are the sheep who can and will go astray. Eve may have been the first sheep to wander away, but she certainly was not the last. "All we like sheep have gone astray . . ." (Isa. 53:6) What a dismal picture—we as sheep separated from our shepherd . . . *if* the story ended here. It doesn't, though.

David's plea is still applicable today. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments" (Psa. 119:176). We have a Shepherd who will search for us if we do not forget His commandments. Peter entitles our Lord "the Chief Shepherd" who will return one day with a crown of glory which shall never fade away (1 Pet. 5:4). Not only do we have the Lord as our Chief Shepherd, He once was a sheep just like us. Remember John the Baptist's announcement of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Our Shepherd is a special shepherd because He knows what it is like to be one of the sheep.

As sheep we must remain on the right path, follow close to Christ to keep from becoming lost, and when we stray turn back to our shepherd and His commands and He will return us to the fold. As Christians we must live with the assurance that Christ is our shepherd. As long as we remain in Christ we can sing the song of David (Psa. 23). "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." *WOT*

BIBLICAL YOUTH MINISTRY

Joey Sparks, Jasper, Alabama

[Joey is a sophomore Bible and History major at Freed-Hardeman University and is serving as our summer youth intern. We appreciate his work and know you will enjoy his thoughtful comments below.]

The past several years have seen the creation and increase of a new ministry position among many brotherhood congregations. This position has become known as “youth minister.” Obviously, the purpose in hiring such a minister is to plan activities for young people, encourage and counsel them, and be able to meet their varied needs. Unfortunately, in spite of efforts made by youth ministers, it seems as though there is an overall decrease in the activity of young people within the Lord’s Kingdom. Though the Bible does not mention the responsibilities of youth ministers as we know them today, it does mention the tremendous task that lies ahead of the ones who are ultimately responsible for the spiritual well-being of young people—parents—God’s most important “youth ministers.” Notice what these “youth ministers” do:

Biblical “youth ministers” teach. In relaying God’s commandments to the Israelites under the Old Testament Law, Moses instructs them numerous times to teach these commandments to their own children. On one such occasion, Moses says the following of the commandments, “You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 11:19). Knowing that the New Testament Law is superior to that law given by Moses (Heb. 8:6-13), we

should feel an even greater responsibility to continue the pattern of instructing our own children in the righteousness found in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). Successful Christian parents will not only teach their children about Scripture, but will also train them how to live by its principles and commands.

Biblical “youth ministers” train.

One of the more famous Old Testament passages concerning parenting is Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The world around us is intent upon there being an exception to every rule. There may even be a few exceptions to this rule. However, one can observe the decline in spirituality among the church’s young people and then hear many parents claiming that there was “nothing they could do” or similar statements. When the exceptions to the rule become more noticeable than its successes, we must examine ourselves to make sure we are following the rule as closely as possible. Notice that the verse says “in the way that he *should* go.” We need to realize that this does not necessarily mean “in the way that he *wants* to go.” Successful Christian parents will be firm in training (aiming) their children in a Biblical direction.

Biblical “youth ministers” correct.

Proverbs also offers much needed information concerning the role of parental correction within the household. Take, for example, the following verse: “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Prov. 13:24). Also notice Proverbs 22:15:

“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him.” Finally, notice two more passages from the wisdom of Proverbs. “Chasten your son while there is hope . . .” (19:18). “Do not withhold correction from a child . . .” (23:13). Although it may be painful for parents to discipline their own offspring, it is a duty given to parents by God that must be enforced and reinforced. Effective discipline is one of the major ways in which proper training within the home is to take place. Successful Christian parents will correct and discipline their children when they disobey household rules as well as biblical principles.

Biblical “youth ministers” love.

All of the afore-mentioned principles of parenthood must be carried out in a loving manner. Any attempts to effectively raise children will fail if children think that their parents do not love them. We read the following statement in Titus 2:4: “that they admonish the young women . . . to love their children. Earlier we read Proverbs 13:24 in the context of correction. Notice again that it states that the father who “loves [his child] disciplines him promptly.” This tells us that discipline and correction take place because parents love their children. The parallel passages of Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 give us this familiar statement: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.” Children will not be provoked to anger if they are fully confident that their parents love them and want the absolute best for them. Successful Christian parents will *lovingly* teach, train, and correct their children.

2 CHRONICLES 29:25

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

Some have asked a question regarding the relationship between 2 Chronicles 29:25 and instrumental music in New Testament worship. The verse reads: "And he [Hezekiah] set the Levites in the house of Jehovah with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was of Jehovah by his prophets." The sentiment often being hinted at in such questions is that since instrumental music was used in Old Testament worship, the same should be true of New Testament worship.

It is clear that the Old Testament worship services included not only instruments of music (Psa. 33:2; 43:4; 71:22), but also burnt-offerings of bulls and rams and he-goats (Lev. 16:1-19), clouds of "sweet incense" (Lev. 16:12-13; Ex. 30:7; Deut. 33:10), dancing (2 Sam. 7:14; Psa. 150:4), hand-clapping (Psa. 47:1), and shouting (Psa. 47:1). Are all of these to be brought into today's worship?

It is clear also that the entire Old Testament worship services have been canceled, nailed to Jesus' cross (Eph. 2:15-16; Col. 2:14-16). The old covenant was given as a "schoolmaster" to bring us to Christ; when it had served its purpose, however, it was annulled (cf. Gal. 3:23-29).

It is clear that the New Testament worship services include singing, the "fruit of lips" (Heb. 13:15; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15), playing, not on a literal harp (as in Psa. 71:22), but figuratively on the strings of the human heart, "making melody in our heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19); praying (1 Thess. 5:17); studying (Acts 20:7); and, on the first day of the week, the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), and the collection (1 Cor. 16:1-2). WOT



We are pleased to announce that the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ now has its own presence on the World Wide Web. You can access several past issues of *The Words of Truth*, with more to be added in the future. Feel free to print articles and distribute them to people who might enjoy reading them. You can also see a list of some of our favorite web pages, sign up for a correspondence course, and read about the church of Christ. We hope you will take time to "surf" our web site—www.sixthavenue.org. Check back often, as new information is added weekly.



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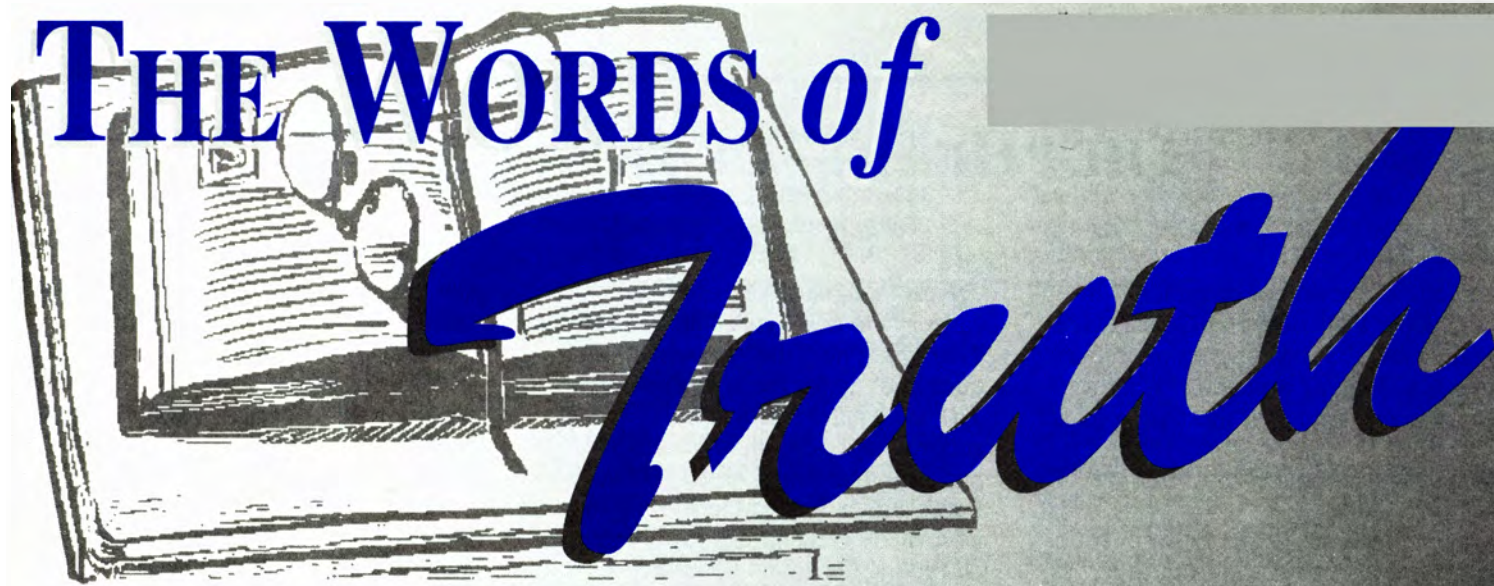
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

LOVE AND DOCTRINE

Mark Teske, Bedford, Texas

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). This text truly shows the extent of God's love! In this discourse, Jesus revealed profound truths about the love of God to Nicodemus, and through the written word to us as well. Included within this passage is the phrase "should not perish." These words show that God has expectations for man and remind us of the truth that He is infinite in justice as well as in love. In our understanding of God, we need to be sure that we reconcile His attributes in our minds and don't become unbalanced in our view of Him.

In Leviticus 10:1-2, we read of the infinite, loving God instantly striking down both Nadab and Abihu for the sin of not obeying His commandments and performing an act that was not authorized. This incident clearly shows the infinite justice of God, but how does He show His love during the incident? Since God changes not (Mal. 3:6) and God is love (1 Jn. 4:8), He was infinitely loving throughout this entire event. Using man's earthly wisdom, this is a dilemma that is without reconciliation, because man (without God's revealed guidance) has a warped view of true love. However, with a proper understanding of both our great God and true love, the action is predictable. The text explains God's

reason for action: "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' So Aaron held his peace" (Lev. 10:3). Nadab and Abihu served as examples for "all the people" that God "must be regarded as holy" by "those who come near." It is interesting that Aaron, the father of the two men who were killed, understood and *accepted* this teaching from God and held his peace. Though God's action is not "loving" in man's way of thinking, it truly is loving in an eternal way: it teaches a truth that will save souls.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus' showing His love. It is clear to see His love in action during numerous situations. One situation was the private discourse with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4), and another was the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 7:53-8:11). However, Jesus was also infinite in love when He said to the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). Jesus' words are very strong and direct as He rebukes these false teachers. Jesus demonstrates His love for souls by clearly showing them their error. They had neglected the Old Testament teaching on the resurrection, as Jesus points out in verses 31-32). His clear and direct teaching on this point serves as a distinct example to all that implication in

Biblical teaching is binding and that God does not tolerate doctrinal errors due to improper reasoning. God shows His love for us by teaching these truths through His word (though it may appear harsh or unloving to some).

When Jesus speaks to the Pharisees in the next chapter, He is even stronger and more direct in His words. He uses the phrases: "Woe to you . . . hypocrites" (Matt. 23:13 et al.), "son of hell" (Matt. 23:15), "Fools and blind" (Matt. 23:17, 19), "Blind guides" (Matt. 23:24), and "brood of vipers" (Matt. 23:33). Once again, Jesus uses these strong words to wake them up to their errors while providing us with yet another example that God does not tolerate those who err in His truth.

As Jesus admonished the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23, there truly are weightier matters of the law (Matt. 22:36-40) that provide a foundation for us. These we must do while not leaving the other matters undone (such as rebuking false teachers—Rom. 16:17), which means that we must have a proper biblical balance to what we do. God has given us examples of this truth in action through the passages outlined above (and many others in Scripture). To be God-like, we must balance these truths as God balanced them and not become unbalanced by a flawed, humanistic view of love.

WOT

THE “HEART” OF THE MATTER

Chuck Webster, Editorial

As long as we do not commit sinful *acts*, God is pleased, right? Does He really care about what goes on in our minds as long as we control what we actually *do*? Consider these principles:

WHAT WE THINK INFLUENCES WHAT WE DO.

Maybe this point is overly simplistic, but it needs to be made—our thoughts influence our actions. In fact, it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of our minds’ impact on our actions. Notice James’ emphasis: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded” (Jam. 4:8). Notice the connection between our “**hands**” (what we do) and our “**hearts**” (what we think). If we are going to do what is right (cleanse our hands)—what must we do? James answers: Be careful what we think (purify our hearts).

Our Lord also established the connection between thoughts and actions: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). The biblical “heart,” of course, is the mind, which means that the Lord is saying that *thoughts* produce *actions*. Murder occurs because of hatred in someone’s mind, adultery because of lust, theft because of greed, . . . Thoughts . . . actions. Thoughts . . . actions. Thoughts . . . actions. That is the natural progression.

Another example: Jesus, as He so often did, went right to the crux of the matter, on this occasion concerning adultery. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That **whosoever looketh** on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already **in his heart**” (Matt. 5:27-28). The Lord’s argument is clear: Adultery occurs when a man looks at a woman (or vice-versa), lusts after her, and has sexual relations with her. But Jesus said it is not enough just to outlaw the act; if we are going to avoid adultery, we must eliminate the cause . . .

. . . *sinful thoughts*. When somebody has cancer, you don’t cure him with aspirin. That might help the symptoms, but it does nothing for the actual problem. The same is true with sinful actions—avoiding them means first purifying our *minds*. If we take care of the thoughts that lead to the sin, then we have made great strides toward correcting the action as well.

Our thoughts influence what we do . . . but where do those thoughts come from?

WHAT WE SEE, HEAR, AND TOUCH CREATES THOUGHTS.

Again, at the risk of sounding overly elementary, we make this point: our thoughts don’t just happen; they are the consequence of outward stimuli. They are more than simply millions of tiny electrical impulses generated by synapses in our complex brains—that may be a physical explanation of the thought process, but thinking occurs only when we respond to something which we have taken into our brains by some means. And the only way something can get into our brains is through one of our senses— seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, or touching. Of those five, three (seeing, hearing, and touching) are responsible for the majority of our thoughts.

“You are what you eat” is just as true mentally as it is physically. We are (think) what we eat (take into our minds). “I can’t control my thoughts,” we often say. “These things just pop into my mind, and I can’t get them out.” The truth is, we have more control over our thoughts than we sometimes think. We can control, to a great extent, what goes into our minds. Notice how each of these senses is responsible for our thoughts.

Sight

Job understood that what he saw created thoughts: “I made a covenant with mine **eyes**; why then should I **think** upon a maid?” (Job 31:1). The implication is, he could keep himself from thinking impure thoughts by not looking. King David “saw” Bathsheba, recognized that

she “was very beautiful to look upon,” “sent and inquired after,” “sent messengers and took her,” and slept with her (2 Sam. 11:2-4). Notice the process: he saw, he thought (desire), he acted. It is a concrete fact: what you see influences what you think.

Peter wrote concerning some who had “eyes full of adultery” and a “heart they have exercised” (2 Pet. 2:14). Do you see the connection? “Eyes full of adultery” is another expression for impure thoughts created by looking.

But it is not just in the area of sexual thoughts. When Eve took of the forbidden fruit, she saw, she thought, she took: “And **when the woman saw** that the tree was good for food, and that it was **pleasant to the eyes**, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). Achan’s sin of taking forbidden bounty from Jericho was preceded by greed which resulted from thoughts. “**When I saw** among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, **then I coveted them, and took them**; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it” (Josh. 7:21). Again, notice the process: see, think, act.

The connection between sight and thought is so clear that the Bible often uses the former to express the latter:

- When the psalmist asked, “**Turn away mine eyes** from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way” (Psalm 119:37), he was requesting God’s help in keeping him from thinking about and desiring vain (empty) things more than God.
- The Proverbs writer commands us: “**Look not thou upon the wine** when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright” (Prov. 23:31). Why should we not look at it? Of course what he means is that we should not look at it with desire . . . that we should not drink it.
- “And hath not eaten upon the

mountains, **neither hath lifted up his eyes** to the idols of the house of Israel, . . ." (Eze. 18:6). In other words, Ezekiel says he has not worshiped or followed the false gods.

Hearing

Think about how much we depend on our hearing. What image is created in your minds when you hear . . .

- . . . a clap of thunder? Perhaps you visualize a massive thunderhead, pouring rain, gusty winds.
- . . . tires squealing? A sports car, an impending crash, a race.
- . . . "I love you" from your spouse? Her/his face, warm, "fuzzy" feelings.

The point is, what we hear creates thoughts, visual images, sometimes even desire. The prevalence of "phone sex" (1-900 numbers) lends credibility to this point. The pervasive nature of music in almost every culture to do more than simply entertain—to make political statements, unify, incite—indicates that what we hear stimulates thoughts.

Of the sounds above, the most specific is that sound communicated via *words*, which is why the Lord said, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:16). . . . "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, . . ." (Matt. 7:24) . . . "their ears are dull of hearing" (Matt. 13:15) . . . "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, . . ." (Matt. 13:19). God spoke through Jeremiah, "Hear now this, O foolish people, . . ." (Jer. 5:21).

We are influenced by what we hear, because our thoughts are created, at least partially, by those things which we take in through our hearing.

Touching

Of these three senses, perhaps the least specific in creating thoughts is touching. If you close your eyes and touch an object, you may or may not be able to determine what it is. On the other hand, though, touching can incite intense feelings. A slap in the face arouses anger, while a warm handshake

communicates friendliness. A hug can convey compassion or desire, depending on its context and manner. Two teenagers locked in a passionate embrace and engaged in sensual kissing will think certain things . . . they will have desires. Who would argue with this point? Touching creates thoughts.

Now, follow the reasoning—the only thing we have established thus far is that thoughts are created by what we take into our minds, primarily by the senses of seeing, hearing, and touching. It follows, then, that if what we see, hear, and touch influences what we think, and if what we think determines to a great extent what we do, then this third point is inevitably true:

THEREFORE, WE MUST BE CAREFUL WHAT WE ALLOW INTO OUR MINDS. Since what we *do* is determined by what we *think*, in order to remain pure we must first control our thoughts.

Next month's editorial will expand on this principle and offer several guidelines for protecting our minds.

WOT

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT AUTHORITY

Ray Dutton, Montgomery, Alabama

In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Here Jesus stated "explicitly" (by the very words) that no one can come to the Father except by him. "Implicitly" (not in exact words) he said that it is impossible to come to the Father by Buddha or Mohammed.

The implications of God's teachings are just as true and binding as the explicit statements, but false teachers deny this fact. They have long tried to justify their additions to God's Word by arguing that the Bible does not "explicitly" (in so many words) forbid what they are doing. However, if God frowns upon only those things which he "explicitly" forbids then there could be nothing wrong with Christians worshipping Buddha or following the teachings of the Koran, because no explicit statement of the Scriptures mentions either Buddha or the Koran.

The truth of the matter is that God's Word instructs us both explicitly and implicitly. When we properly interpret a Scripture's explicit statements, we will correctly "infer" those things which are "implied" by them. For example, John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." A man rightly "infers" that HE should believe in Jesus because God "implied" this when he said "whosoever." Though his name does not appear in the Bible, he necessarily "infers" that "whosoever" includes him.

When a mother instructs her daughter to put certain ingredients into a bowl in order to make cake batter, even a small girl knows by "necessary inference" that her mother has "implied" that all other possible ingredients should not be arbitrarily added. When Jesus instructed the disciples to use bread and the fruit of

the vine in the Lord's Supper, the disciples properly "inferred" that they were not permitted to add bacon and eggs, though these items were not "explicitly excluded" by Jesus. Even Naaman the Syrian understood by "inference" that Elisha's command to wash seven times in the Jordan river "implicitly excluded" the Abana and Pharpar rivers (2 Kngs. 5:12).

All of this being true, why is it that the explicit command of God that we should "sing" in our worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) is not understood by many to implicitly exclude all other forms of music that are not mentioned? If God had wanted to "implicitly include" other forms of music, He could have simply said "make music." However, God chose to include only "singing," and we therefore properly "infer" that whistling, humming, and playing on a piano are not authorized.

WOT

YOU CAN'T FIGHT SIN BY SINNING

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

You may be able to fight fire with fire, but it is not possible to fight sin with sin.

World magazine is a beautifully crafted, weekly magazine that addresses various themes of national and international interest—with special focus on issues pertaining to religion. The publishers profess to represent a “Christian” perspective. Frequently this attractive magazine does present beneficial and forceful contributions relating to religious/ethical questions.

World's July 27 issue contains a significant article that throws a floodlight upon the illegal, not-to-mention immoral, activities of the Planned Parenthood organization.

Planned Parenthood has long been recognized as one of the nation's most influential defenders of abortion. Of course many people operate on the premise that since abortion is legal (*Roe v. Wade* – 1973), the functions of this organization are perfectly ethical. But the truth is, the arbitrary, willful destruction of innocent human life is morally wrong, no matter what it is called, and irrespective of its “legal” status. What is “legal” with man is not necessarily so with God. (In ancient Rome it was legal to throw unwanted, newborn infants into the trash dumps.)

This recent story in *World*, titled “Keeping Secrets,” concerns the investigations of a Texas-based, pro-life group called Life Dynamics. This organization recently initiated an “undercover” probe of Planned Parenthood clinics around the country. They interviewed 614 employees of PP clinics; the results of their investigation determined that in the majority of cases (approximately 80%), those with whom they spoke were willing to violate the law by concealing evidence and/or ignoring “statutory rape” laws. Here is what happened, according to the *World* article.

From February through April 2002, Life Dynamics, a pro-life investigative group in Denton, Texas, employed a 23-year-old woman with a little-girl voice. Her

job: to telephone family-planning clinics across the nation, including all 875 Planned Parenthood facilities, and tell the same story. That she was almost, but not quite, fourteen years old, that she thought she was pregnant by her twenty-two-year-old boyfriend, and that she didn't want her parents—or anyone—to know. In each case, the “girl” asked clinic personnel repeatedly if anyone or anybody would have to know about the age of her “boyfriend.” The intent of the calls: to learn whether abortion and family-planning clinics would comply with laws requiring medical staffers to report suspected child sexual abuse.

Right now we are in the midst of one of the hottest controversies in American history—the pedophilia scandal. A great number of “clergy” (Roman Catholic and otherwise) have been exposed as sexual predators, abusers of the nation's youth. Moreover, not only have the actual perpetrators been targeted for prosecution, those in administrative positions—who have known about and covered up the problem—have been judged culpable as well.

And now, in principle, one of the nation's most publicized pro-feminine institutions, supposedly so concerned for the welfare of young girls, is exposed as a major violator in the national shame.

The zealots of Planned Parenthood are so obsessed with their “a woman has the right to control her own body” agenda, that they are willing to fling to the wind other protective considerations. After all, a swelling chorus of voices is suggesting that the “age of consent” for youngsters engaging in sexual activity should be lowered anyway. What once was deemed a disgraceful, criminal violation of innocence is becoming a new cause for the hedonistic libertines of our modern, sex-saturated subculture.

But that is not the end of this story. What is also distressing is the fact that so-called “Christian” people, operating

upon the premise that “the end justifies the means,” believe that outright (or should we say “out-wrong”) lying may be employed in “getting the goods” on Planned Parenthood.

In the quote from *World*, featured above, the woman with the “little girl voice” clearly lied. She was not fourteen; she was twenty-three. Her entire story was a fabrication. This is nothing but “situation ethics.” Allegedly, it's right to do wrong, if right-over-wrong is the ultimate goal. If this conduct is deemed acceptable, everyone becomes a “law unto himself,” because he/she makes the decision as to when wrong-doing is justified and when it is not. But scripture does not merely condemn “some” lying; it censures “all” lying (cf. Rev. 21:8).

Finally, it is regrettable that *World* magazine, which promotes itself as reporting from a “Christian” vantage point, would present this piece with no word of criticism for the dishonest methodology of Life Dynamics. *World's* “Mission Statement” claims that its goal is:

To accompany reporting with practical commentary on current events and issues from a perspective committed to the final authority of the Bible as the inerrant written Word of God. To assist in developing a Christian understanding of the world, rather than existing secular ideologies.

You don't say! In reporting on the “investigation” cited above, not only was there not a solitary note of censure for the deceptive tactics employed by Life Dynamics, but *World* even obtained and gloried in the use of twenty of the tapes.

When we become so zealous in our defense of what is right that we ourselves are willing to break the rules in order to achieve our goals, we have betrayed the Cause we hold so dear. The “vigilante” mentality is no more acceptable in religious circles than it is in the civil arena.

WOT

HOW TO HIDE THE GOSPEL

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

In 2 Corinthians 3-4, we read a tremendous section of the Bible that shows us the superseding brilliance of the New Testament. When the covenant at Sinai was given, Moses had to veil his face as he came down from the mountain with the tablets of stone because the glory of that law was already fading even as it began. Paul clearly enunciates that the old arrangement was taken out of the way and has no glory, now that the testament Christ initiated, by the giving of His blood, is in existence. In fact, a veil is upon the hearts and minds of those striving to ignore the New Testament while clinging to the old system. This is the classic argument against Judaism and its inferior nature versus the brilliance of the more glorious covenant of Christ.

The next step in the apostle's discussion is found in 2 Corinthians 4:3: "And if our gospel be veiled, it is hidden to those that are lost." What a powerful point for evangelism and against indifference toward sharing Christianity with the lost! Someone has said:

He who lives to himself and dies to himself
To himself and none beside,
Lives as though Christ never lived—As though He never died.

How Can We Hide the Gospel Now?

How do we hide the gospel today?
People hide the gospel (1) by forgetting the simplicity of

Christianity, (2) by stinginess in giving, (3) by ignorance of the Bible, (4) by immorality, (5) by compromise in teaching and in living, (6) by allowing error to go unrebuked, (7) by neglect and lack of zeal, (8) by flippant attitudes toward sin, (9) by forgetting heavenly goals, and (10) by allowing earthly woes to distract us.

When we make the Bible more complex than it really is and when the plan of salvation is difficult to understand due to our inept presentation, we greatly err. Christ led a simple life (Matt. 8:20), taught clear lessons (Lk. 24:32), revealed an understandable system (2 Cor. 11:3), and chose simple men as apostles (Acts 2:7). We should constantly praise God for making it easy to follow the way of truth!

The cause of the Savior is grossly hindered when men give selfishly. Robbing God of money that is needed to support heaven's work is a tragedy (Mal. 3:8). Mundane considerations overwhelm spiritual values in our use of funds. Souls die—lost due to those who give poorly because they are egocentered rather than spiritual. Matthew 10:8 reminds us: "Freely you have received, freely give." Stingy Christians need to remember that we always get out of any endeavor what we put into it.

When we lack Bible knowledge, we war against our own hope of heaven (Hos. 4:6) and stand in the path to glory for those we could have

taught. When we fail to learn Scripture, we build our own coffin in Satan's graveyard (Hos. 13:9). Since the Word of the Lord can keep us from sin (Psa. 119:11), we become our own worst enemy when we fail to study and learn the book!

Immoral and indecent conduct is a natural consequence of worldly emphasis devoid of scriptural knowledge. We are estranged from our Maker by licentious conduct and behavior. The words of the song, "Purer in Heart" express it well: "Keep me from secret sin, Reign Thou my soul within, Purer in heart, O God, Help me to be."

When error goes unrebuked, we allow Satan to win the day in a battle between good and evil. We dare not forget the injunction of Colossians 2:8, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." Only truth makes us free (Jn. 8:32). Only cowards take the easy road, and it winds up in hell! It is very true that it is never difficult to make proper decisions when we know what our values are. Lack of zeal causes us to thwart the gospel's progress and hide its power from the lives of others (Rom. 12:11). A failure to be alert in our value system also veils the true urgency in living for Jesus. This results in forgetting that heaven is our ultimate goal and in allowing lesser things to deter our journey toward the home of the redeemed. May we never hide the gospel and its glory! *WOT*

WE MUST START SOONER!

Brad Harrub, Ph.D., Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama

For less than \$30 you can now purchase a "Do-It-Yourself Divorce Kit" that claims to be legal in all fifty states (see "Divorce Kit"). Our society has so effectively streamlined the divorce process that "drive-thru" divorces are advertised in states such as Nevada. By simply driving up to a window, individuals can get the papers filed and pay the necessary fees that begin the

divorce process. In just a few weeks an official decree will be mailed to the couple—effectively ending that marriage in the sight of the government. For those who cannot wait those few weeks, one internet site is now offering their services, making it possible to fly down to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic—where they have the "fastest divorces in the Western Hemisphere."

This legal service invites unhappy individuals to "fly down to Santo Domingo one day, fly home divorced the next!" (see "Nevada Divorce").

The 2002 Census Report documented that the median duration of marriages ending in divorce is just under eight years (Kreider and Fields, 2002, p.19). In their projections of marital events, they stated that nearly everyone marries, and

nearly half of these first marriages will end in divorce. They then added that most of these will then remarry after divorcing from a first marriage. Marriage has become a disposable product in our society—something that, once the user tires of, he or she simply tosses it aside in hopes of then obtaining a new one. Almost one-half of adults in America are unmarried and, for the first time, single-person households outnumber married families with children. Conventional marriages are now viewed as obsolete and are quickly becoming endangered.

In an effort to keep marriage numbers up, Wendy McElroy recently suggested that we privatize marriage. She stated: "Let people make their own marriage contracts according to their conscience, religion, and common sense. Those contracts could be registered with the state, recognized as legal and arbitrated by the courts, but the terms would be determined by those involved" (2002). McElroy goes on to comment that "imposing a 'one-size-fits-all' model of marriage is a folly." She then points out the confusion that same sex marriages bring into the picture as proof that we need more options. As such, she summed it up this way: "A legal marriage is whatever contract for a committed relationship is agreed to by those involved."

We have reached the point where humans not only want to redefine marriage, but they also want to tailor-make it to fit their own wishes and circumstances. We have forgotten that marriage is a covenant that was first formed by Almighty God, and as such, we have no right to change the terms. On the sixth day of creation, after Adam was finished naming the animals, God put him to sleep and performed history's first human surgery. He fashioned the female of the species from a portion of the male's body. God then presented the woman to the man—**no doubt in what we would refer to as the first marriage ceremony!** Observe Adam's response: "And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man'" (Gen. 2:23). It would be roughly 4,000 years later that Jesus would have to remind the Pharisees that God intended this union between man and woman to be for life.

In addressing the Pharisees' question regarding divorce in Matthew 19, Jesus pointed out that they had altered God's

original plan. From the beginning God intended there be "no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). Christ then goes on to outline the only exception for divorce and remarriage—fornication. The Pharisees did not bother him further with hypothetical "what if" situations, or plague him with their opinions regarding the waiting game and the innocent party. These men understood (as does a twelve year old child today who reads that passage) that God intended marriage to be for life—period. The only exception that broke this covenant in the eyes of God was when adultery was committed in that marriage—period. However, these are hard sayings, and so now we have preachers and elderships all across the country trying to water down or make exceptions to this clear passage in God's word. Compromises are being made as individuals look diligently for acceptance, all the while disregarding the "God-breathed" Word of God.

The popularity of divorce should be a wake up call for all Christians. And rather than trying to figure out ways to twist God's word into accepting "what ifs" or "certain circumstances," we need to focus on the words of Christ. We need to recall what God intended marriage to be from the beginning and start teaching on it. Preachers need to mount the pulpit and proclaim God's original plan for husband and wife. Elders need to ensure that their flock not only realizes what God's Word teaches on this, but they also need to let individuals know they will not openly accept Christians who are in marriages that God does not recognize. Additionally, we must realize that the same television stars and Hollywood actors that our children often try to emulate are also teaching them very worldly practices regarding marriage.

If we are going to stem the rate of divorce in the church, we must start teaching our young people **sooner!** It makes absolutely no sense for the church to be filled with four- and five-year-olds living in broken homes or to have friends with step-parents, and yet we do not start teaching about marriage and divorce until high school. We can act like it does not exist, in an effort to protect those in elementary school, but this does not make the reality go away. Most congregations of the Lord's church believe that the topic of marriage and

divorce should be addressed just prior to our children leaving the home (as well it should); however, that is not good enough. This is one of the most important decisions our young people will ever make, and yet we do not even start emphasizing the importance of a life-long commitment until they are almost already married. Many teens are already actively dating by the time Bible classes begin to cover this topic. As such, hormones and youthful lusts often cloud the eternal importance of this issue. Many of our young people are rushing headlong into marriage simply so they can fulfill physical pleasures, only to wake up several years later realizing the problem. How many of our Christian young people run off and get married, and then four or five years later they find themselves single—desperately wanting a Christian mate, but not scripturally able to remarry. Consider how many tears could be prevented if we were to properly educate our young people on this lifelong decision.

We can either start teaching the Truth regarding God's original plan for marriage, or we can watch as our children line up in divorce drive-thrus. As parents and teachers, we can start spending time and money showing our children the benefits of healthy Christian marriages, or we can set aside the \$30 and allow them to "Do-It-Themselves" when they find themselves negotiating a divorce. The answer is not to bend the Scriptures to fit a certain situation, or find a congregation that will welcome anyone with open arms—the answer is to educate our young people about the authority of God's Word. If we are ever going to turn the tide, we are going to have to start sooner!

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HOMOSEXUALITY: ALTERNATE LIFESTYLE OR SIN?

Kevin Randles, New Hope, Alabama

Recent statistics show that the number of homosexuals is growing rapidly in the world today, and America is being told to be tolerant of their "alternative lifestyles." They are not hurting other people, and people should simply accept them. However, God is not tolerant when it comes to homosexuality. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, sets forth God's stance: "And likewise also the men, leaving the *natural* use of the woman, burned in their *lust* one toward another; men with men working that which is *unseemly*, and receiving in themselves that *recompence* of their *error* which was meet" (Rom. 1:27). Notice the five key words that have been italicized in the preceding passage. These five key words written by Paul set forth five truths concerning homosexuality:

1. Homosexuality is not natural. Paul said that homosexuality is "leaving the natural use of the woman." Natural is from the Greek word *phusikos*, which means that which is produced by nature, inborn, and according to nature. Many claim that they were born homosexual. However, Paul disproves this false belief. Therefore, one can conclude from Paul's teaching here that every man is inborn with a natural heterosexual preference. When God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, he then created woman and gave man and woman the following instruction: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). It is clear that God's plan since the beginning of time has been for men to be with and marry women, neither men with men nor women with women. Therefore, it is impossible for one to be born homosexual, because it is not natural or inborn from God.

2. Homosexuality is lust. Paul said that the homosexuals in Rome "burned in their lust one toward another." Lust is from the Greek word *orexis*, which literally means "a reaching" or "stretching after." Therefore, lust is a

general term that Paul uses here to represent every kind of lustful desire. Lust is an evil act that Christians are told to avoid. For example, in his first epistle to the church at Corinth, Paul said, "We should not lust after evil things" (1 Cor. 10:6). Therefore, Paul states that homosexuality is a lustful and therefore sinful desire where men burn for other men and women burn for other women. The apostle John states that the world is full of lust. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:16). Therefore, the apostle John says one that commits such a lustful act as homosexuality "is not of the Father," and "the love of the Father is not in him."

3. Homosexuality is unseemly (shameful). Paul refers to homosexuality as "working that which is unseemly." Unseemly is from the Greek word *aschemosune*, which means unseemly or unseemliness. Paul says that homosexuality is shameful and unseemly. It is ironic that homosexuals have taken the word "gay," which means happy, to represent their wicked lifestyle. However, Paul clearly sets forth that homosexuals are not happy, joyous, and proud as they would lead one to believe, but are shameful, unseemly, and embarrassed. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Task Force on Youth Suicide issued a report in January of 1989 concluding that lesbian and gay youth may constitute "up to thirty percent of completed suicides annually" and that "homosexuals of both sexes are two to six times more likely to attempt suicide than are heterosexuals." An important question must then be asked, "If homosexuality is such a 'gay' activity and sexual preference, then why are so many homosexuals of both sexes committing suicide?" Paul says the reason is that it is an unseemly and shameful act. Homosexuals are not "gay."

4. Homosexuality will bring a recompence. Recompence is from the

Greek word *antimisthia*, which literally means "a reward, requital" and can be used in a good or bad sense. Paul uses it in a bad sense in Romans 1:27. Paul is saying that homosexuals will get their just recompence (reward) for their wicked and sinful lifestyle, which is eternal damnation. Paul said, "God gave them up unto vile affections" (Rom. 1:26). These people were so wicked that God literally gave them up unto their own wickedness and sin. These "vile affections" that one partakes in will certainly be punished by God. Paul said, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). Paul clearly states that no one who is wicked will be able to avoid or escape God's wrath. His wrath will be revealed upon *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness. Therefore, the just recompence from God for homosexuals will be eternal damnation. For example, Sodom and Gomorrah were filled with homosexuality and many other kinds of wickedness. They received their just recompence because of their homosexuality and other "grievous sins." "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

5. Homosexuality is an error. Error is from the Greek word *plane*, which means "a wandering, a forsaking of the right path, whether in doctrine or in morals." Therefore, Paul says that homosexuality is the error of man. Unfortunately, many people in the world today are committing the error of homosexuality. It is an error that is punishable by eternal death and the loss of a precious soul. Homosexuality is not an alternative lifestyle and has never been authorized or approved by God. The Bible clearly states that homosexuality is a sin that will lead a soul to death.

WOT

WHO?

Adam Faughn, Haleyville, Alabama

Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, and Geuel. I'm sure that these ten names are very common and well-known to us. Or, maybe, we are saying, "Who?" What about Joshua and Caleb? Are those names a little more familiar?

The first list of names are the ten spies who went into the promised land of Canaan, came back, and said that the children of Israel could not take the land. Joshua and Caleb, on the other hand, said that God would help them overtake the land and its people, just as He had promised. Caleb said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30).

To whom did the people listen? Of course, they listened to the majority. They listened to those who told the fantastic story. They listened to the ten who lacked faith.

There is no doubt that all twelve men were chosen because they were leaders. In fact, Numbers 13:2 says, in part, "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan...you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, *every one a leader among them.*" Never would Moses or God have allowed followers to be in charge of such an important task. But these leaders still suffered from a lack of trust in God!

There are many lessons we can draw from this story. One is very obvious: always trust God. The Psalmist reminds us, "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD" (4:5). Christ, our ultimate example, trusted even near death. While hanging on the cruel cross, it was Christ who said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk. 23:46). We can always listen to the majority, but we will only overcome when we listen to God and put our trust in Him.

Secondly, we can learn that those who follow God will be those who are truly remembered. Shammua and the other nine spies are only listed in the Bible, and very few people could ever tell you who they are without re-reading the story. Joshua and Caleb, on the other hand, hold a lasting place in our hearts and in our Bible lessons as men who trusted God in a very difficult situation. It was also Joshua who would later lead the children of Israel and charge them to make that momentous decision, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." He also reminded them of his loyalty in the same proclamation: "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15).

Third, we need to remember that Joshua and Caleb were somewhat young when sent out to do this task. For many of us, it is much easier to simply listen to the "mature" majority than to listen to every side of an issue and compare it with God's holy Word. The age of the person—whether young or old—who presents us with a biblical principle should be irrelevant.

The ten spies, who will forever live in infamy, caused the children of Israel to doubt God, and, in doing so, they led Israel to another difficult and sad time in their history. Let us always trust God, even in difficult situations, and let us listen to the majority only when their path is consistent with biblical teaching. "Happy is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose trust the LORD is" (Jer. 17:7). WOT

The Words of Truth

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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.

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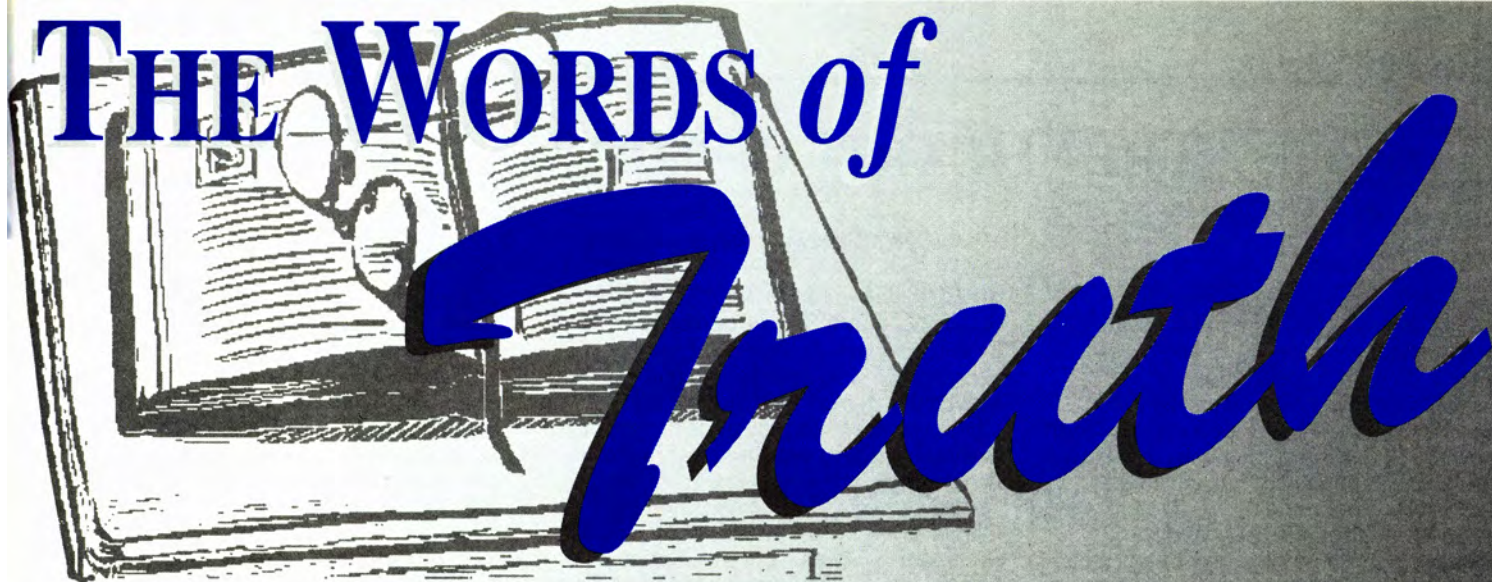
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

Vol. 39 No. 9

September 2002

HOW MUCH DOES "CONVICTION" COST?

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

"The man after God's own heart" had followed the crooked path of self-destruction. One sin inevitably led to another, then another, then another. It had all started with a small, perhaps even innocent, distraction from his palace rooftop (2 Sam. 11:2). Little did the monarch realize that this momentary lapse of judgment would lead to much more serious events. Incrementally, David would migrate from lust, to adultery, to lying and deception, to murder, and finally to an elaborate plan to cover up his indiscretions.

Oblivious and unconcerned about the consequences, he continued this activity until God sent a preacher—Nathan—to confront him. The prophet's divinely-ordained task was to "call down" the king of Israel. Tell a story, expose hypocrisy, and then petition his majesty to humble repentance. A daunting responsibility, at the very least.

I have often wondered about Nathan's emotional and mental state just prior to that sermon. Exactly how did he feel? Was he afraid? Did his blood run "icy-cold" at the thought of this impending "worship service" with only one member in the assembly? Did he experience any heightened anxiety? [If it had been me, I would have been terrified!] If Nathan was like his contemporaries (1 Kng. 19:3; Jam. 5:17), he experienced some trepidation at his task. And why not?! David had, with

Joab's assistance, murdered Uriah without remorse (2 Sam. 11:15-25). What would prevent the proud king from doing the same thing to this "puny prophet" also? He had done it before; he could do it again, couldn't he? I imagine Nathan was well-aware of the potential repercussions of faithfully delivering his message.

While I don't know exactly what Nathan *felt*, because the Bible doesn't tell me, I do know what he *did*. He preached his "firing" sermon. [The kind of sermon that sometimes gets a man his pink slip.] Note the components of Nathan's bold proclamation:

1. There was **certainty**. "Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon" (2 Sam. 12:9). There was no doubt as to what David had done and that he would be held accountable for his actions (2 Sam. 12:10-14).

2. There was **authority**. The prophet appealed to, "Thus says the Lord God . . ." (2 Sam. 12:1,7,11) rather than to his own human initiative. He spoke for God and announced His decree.

3. There was **rigidity**. David was guilty of gross misconduct, and nothing short of

full-fledged penance and contrition could clear his spiritual record (Psa. 51:1-4; 34:18; 2 Sam. 12:13) before Jehovah. The King of kings could not simply blind Himself to the sins of the king of Israel (Isa. 59:1-3; cf. 64:7).

My guess is that it was hard for Nathan to rebuke David. Telling a sovereign king what he didn't want to hear had to be very difficult. It took conviction. That's a trait that few preachers possessed then, or for that matter, possess today.

Exposing sinful behavior is tough. It invites retaliatory criticism and personal attacks. It opens doors for insult. It can cost a man his reputation, his job, his livelihood, even his very life (Matt. 14:1-12; Acts 7:51-60). But that didn't matter to Nathan. He knew the price of preaching (2 Tim. 3:3-6). He understood the cost of unyielding conviction (Matt. 16:24), and he willingly made the payment.

Sound preachers don't enjoy pointing out people's faults, but it is part of what God has called them to do (2 Tim. 4:2-5). "Love the sinner, but hate the sin." Folks bound in the fetters of iniquity need release (Rom. 6:17-18). Watered-down, wishy-washy sermonettes won't bring that needed release. Firm, yet loving gospel preaching will.

"Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority . . ." (Tit. 2:15; cf. 1 Tim. 5:20).

WOT

THE “HEART” OF THE MATTER

PART 2 OF 2

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Few would argue with the somewhat general assertion that Christians should be careful about what we allow into our minds. Since it does little good, however, to “prove” vague, almost universally held convictions, this month’s editorial sets forth some fairly specific applications in this two-part series on protecting our spiritual “hearts” (i.e., our minds).

In Philippians 4:8, Paul writes: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Apply that principle to the following forms of the popular media:

Movies

Movie theaters rake in somewhere around five billion dollars annually, and then about ten billion on rentals after the movies leave the theaters. It is not uncommon for a popular movie to gross over \$100 million. In fact, the highest grossing movie ever (Titanic) pulled in \$1.8 billion! Star Wars: The Phantom Menace grossed \$922 million. The Lost World gained \$72 million in box office receipts . . . in its opening weekend (Friday-Sunday)! The fact is, Americans are seeing movies at an unprecedented rate. But, closer to home, so are Christians.

Are our viewing habits similar to the world’s? They shouldn’t be, because we are guided by the psalmist’s conviction: “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me” (Psa. 101:3).

One of this fall’s most popular movies is “Barbershop” (starring Ice Cube and Anthony Anderson, rated PG-13). This movie, according to www.screenit.com (a secular site, incidentally), contains 102 profane words, eight of which are vain uses of the Lord’s name, twelve scenes that are objectionable due to their sexual content, and drug and alcohol use. Have Christians seen this movie? If so, were they putting a “wicked thing” before their eyes? Were they thinking about things that were “pure,” “lovely,” virtuous, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8)? Were they protecting their minds? Incidentally, this movie (rated PG-13) demonstrates the folly of setting an arbitrary standard such as not watching R-rated movies, but watching anything “cleaner” than that . . . If non-religious people find it offensive, how should Christians feel about it?

Now, a question: Could this movie, and dozens with similar content, honestly be considered “pure” by anyone who believes

the Bible and loves the Lord? Someone responds, “But if that’s true, then I’d hardly be able to watch *anything*, because *everything* has something like that in it.” Maybe that is true, but whoever said serving Christ was easy? In fact, quite the opposite is true. Jesus said that discipleship means denying self, taking up your cross, and following Him (Matt. 16:24). Being a Christian has *always* meant going against the crowd (cf. Matt. 7:13-14). Suppose, hypothetically, that in order to follow Christ we gave up *all* movies (this is unnecessary, of course, as there are wholesome movies, though more difficult to find), how would that sacrifice compare with the one Jesus offered for us? *Be careful what you watch.*

Television

How often is the following scenario repeated? The children get home from school, flip on the television while they eat an afternoon snack, and watch a couple of programs. Dad gets home from work and, after dinner, the family watches two or three of their favorite shows. On the weekend, three or four hours are spent watching ballgames, maybe a couple of hours of cartoons for the kids, and then the evening news and perhaps a news talk show or a two-hour movie.

According to statistics, 99% of American homes have at least one television, while 2/3 have more than one. About 54% of children have a television in their bedrooms. This abundance of television sets and the pervasiveness of cable/satellite programming translate into heavy viewing. The average weekly viewing time for American families is 51 hours and 55 minutes, an average of over seven hours per day (Nielsen). Children spend an average of 28 hours per week watching television (four hours per day). During primetime, about seven million teenagers and nine to ten million preteens are tuned in (Media Dynamics, 1996). It isn’t just young people, though—the heaviest viewers are older people, especially retirees, some of whom watch 55 hours per week.

What are we watching? One social scientist estimates that by age fourteen, the average child witnesses 11,000 murders on television—not including thousands of fights, robberies, muggings, rapes, and kidnappings. The January 1999 APA journal *Pediatrics* estimated that children, on average, view about 10,000 violent acts on television each year (and we wonder why kids are killing each other in schools . . .?). The same study concluded that each year, a typical teenager views nearly 15,000 sexual references, innuendoes, and jokes on television, of which fewer than 170 deal

with abstinence, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, or pregnancy. The so-called television “family hour,” from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m., contains more than eight sexual incidents per hour—four times as many as in 1976. Alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs are present in 70% of prime time network dramatic programs (see <http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/9901/06/media.kids/> for the complete CNN article). Is it any wonder that today’s teenagers are twice as likely to be sexually active as were the teens of thirty years ago?

Christians must be careful what we watch—it affects our thoughts, which, of course, influence our actions. Minimize television viewing and create opportunities for family time, Bible study, and church work.

Music

Who *doesn’t* enjoy music in some form? It’s fun, entertaining, and exciting. It can lift your spirits, express heart-felt emotions, and even unify a nation. People of all ages and cultures love it, even if it is in different forms. Some modern music, though, violates biblical principles and, as a result, is unfit for Christians. Suggestive lyrics, profanity, sexual content, and violent overtones can be found in much of today’s popular music . . . check out the lyrics of the songs before you buy the CD. Are they clean? Do they contain profanity? Are they filled with sexual references? Are they “pure,” “praiseworthy,” “honorable,” “virtuous”?

Some people say, however, “But the lyrics don’t actually matter . . . I just like the sound of the music.” But remember the biblical progression: what we hear translates into thoughts which themselves form our actions. We may think we can listen to ungodly lyrics and remain unscathed, but the Bible suggests otherwise. *Be careful what you listen to.*

Books/Magazines

The check-out lines at grocery stores are strategically filled with magazines, all with catchy headlines, glamorous photographs, eye-catching slogans. Is the content appropriate? Is it characterized by sexual overtones? Does it contribute to our pursuit of godliness?

The same is true of many best-selling books. Much of today’s popular literature is saturated with profanity and sexuality. Before we begin reading a book, we should make sure its content is consistent with biblical principles. Its presence on the *New York Times* bestseller list does not mean Christians should read it. *Be careful what you read.*

An article like this one is dangerous, because some will read it and immediately respond with a reaction similar to . . . “Does he *really* expect me to give up most popular movies, books, and music? Why not just move to a cabin in the woods and get away from everything?”

Please realize . . . we are in a war. It’s not a physical fight with laser-guided bombs and surgical air strikes. It’s a battle for our minds. What Satan wants more than anything is to get us to where we are just

like everybody else—to get us to think like the world and have the same priorities as the world. One of his most effective tools is the media—movies, books, television, magazines, and music. If he presented it to us directly, we wouldn’t fall for it. If he appeared before us and said, “Immorality, wickedness, and ungodliness are good—you really should experiment with sin,” we would immediately reject him. But that isn’t the way he works. He tries to get us to

become desensitized by injecting it subtly into our television shows, movies, and music. Then, after we have become “used to it,” he will carefully draw us into his clutches.

We are in a war, and the battlefield is our spiritual ‘hearts’—our minds. God wants us to stay pure and clean and devoted. Satan wants to fill our hearts with impurity, violence, and profanity. *Guard your heart with vigilance.* WOT

THE QUALITY OF MUSIC?

Scott McCown, Parrish, Alabama

The headline in the paper reads: “Nothing Matches the Quality of Organ Music.” One might skip over the article if the next line under the title did not state, “_____ church has new, custom-built organ ready for Sunday.” The newspaper reporter further entices the reader by stating that the church “has been without music for the past year because its old organ (was) too old to work.”

The article in reference reflects the understanding of many in the “Christian” community. Many, if not most, believe instrumental music to be a matter of choice. The religious leader quoted above, stating “Nothing matches the quality of organ music,” simply compared his preference to that of others who use a piano or orchestra. It seems his opinion is that organ music is appropriate for worship.

In all things related to Christianity the question is not: “What is your preference?” The question is, “What is God’s preference?” In worship God is the audience, and we are the participants. We should concern ourselves with pleasing God’s ears, not our individual or group preferences. So we ask, does God prefer a pipe organ to an electronic one? Does God prefer full orchestration? Would God be more pleased with one piano or with a Blue Grass Gospel Band? Paul tells us that we should do all things “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col 3:17, NKJV). We must do things God’s way. What is God’s way? The only way to know God’s answer is to read His word. God’s revealed word contains “all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

There are ten verses of Scripture in the New Testament that discuss music and singing to be done in the church this side of eternity. Revelation has passages about singing in heaven, but since we are not there yet, we should focus on music in the church. The ten passages are:

- Matthew 26:30: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”
- Mark 14:26: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of

Olives.”

- Acts 16:25: “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”
- Romans 15:9: “and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: ‘For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name.’”
- 1 Corinthians 14:15: “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”
- Ephesians 5:19: “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”
- Colossians 3:16: “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.”
- Hebrews 2:12: “I will declare Your name to My brethren: In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”
- Hebrews 13:15: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”
- James 5:13: “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”

From these passages we learn what God prefers as church music. Remember that God is the audience. Remember that our primary goal in worship is to please Him. There are at least five specifics about church music in these passages:

- God tells worshipers to **sing**.
- God tells worshipers **what** to sing.
- God tells worshipers **how** to sing.
- God tells worshipers **when** to sing.
- God tells worshipers **why** to sing.

Those who worship God are to sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs (cf. Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Christians are to sing with a proper attitude and heart (cf. 1 Cor. 14:15). We are to sing when we are assembled and when we are cheerful (cf. Heb. 2:12; Jam. 5:13). And finally we sing to God (Col 3:16), to express our personal inward joy (Jam. 5:13), and to admonish others as we

teach each other the truth in song (Col. 3:16). The latter purpose of singing is a by-product of the first two. When I sing to God and express my joy in song because of Him, those who are singing with me and near me receive both instruction and encouragement.

What is significantly missing from these scriptures is what mechanical instrument of music God considers to be of the best quality. What is missing is God’s choice of a piano, psalter, drum, or dulcimer. Since God does not state a preference in His Word is it left up to the individual or group to decide what is best? No . . . that would be seeking to please man’s ear and not God’s will. God simply tells us to sing. To be specific God **does** define the instrument He wants played, plucked, and picked in worship. Look back to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. There it is in Scripture—we are to sing and make melody (music) “in our hearts to the Lord.” God not only prefers the heart as His instrument of choice; He commands it. When God makes a specific command, that eliminates all other options. God does not want a piano, pipe organ, or full orchestration. God wants individual Christians lifting up their voices as they sing together, teaching and admonishing each other, as they make music in their hearts. Dan Chambers—in *Where’s The Piano?*—points out that renowned Methodist preacher and commentator Adam Clarke (1762-1832) remarks in his commentary after calling instruments “a substitute for the life and power of religion”:

Away with such portentous baubles from the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship Him in spirit and in truth, for to no such worship are those instruments friendly.

What then is the conclusion? I think it is best said in the words of the writer of Hebrews, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15). WOT

STUDIES IN 1 JOHN 1

Jason Jackson, Stockton, California

John writes with this purpose: “These things I write unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:13). Similarly, he begins the epistle by saying, “[T]hat which we have seen and heard declare unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be made full” (1 Jn. 1:3-4).

John wants Christians to “know” that they have eternal life. That is, he desires that they come to a full understanding of what it means to be in fellowship with God and what is required to maintain that fellowship.

Notice the order of things that lead to eternal life—the result of fellowship with God. First, there exists that which John saw and heard (v. 1)—the *proofs* that Jesus, the Son of God, came in the flesh for man’s redemption . . . God’s plan in action (cf. 1 Jn. 4:2; Heb. 2:14).

Second, there is the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus Christ, the Word of Life. John says, “We bear witness, and declare unto you . . . declare we unto you . . .” (vv. 2-3).

Third, there is the reception, on the part of the hearers, concerning the truths

about Jesus Christ (v. 3). Belief (i.e., faith *and* obedience, cf. Rom. 1:5; 16:26) that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God” who “became flesh and dwelt among us,” is the basis of our fellowship with the apostles, which *is* fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (cf. Jn. 20:30-31; 1:14; Lk. 10:16).

Fourth, genuine fellowship with God will bring about the ultimate joy for the Christian—eternal life (v. 4).

After John introduces these important points, his focus through the balance of the book is our fellowship with God. Christ has come—that is true. We can enjoy eternal life with God through Christ—that is true. But we must receive the teaching of Jesus Christ—in doctrine *and* daily living.

The letter’s main body begins with 1 John 1:5-10. Fellowship with God is not merely accepting and affirming the truths of Christianity; it is *also* adopting a way of life—a life consistent with God’s nature and will. This is the kind of life that Jesus led.

From a study of these verses, we learn that the Christian life is more than a profession. It is possible that we can profess something that is not true. We may believe our spiritual condition to be one thing, when God sees it another way. In order for us to *know* (cf. 1 Jn. 5:13) that we

have fellowship with God, what we say *and* what we do must correspond to God’s will.

As we consider the passage, we learn about some errors to avoid, and we learn some truths to embrace.

In order to have fellowship with God, we must avoid the following errors:

First, we cannot walk in darkness (v. 6).

Second, we cannot claim that sin has no real significance in our lives (v. 8).

Third, we cannot assert that we have not sinned (v. 10). Therefore, it is necessary that we have a proper view of ourselves in relation to sin. We cannot live in sin. We must maintain a healthy respect for the danger of sin. And, we must recall the truth that sin has been a part of our personal past.

With this biblical view of sin, we must also embrace the following truths: We can be cleansed of sin by the blood of Christ (v. 7). And God is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (v. 9). What wonderful promises! But these are *conditional* promises. We must walk in the light, and we must confess our sins (vv. 7, 9).

In this way, John begins the letter: human professions and divine promises.

WOT

A KNOWLEDGE FOR EVERY MOMENT

Tom McLemore, Selma, Alabama

“We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). No doubt this verse written by Paul has been committed to memory by many Christians and has bolstered their faith and provided stability and hope in times of need. It is a gem in the treasure house of the sacred oracles and reveals several great truths.

When it comes to God, the Christian can be *certain*. “We know,” writes Paul. He may be certain because God’s Word declares what may be verified time and again by experience. Paul had been in many challenging situations (see 2 Cor. 11:23-33), yet he declared that the faithful God “delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again” (2 Cor. 1:10). If one trusts deeply enough and long enough, he will come to know by experience the trustworthiness of God as revealed in Scripture.

When it comes to God, the sovereign Creator is in *complete control*. “In everything,” the apostle affirms of God. Though it may be true that not everything which happens is according to His desire/will/wish (one of the consequences of His granting men free wills), there is nothing whatsoever that immobilizes God. Such power is beyond our comprehension, but its evidence is everywhere to be seen and known.

When it comes to God, the sovereign Creator, Christians may be certain He is *involved*. “God works,” Paul assures us. Jesus concurs: “My Father is working still . . .” (Jn. 5:17). He is not aloof, absent, unconcerned, but rather He is the “one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6). He is constantly more active than we could ever imagine. “Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:4).

When it comes to God, the working Sovereign’s objective is *changeless*. “God

works *for good*,” according to the apostle. “The Lord is good” (Psa. 25:8; 34:8; 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 119:68; 135:3; 136:1; 145:1), He created all men and all things good, and He desires only good. While men at times neither perceive nor know what is good, it is certain that the good God knows absolutely what is good and pursues it incessantly and completely. If men would only heed, “He has showed you, O man, what is good . . .” (Mic. 6:8). Whatever God does, we may take for granted that it is for good. There are no exceptions, despite the malevolence of men. “. . . [Y]ou meant evil against me; but God meant it for good,” declared Joseph to his fearful brothers (Gen. 50:20).

When it comes to God, the sovereign Creator has a special regard for, and relationship with, *his people in Christ Jesus*. They “love God and are called according to his purpose,” according to the description Paul provides. “. . . [H]e chose us in him before the foundation of the

world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:4-6). "To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14).

When it comes to God, all these things are certain. Not only are they submitted in inspiration, but they are also verifiable and verified by experience. These truths provide a solid and unassailable bulwark for weak, fragile men in the clutches of life "under the sun." The only variable is whether or not you and I love God. Are we

willing to love God with all of our hearts, souls, strength, and minds (Lk. 10:27). . . not merely with lip service, but with a consecrated life of unflinching service? If we can do this, then all is certain! Let come what may, for we are secure in God. This knowledge is one for any and every moment. Is it yours? WOT

"THE DAY OF THE LORD"

Bryant Evans, Daphne, Alabama

God intervenes providentially in the daily affairs of mankind. But occasionally, God has intervened in such a monumental way that it can only be called "the day of the Lord." Every biblical occurrence of the phrase is in the context of holy judgment. Isaiah describes the "Day of the Lord" as a time that comes upon the "proud and lofty" (Isa. 2:12). He, along with Joel, proclaims that it will come "as a destruction from the Almighty" (Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15). Isaiah also adds that it is "cruel both with wrath and fierce anger" (Isa. 13:9). Jeremiah said the day of the Lord was "a day of vengeance" and a day in which "none escaped" (Jer. 46:10; Lam. 2:22).

Punishment, meanwhile, is the theme of the day of the Lord in Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:7,8,14,18; 2:2-3 and 14:1). There is nothing but doom on the horizon for those who rebel against Jehovah God.

Oddly, the northern tribes of Israel, even in their apostasy, looked forward to the day of the Lord. Amos sharply rebuked them: "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness and not light" (Amos 5:18). He continues in verse 20: "Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it."

Israel was living in a time of prosperity and comfort. There was peace

in the region and wealth was flowing. Amos describes them in chapter six as they "that lie upon beds of ivory and stretch themselves upon their couches . . ." (Amos 6:4). The nation, although divided from their brethren in the south, were proud of their heritage and their special relationship with God. Some evidently thought that the coming of Jehovah would be against the surrounding heathen nations and so they looked forward to His coming. But Amos says nothing could be further from the truth. "I hate, I despise your feast days . . ." (Amos 5:21). As to their offerings God said: "I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts" (Amos 5:22).

Amos foretold their future when he cried: "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord . . ." (Amos 5:27). The climax of his message comes next: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion . . ." (Amos 6:1). The day of the Lord came against Israel in 722 B.C. when the Assyrians carried the nation captive. Never again would the ten tribes of the north stand as one nation. Jehovah would later rise against Judah when they were carried away captive by Nebuchadnezzar in about 586 B.C. Later, Judah would return from captivity and re-inhabit Jerusalem. But even these Jews would survive only as a

shadow of their former great kingdom. God would again bring judgment against them (another day of the Lord) in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was once for all destroyed and Judaism was publicly dismantled by God.

Perhaps most frightening, and certainly more concerning to us, is that there will be another day of the Lord. We may be as ill-prepared as Israel was in 722. Generally, we are quite comfortable. We are at ease in our communities and secure in our churches. We live as the world lives and we do as the world does. We nod at sin and wink at unrighteousness so that we can get along with the world while drifting further from God. Sadly, like the Israelites of over 2,500 years ago, we are oblivious to the danger we are in. Peter said: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10). Yes, friend, there is a day of judgment, a day of destruction for the wicked yet ahead. Are you at ease? Are you prepared? As Peter asked in 2 Peter 2:11: "what manner of persons ought yet to be . . ." We ought to be watchful, concerned, and obedient. May God bless the study of His Word. WOT

PEDDLERS VERSES PREACHERS

Drew Kizer, Leeds, Alabama

There is much talk today about "favorite preachers" and the "best churches," so much so that church work has become quite competitive. This is where the worlds of religion and fast food blend; people are looking for a church that suits their "tastes." The problem is, "tastes" change—today it might be Burger King, tomorrow McDonald's, and the next day

Wendy's.

But, as in all cases, history repeats itself. The temptation to be the slickest, most appealing church to religious consumers has been around from the inception of the church of Christ. Consider what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:17: "For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as

men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ" (ESV). Evidently, Paul was having to deal with those whom he calls "peddlers of God's word," those who had in some way frustrated his attempts to maintain purity and soundness in the church at Corinth. Paul's language here is interesting. It alludes to the "peddlers"

or hucksters of his day, who were notorious for their tricks. Many of them were wine dealers, who would dilute their wines with water and other juices for the purpose of illegitimate gain. Because of the tricks of these tradesmen, the word Paul uses came to refer to anyone who adulterated something that was otherwise pure (Bauer, p. 403; cf. KJV).

Who were these "peddlers of God's word"? The text says there were "many" of them. We know that, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul addressed the "excellency of speech or of wisdom" and the "enticing words of man's wisdom" (2:1,4). This was the rhetoric of the sophists, or the teachers-for-hire, who sold their teachings for profit. Paul had no problem with gospel preachers' receiving support for proclaiming the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9). But the first century sophists were an entirely different matter. Their focus was not upon *what* was being said, but upon *how* it was being said. Consequently, they were able to woo every audience into their favor by the artistry of their speech. As we delve further into the second letter to Corinth, we find that this practice had crept into the church. In one place, Paul listed a

number of things he renounced, things we can conclude were characteristic of the gospel peddlers: "hidden things of dishonesty . . . craftiness . . . handling the word of God deceitfully" (4:2). Also, he spoke of those preaching "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel" (11:4). These, Paul says, are "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ" (11:13). Basically, the Corinthians were beginning to trade the gospel Paul preached to them for a shinier, more glamorous gospel delivered by these "peddlers."

Paul pled with them to reconsider their favorite preachers. He and his companions were not the most eloquent (cf. 1 Cor. 2:3-4), but they were sincere. The word expressing "sincerity" signifies that which is "unalloyed and pure." Interestingly, it was often used in reference to "unmixed substances," such as pure wine unadulterated by fraudulent peddlers (Vine, p. 913). The apostle then supports his sincerity with three distinguishing facts about his preaching. First, his preaching is *from God*. He is no peddler; instead he is "commissioned by God." Second, he preaches *before God*. In contrast to the "false apostles" who

hide behind false images, Paul works out in the open, "in the sight of God." Third, he is "*in Christ*," where, as a preacher, he ought to be. How could someone preach Christ and stand outside of His body?

Today we need more preachers who will stand with Paul and preach out of "sincerity." The denominations and the community churches will always be more appealing to religious consumers shopping for fast food religion. But the pure, unadulterated preaching of the gospel will save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21). Though the lost of the world may crave peddlers, peddlers are not what they need. What they need is to hear the gospel of salvation, and "how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14).

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WHOM DO MEN SAY THAT I AM?"

Sam Willcut, Mumford, Tennessee

When Jesus and His apostles came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he instigated a discussion that began with a series of thought-provoking questions. His first question to them was, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matt. 16:13). I have wondered why He asked them this question. My initial thought is that it was simply a question to foreshadow the next all-important, personal question: "But whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). The apostles' response to the first question included prophets like John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. While I do not believe Jesus was in any way image-driven, I believe He did want the world to see Him correctly. His influence alone stood to prove to people who He claimed to be. Nicodemus said to Jesus at night, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (Jn. 3:2). Thus, the futile attempts of other Pharisees to ruin Jesus' influence by publicly accusing Him to be affiliated with Beelzebub (Satan) were easily and quickly extinguished (Matt. 12:22-45). Therefore, although we likewise are not to be

image-driven, we are to be conscientious of the way others see us. Thus, ask yourself the following question: "Whom do men say that I am?" What answers would you get?

Would the world say of you that you are obviously one who is not a Christian? Do your co-workers even know that you are a Christian? Can they see something in your life that is different from the lives of others? Simply put, do people see Jesus in you (Gal. 2:20)? Take, for example, your speech. When Jephthah defeated the Ephraimites, the Gileadites seized the fords of the River Jordan to prevent the return of the conquered Ephraimites. To determine whether one seeking to cross belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, he was required to pronounce the word "Shibboleth." Since they "could not frame to pronounce it right" (Jud. 12:6), not giving the sound of the "sh" at the beginning of the word, all who said "Sibboleth" were killed. Their speech betrayed them. When Peter was observing the atrocity against Jesus in the high priest's house, one said to him, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee" (Matt. 26:73). Luke adds in the same context, ". . . for he is a

Galilaean" (Lk. 22:59). His speech proved he was different. Do people see your speech as non-Christian?

Would others say of you that you are a Christian that goes to church and just sits on the pew? Do others see your being involved in the work, or do they look upon you as a lukewarm member (cf. Rev. 3:15-16)? If asked about you, would they say that you might be faithful in attendance, but never involve yourself with any of the activities of the congregation? Do you quickly leave following the assembly without socializing any with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do people see you as a lukewarm Christian?

Would others say of you that you are a faithful Christian? Can they easily see your "abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58)? If people were to talk about your spirituality, would they describe you as being dependable and faithful? Would they see the "fruit of the Spirit" in your life (Gal. 5:22-23)? Could they say of your family, like "the house of Stephanas," that you have addicted yourselves "to the ministry of the saints" (1 Cor. 16:15)? Do people see you as a faithful Christian? WOT

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO US TODAY?

Duane Patton, Jacksonville, Alabama

God, from the beginning, has revealed Himself and has spoken to mankind at various times and in various ways (Heb. 1:1). The first man and woman had a very unique relationship with the Creator in regards to their communication with Him. Later, God spoke to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and certain others giving them direct instructions concerning His will for them (Gen. 6; 12:1-3; 18:1-15; 26:23ff.; 28:10ff.). The prophets of old were given express instruction from God as it pertained to the rise and fall of the nations and even certain individuals (Isa. 6; Jer. 1:9-10; Ezek. 1:3; Dan. 2; Amos 7:10-17; Matt. 11:13). Finally, God spoke His will to men through His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2; Jn. 1:1-3, 14). He *was* and *is* the Living Word of God who speaks to us today. How does He do this, or in what way does God speak through Jesus?

HOW GOD DOES *NOT* COMMUNICATE HIS WILL TO US TODAY:

1. **Nature** - While nature reveals much about God's existence and power, it cannot reveal His will to mankind concerning salvation (Psa. 19:1ff.; Rom. 1:20).

2. **World Religion** - "Men are incurably religious" so the phrase goes. But not all religion is God ordained. Christianity by its very nature is exclusive and only through it may men gain access to God (Matt. 7:21ff.; Jn. 14:6; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). Paul preached to the Athenian philosophers of his day concerning the "One whom [they] worship without knowing" as being the "One true and living God" (Acts 17:22ff.; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Thess. 1:9).

3. **Teachers of Error** - Paul warned the elders at the Ephesus church of Christ that after his departure certain men from amongst themselves would "rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:30). Error has a way of making itself sound truthful. God's will can never be made known through deceptive means (Jer. 7:4, 8; 23:30-32).

4. **Human Emotion** - Emotion is good—God gave it to us to be used correctly. We are moved with *conviction* when we understand the truth about sin, with *sorrow* when we understand that sin put Christ on the cross, but with *joy* when we realize that because he "bore the brunt" of sin for us we can be made right with God. However emotions **follow**, they do not **precede** knowledge. Once we get this right the gospel will be much easier to

accept! (Prov. 14:12; Jn. 8:32).

5. **Miracles/Miraculously Inspired Men**

- The age of miracles had its *place* and *purpose* (Jn. 20:30-31; 1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11ff.; Heb. 2:1-4). Once God's Word concerning salvation was completely revealed/confirmed the need for miracles ceased. Now you and I have what those in the first century were not privy to all at once—God's fully revealed will (1 Cor. 2:6-13; Eph. 3:1-11; Jude 3)! Some claim to speak God's will today miraculously, but in doing so they contradict plain Scripture and in so doing they have the curse of God residing upon them unless they repent (Gal. 1:6-9; 1.k. 13:3)!

6. **Angels** - Angels have often transferred God's will to certain men in the past (Gen. 18:1-2, 16ff.; 19:1-22; Acts 27:23; Rev. 1:1ff.; 19:10); but they, like miracles, have ceased in their work concerning the transference of God's will (Gal. 1:6-9). God created angels to serve and worship Him (Heb. 1:6-7, 14). They serve in some capacity for those who will inherit salvation (Christians), but in what certain capacity God has not clearly revealed to us. One thing is sure, they do not deliver the Word of reconciliation (i.e., the gospel); for it is made known through preaching (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; Tit. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:8-10)!

7. **Mediums/Sorcery** - Of all the things which the Lord has denounced and forbidden, witchcraft and the like must be close to the top of the list. Overt spiritual trickery and "hocus-pocus" are great tools for Satan's diabolical work. The fanaticism associated with such things as psychic hotlines, fortune-telling, and witchcraft leads people far away from the will of the Lord and into the depths of that which abominable before God (Deut. 18:10ff.). The Israelites of old were forbidden to practice or consult such (Lev. 19:27,31); the new covenant likewise condemns such practice (Rev. 9:21; 21:8,27).

HOW GOD *DOES* COMMUNICATE HIS WILL TO US TODAY:

The Divinely inspired writer of the epistle to the Hebrews informs us that "God . . . has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the worlds . . ." (Heb. 1:1-2). John, in His account of the Gospel, identified this Creator of the universe and Revealer of God's will as Jesus, whom God also appointed to take away the sin of the world

by dying in man's place (Jn. 1:1-4,29; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24). What God wants all men to know has been and is still communicated to the world through Jesus Christ. But *how* does He do this?

Consider first that while Jesus walked on the earth with men He could speak directly to them, face to face (Jn. 1:14; Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Jn. 1:1-2). He spent some thirty-three years in open, physical contact with humanity; the last three years or so being spent teaching men and women about the kingdom of God that would and did come in their lifetime (Mk. 1:14; 9:1; Col. 1:13). Not long before His sad betrayal and unlawful arrest Jesus spoke concerning His departure from the earth and explained to His apostles what they could soon afterwards expect to occur. Because He would no longer be with the apostles (or any one else on the earth) He would send the Holy Spirit from heaven to miraculously comfort *them* in times of grief and terror, and guide *them* into all truth by bringing into *their* remembrance "all things" that He said to *them* (Jn. 14:25-26; 16:33). These selected men of the first century would be miraculously endowed with the ability to both *speak* and *write* the will of God **completely** and **without mistake**, and to give gifts to others through the laying on of *their* hands (such gifts however could not be transferred by someone other than an apostle, cf. Acts 8:14-18). This certainly proves that no such gifts are available today. Thus, Jesus would speak to men through His apostles of the first century both *orally* and in *written* form (1 Cor. 2:6,13; 14:37; et al.).

By the end of the first century A.D. God's **complete will** concerning salvation along with the **details of living the Christian life** had been delivered to mankind once and for all (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Jude 3). God's miraculous communication to men and through men had ceased upon the completion of the New Testament scriptures. The communication process from then on would be through the written Word; and that sufficiently so (Acts 20:28; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12ff.).

In summary we should note that 1) Jesus Christ is God's spokesman concerning salvation and all that accompanies it; 2) the Holy Spirit directed certain men (the apostles of Christ) in the first century into all truth on Christ's behalf; and 3) God's will in every aspect of our lives has either been spoken or written by these men in the first century A.D. and has been sufficiently recorded for us by Divine assistance in what is known as the Bible!

WOT

REGARDLESS

Eddy Gilpin

Matthew 25 contains the parable of the ten virgins (five wise, five foolish), a judgment scene depicted by the Lord (vv. 31-46) and the parable of the talents. All of these are familiar to the Bible student. The two parables (which precede the judgment scene) reveal the need for preparation for that final day. In the parable of the talents the one-talent man is seen as having hid his Lord's talent in the earth and presenting it to Him upon his Lord's return. At least two matters regarding this parable are worthy of our attention and require our loyalties. These matters revolve around the truth expressed in Matthew 25:19: "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them." That time of reckoning will occur regardless of . . .

The Passing of Time. The passage states that "after a long time the lord of those servants cometh." The "lord of those servants" symbolizes the Lord Himself who will be the judge of "the quick and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1). That day is appointed (Acts 17:31), and the passage of time will not prevent it. Some have made the mistake of thinking that since His return has not transpired that it will not (2 Pet. 2:4). Regardless of the amount of time that passes, God will keep His word (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

The "Passing of the Buck." The passage also states that the lord of those servants "reckoneth with them." The one-talent man offered excuses to his lord. He first "passed the buck" by saying the lord was hard and vindictive (Matt. 25:24). He tried to use the lord as his excuse. Next, he tried to use his own frailties as an excuse. He said, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth" (Matt. 25:25). Such "fear" is listed in Revelation 21:8 at the very top of the list of matters which will keep one from heaven. Quickly the verdict was rendered concerning this man. The Lord said, "cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30). For this man, the time of reckoning came and no excuse he offered could prevent it.

What are you counting on to keep from being judged by God? Time will not prevent it and neither will excuses. That day is appointed and will transpire. Will you be ready? *WOT*

The Words of Truth

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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.

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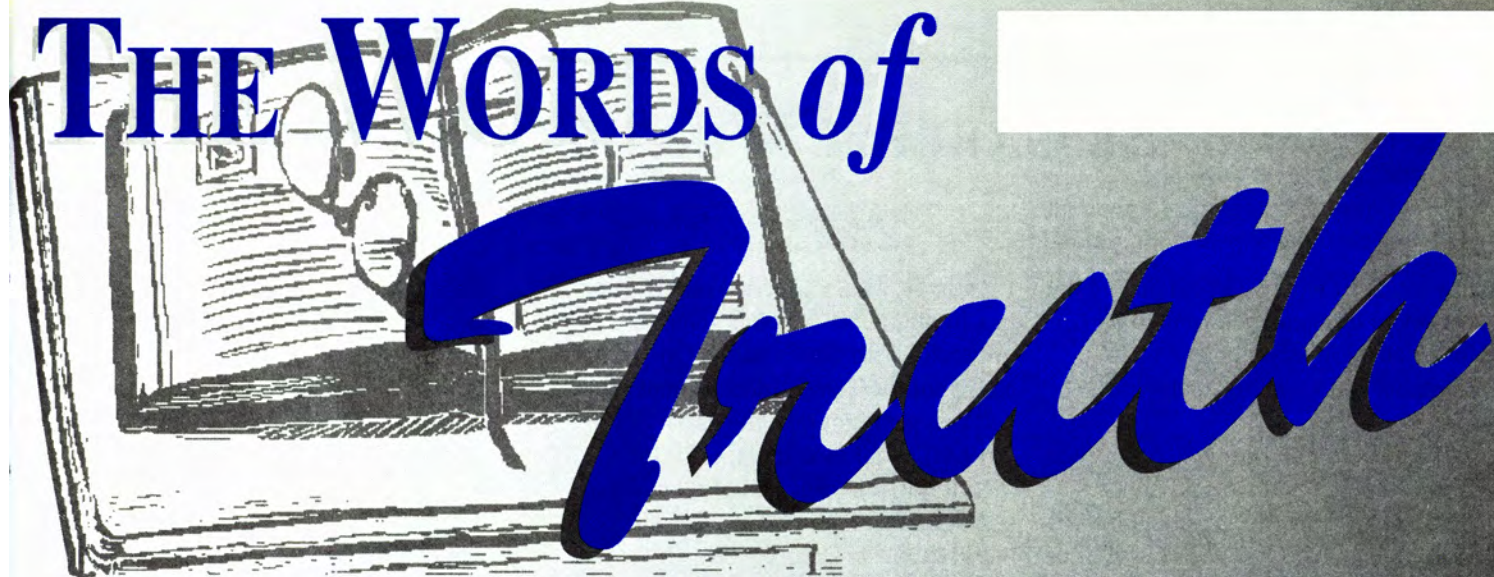
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

WATCH AND WARN

Brandon Jackson, Jasper, Alabama

We have all heard the illustration: A man in a body of water is gasping for breath as he bobs to the surface. Another man is in a boat not far away, life preserver in hand, yet he does nothing and the preserver never leaves his side. Thus, the man in the water descends and the water's surface remains unbroken. The story is given to illustrate the point that the man drowns because he is in the water, not because the man in the boat does not provide him with the life preserver. Just as one who has never heard the gospel dies in his sins, not because no one preached the message unto him, but because *he was in sin*.

This is a powerful illustration, but I believe we can do better. Consider Ezekiel 33. In this text we find a divine illustration of the point that one who has never been warned of his sins will yet die in them, not because he was not warned or did not hear the message but because *he was in sin*. "But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his

iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (Ezek. 33:6). "... [H]e is taken away in his iniquity. . . ." He is not taken away because the watchman did not proclaim the warning, but because of his iniquity. The enemy was on the way. The watchman's warning may have allowed those who heard it to be saved had they made preparation. But the watchman's failure to sound the trumpet did not cause their destruction—the invading army did. We see souls in peril every day. Every day the enemy army—sin and death—is approaching those around us. Every day we have the responsibility to perform the duties of the watchman—to watch and to warn.

How serious is this responsibility? The Lord says that the blood of the lost will be required at the hand of the watchman who fails to perform his duty. This illustration is so powerful because we can envision the watchman in his tower, the entire city relying upon his vigilant eye to warn them of impending danger. We can glimpse, in the view of the distant landscape, the glint of a shield, the

shine of a sword, signaling the approaching army. Yet, the tower-perching soldier does nothing, willfully allowing the army to approach closer and closer to his loved ones, to the ones he has befriended, to the ones who have befriended him. Ultimately, the enemy enters the camp and all are lost. What a powerful illustration of the point being made to Ezekiel and to us today. Be vigilant. Watch and warn. The enemy is approaching; every day the grave grows closer. All must do battle with the enemy army of sin and death. If we watch and warn we can provide our cities with the preparation they need to overcome.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 Jn. 5:4-6). *WOT*

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY

Chuck Webster, Editorial

How much of what you said during the past seven days can you remember? How many conversations can you remember *verbatim*? Probably not many.

That is a bit alarming, especially in view of the fact that we said about 150,000 words last week, enough to fill a 500-page book. Over the course of our lifetimes, you and I will “write” about 3,000 books—each with 500 pages—by what we say. We will speak around 450 million words.

It becomes even more sobering when we realize what Jesus said in Matthew 12:36-37: “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” What Jesus is saying, of course, is that we will be judged by what we say . . . which means that God is listening to all 450 million words.

What does He think about what *you* said last week?

How are we using our speech—for good or bad? Everyone knows how much damage can be done by our speech. Which of us has never felt the sting of criticism from a friend, classmate, or family member? Whoever wrote “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me” was way off the mark. The truth is, words can harm . . . and they can do serious damage.

James called the tongue a “fire, a world of iniquity” (Jam. 3:6), because it has force that is potentially destructive . . . and it usually starts with a thoughtless word. But once it starts, it is terribly hard to control. With that in mind, here are some “don’t’s” for our speech:

Don’t take God’s name in vain (i.e., don’t use profanity).

Some people hear bad news and exclaim, “Oh my G___!” Others see something unexpected and cry out,

“Christ, what happened here?” But Christians, on the other hand, are more careful with God’s name. One of the first of the Ten Commandments was, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Ex. 20:7; cf. Lev. 19:12; 22:2; Deut. 28:58).

One can watch very few television shows or movies without hearing God’s name repeatedly used irreverently. As a result many Christians have become desensitized, hearing the language, but not being shocked by it. Worse still, some Christians have adopted the world’s irreverent speech, using God’s name as if it were an ordinary name (i.e., profaning it). Others, perhaps limited somewhat by conscience and not quite able to use His exact name, “soften” it by using a euphemism—the “substitution of a word or phrase which is less offensive or objectionable”—instead. Some common euphemisms include: “Lordy” or “Law me” which refers to the Lord; “Gee Whiz,” “Jeez,” or “Gee” which is a euphemistic contraction of the name of Jesus; “Gosh,” “Golly,” “Gad,” “Egad,” for God; “Good gracious,” “Good grief;” “My Goodness,” “Goodness knows,” “For Goodness sake,” “Thank Goodness,” are all mild forms of oaths and are used euphemistically for God. “Heavens,” “Good heavens,” and “For heaven’s sake” all call on heaven to witness the truth (cf. Matt. 23:22). “Darn,” “Dang,” and “Dern” simply mean “damn.” “Dickens” and “Deuce” are used for the devil. “Heck” means hell.

God’s name is worthy of our utmost respect. In the model prayer, Jesus encouraged us to begin with an affirmation of God’s holiness: “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name” (Matt. 6:9). The Greek verb translated “hallowed” means “to be venerable or

hallow, to separate from profane things and dedicate to God” (*Strong’s*). Though this phrase is certainly not limited to our speech, it clearly includes it. In other words, let God’s name always be holy, different from other names, set apart, special. Use it only when you are consciously thinking of what that name represents. Never let it pass your lips in a flippant or casual way.

Don’t curse or use filthy speech.

Swearing is everywhere—in the break room, in our hallways at school, in the stands at football games. Television and movies fill scripts with four-letter words. A popular tract has this quotation: “people swear when they are mad and when they are glad; when they are satisfied and when they are disappointed; when they are fortunate, and when they are unfortunate; when they are sick, and when they are well; when they are blessed in work or play, in earnest and in fun, and for a thousand other reasons.”

In biblical language, to utter a “curse” is to pronounce condemnation upon someone (Jam. 3:10). Modern examples are “Damn you!” or “Go to hell!” The language of Christians, of course, should be free from cursing. Our desire is consistent with God’s . . . we want no one to perish but rather “that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Instead of wishing that others be lost, we do all we can to save them (Mk. 16:16). Jesus said for us to love—not curse—our enemies (Matt. 5:44). We love our neighbors (Matt. 22:39). As a table of contents tells what one will find in a book, so speech tells others what they will find in our hearts.

Do you know people who always use filthy speech? Maybe they are always talking about immorality or telling off-color jokes, or perhaps they cannot complete a sentence without injecting some sort of obscenity. Everything, to

people like that, relates in some way to things of a lewd nature. That is the kind of language Paul condemned when he said to avoid “filthy language” (Col. 3:8). He was referring to “speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste. obscene speech, dirty talk” (*Greek-English Lexicon*: cf. Wayne Jackson, “Profanity—A Biblical Assessment.” <http://www.christiancourier.com/penpoints/profanity2.htm>). In other words, avoid “gutter” talk. If the joke is dirty, don’t tell it, don’t listen to it, and don’t laugh at it. Don’t talk about anything you wouldn’t discuss in the presence of Jesus Christ.

Don’t lie.

God expects His children to be truthful—to mean what they say. “Do not lie.” God’s ninth commandment says (Ex. 20:16). A liar will not continue in God’s presence (Psa. 101:7) because he is a child of the devil (Jn. 8:44). “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Eph. 4:25). “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). “But . . . all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8; repeated twice more, in 21:27 and 22:15).

A businessman was interviewing applicants for the position of divisional manager. He devised a simple test to select the most suitable person for the job. He asked each applicant the question, “What is two and two?” The first interviewee was a journalist. His answer was “twenty-two.” The second applicant was an engineer. He pulled out a calculator and showed the answer to be between 3.999 and 4.001. The next person was a lawyer. He stated that in the case of *Jenkins v. Commissioner of Stamp Duties*, two and two was proven to be four. The last applicant was an accountant. The businessman asked him, “How much is two and two?” The accountant got up from his chair, went over to the door, closed it, then came back and sat down. He leaned across the desk and said in a low voice, “How

much do you want it to be?”

Is what *we* say dependent on the situation? Do we say what our supervisors/spouses/co-workers/friends want to hear or do we tell them the truth? Dishonesty comes in different forms . . . but all are condemned by God.

Don’t gossip.

“You’re not going to believe what I heard about . . . If I tell you something can you keep a secret? . . . Did you hear about . . . ?” Maybe you’ve heard someone use one of those expressions lately, or, perhaps you’ve used one of them yourself? There is something about gossip that gets people’s ears perked up.

Sometimes we try to categorize sins; there are “really bad” sins, “bad” sins, and “not-so-bad” sins. The “really bad” category includes things like murder and rape. “Bad” might consist of fornication and lying. “Not-so-bad” sins are things like breaking traffic laws and *gossip*. Does that hold up?

“You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people . . .” (Lev. 19:16). “A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Prov. 11:13). “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips” (Prov. 20:19). “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (Prov. 26:20). Perhaps the expression “*juicy gossip*” came from Proverbs 18:8: “The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body.”

Gossip is dangerous (Prov. 20:19; 11:13; 2 Cor. 12:20) because it wounds (Prov. 18:8, 21; Psa. 41:7), separates friends (Prov. 17:9; 16:28), sows strife and digs up evil (Prov. 16:27), ensnares the gossip’s own soul (Prov. 18:7), and is classed with the worst of evils (Rom. 1:28-32).

Don’t gossip . . . and don’t listen to gossip. The next time someone says, “You’re not going to believe what I heard . . .”, respond appropriately. “Then I would appreciate it if you just wouldn’t tell me.”

Don’t criticize harshly.

There are a lot of active critics in the world—people who think they have been divinely appointed to search diligently for the smallest fault and then, when they find it, to castigate the person who committed it.

This tendency, to be frank, affects us all. There is something fulfilling about criticizing other people. Perhaps it is the thought that we can feel better about ourselves when we identify weaknesses in others. “Well, I may have my problems, but at least I’m not like . . .” Or maybe it gives us some sort of thrill that we are able to find even the most insignificant fault in someone.

The Lord addresses this issue in Matthew 7:1-5: “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.”

Two boys on the school playground were discussing a classmate. One of them remarked, “He’s no good at sports.” The other quickly responded, “Yes, but he always plays fair.” The critical one added, “He’s not very smart either.” His friend countered, “That may be true, but he studies hard.” The boy with the mean tongue was becoming exasperated with the attitude of the other. “Well,” he sneered, “did you ever notice how ragged his clothes are?” The other boy replied kindly, “Yes, but did you ever notice that they’re always clean?”

Let us be kind—look for good, not bad. Encourage, don’t discourage. Emphasize the positive, not the negative.

450 million words . . . use them to God’s glory, not to His (and your) shame.

WOT

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

Tom McLemore, Selma, Alabama

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:1-6).

Paul urges maintaining unity which the Spirit creates. He was willing to go to prison for it (Eph. 3:1,6; cf. Acts 21:28), and we ought to be extremely concerned about it. Unity must *exist*, however, before it can be *maintained*. And before it can exist, people must understand what is involved. What is involved in *the unity of the Spirit*? In a word, we must correctly understand and embrace the seven items Paul mentions in the text and their relationship to each other.

The Quasi-Unified State of the Religious World

There is an apparent *oneness* in the religious world with regard to Spirit, Lord, and God/Father. Yet, there is clear *division* with regard to body, hope, faith, and baptism. There are *bodies* distinct from each other represented by hundreds of religious groups with distinguishing self-designations, organized and meeting separately. Distinctive *hopes* are represented by the many eschatological schemes widely promulgated. Distinctive *faiths* are represented by the creeds of Christendom and codified in official confessions. Distinctive *baptisms* are administered, involving varying subjects, modes, and designs.

In addition, there is an attitude of *complacency* in the religious world with respect to this situation. For most, the disunity that exists in Christendom, while not seen to be desirable or wholly acceptable, is tolerable and is perhaps even a necessary evil.

How did the religious world come to be in this state, and how do people who claim to follow the New Testament (including this passage in Ephesians 4)

justify this situation? Clearly, an *unwarranted distinction* has been made among the items Paul acclaims. The one Spirit, Lord, and God/Father are viewed as being of the essence of Christianity. All professed Christians claim to acknowledge the same Spirit, Lord, and God/Father. On the other hand, not all professed Christians view the one body, the one hope, the one faith, and the one baptism as being of the essence of Christianity. In fact, most would acknowledge that, as far as they are concerned, these are not essential. Any body, hope, faith, or baptism will do!

The distinction reflects an elevation of *human authority* (interpretations and elaborations of Scripture teachings) to the status of *divine authority* (the Scripture teachings themselves). It is this elevation of human authority which has resulted in the distinct bodies, hopes, faiths, and baptisms. When *the Scripture teachings alone* are embraced by faith and practiced, there is oneness of body, hope, faith, and baptism.

What is the truth with respect to Paul’s acclamations? One body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God/Father—*ALL of these* are of the essence of Christianity. The language of Scripture allows for no levels of distinction among the items. Each item is characterized by the same kind of oneness; there is one of each of them in the very same sense—one and only one. People in the religious world take Spirit, hope, Lord, God/Father as “one” in the *specific and strict* sense, and they are willing to take body, faith, and baptism as “one” in a generic and loose sense. (“All of the specific bodies are really just one body in general, etc.”). Is that what Paul wrote? The text gives no indication whatsoever that “one” is to be taken in the general or loose sense in any case. The oneness that goes for one is the oneness that goes for all. Furthermore, “There is” refers to how things are *as far as God is concerned*, how things are *according to reality in Christ*, and how things *ought to be* among men.

Toward Making the Unity of the Spirit a Reality Today

The typical (ecumenical) approach to the issue of unity is to minimize division, to laud the supposed virtue of agreeing to disagree, and to engage in the self-delusion (promoted, e.g., by the “coming together” of “people of all faiths” in some benevolent or civic project) that the religious world is united. This approach is acceptable neither to God nor to those who take God’s Word seriously!

The unity of the Spirit will exist only when each of the seven items in the text is acknowledged as equal by all concerned (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10,13; 12:25). What are the *one body*, the *one hope*, the *one faith*, and the *one baptism* according to the doctrine of Scripture (so that people can be one with respect to these four as they also should in the other three)?

First, consider the one body. According to the New Testament, the one body is the singular church of the Lord. “. . . [H]e [God] has put all things under his [Christ’s] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). This is the church which Jesus promised to build in Matthew 16:18 and which came to be reality in Acts 2 (see especially verses 37-38, 41, 47).

Second, consider the one hope. According to the New Testament, the one hope is that of inheriting the everlasting kingdom of heaven in a resurrected and/or transformed body at the end of time when Jesus, who now reigns over his kingdom, comes again. See 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, 50-58; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Third, consider the one faith. According to the New Testament, the one faith is the objective, revealed content believed in common by all Christians (Jude 3). From the universal, concise, and all-sufficient confession of believers witnessed by the New Testament authors, that faith consists of the proposition, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Lord.” See Matthew 16:16; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10; 1

Corinthians 12:3; 1 Timothy 6:12-13 (cf. Lk. 23:1-3); 2 Timothy 2:19, et. al. This, no more and no less, is the confession requisite to immersion into Christ.

Fourth, consider the one baptism. The New Testament texts on baptism, and the universal use of the Greek word *baptizo* and its cognates, indicate that it is the immersion in water of responsible, penitent individuals who believe and confess the gospel for the purpose of receiving remission of sins. What does the New Testament teach regarding how the one baptism is administered? See Acts 8:38-39; Romans 6:1-7; Colossians 2:12. To whom is the one baptism administered according to the New Testament? See Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-41. Why/for what purpose is the one New Testament baptism received? See Acts 2:38 (cf. Matt. 26:28—note carefully that baptism is received in order to obtain the same benefit as the blood of Jesus was shed to provide; the identical language in the English translations of both passages is also strictly identical in the Greek text of both passages); Acts 22:16.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that the one body, one hope, one faith, and one baptism are just as

much of the essence of Christianity as the one Spirit, one Lord, and one God/Father lies in the fact that in the New Testament declarations of God's work of redemption, *the Spirit, the Lord, and the God/Father are inextricably bound to the body, the hope, the faith, and the baptism*. Note, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Galatians 3:26-29, the presence of all seven of the items which Paul acclaims; take any of them out and the whole coherent picture collapses: "For just as the body is one [the one body] and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ [the one Lord]. For by one Spirit [the one Spirit] we were all baptized [the one baptism] into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. . . . [I]n Christ Jesus you are all sons of God [the one God/Father], through faith [the one faith]. For as many of you as were baptized [the one baptism] into Christ have put on Christ [the one Lord]. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you

are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise [the one hope]."

What Will YOU Do About It?

The considerations of this article present a challenge, promise desirable results, and issue a call. The challenge is for every professed believer in Christ to embrace the one body, one hope, one faith, and the one baptism of the New Testament as well as the one Spirit, one Lord, and one God/Father. The desirable results include the realization of the unity of the Spirit and the answer to Jesus' earnest prayer in John 17:20-21, viz., that all believers would be perfectly united through the Word of His apostles. There is a clear call for all professed Christians to embrace and maintain the unity of the Spirit.

The questions before you are clear and compelling. Will you follow the one and only Spirit who leads you to confess the one and only faith and receive the one and only baptism? Will you thus prove to be a servant of the one and only Lord, to become a member of the one and only body, and a child of the one and only God/Father, claiming the one and only hope?

WOT

YOU ARE SPECIAL INDEED!

James E. Haynes, Jr., Pottsboro, Texas

You are special indeed! There is no doubt about it. Do you believe that? Has anyone told you that lately? It may be the case that you have not heard those precious words in a very, very long time. So, I want to remind you today, **YOU ARE VERY SPECIAL INDEED!**

We live in a drive-through, one-stop-shop, fast-paced world where those beautiful words are rarely expressed. Maybe this is one of the reasons so many people are constantly living in a depressed state, while others are turning to drugs, alcohol, or gluttony. Sadly, some are even suicidal. They feel unwanted, unneeded, undesired, and unloved! They do not feel special anymore!

Here is the good news! Your Creator says in His Word that you are special indeed. Some look at the Bible as merely a dead and buried periodical. Its dusty contents are outdated and insignificant to the fast-paced world in which we live. However, nothing could be further from the truth! The Word of God is real, vibrant,

and necessary. Listen carefully to the sentiments of the Hebrews writer, "For the word of God is living and powerful . . ." (Heb. 4:12). It is within its contents that we are introduced to the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10). So, let us dust off our Bibles and learn from its contents this awesome truth, "You are special indeed!"

You are special because God created you. God made you. True, there are individuals in our world who will try and tell you differently; however, do not believe a lie (1 Kng. 13:18). The Psalmist said it bluntly, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Many of those who once claimed there is no God are starting to recant their claims. One atheist made this incredible statement, "The more statistically improbable a thing is, the less we can believe that it just happened by blind chance. Superficially, the obvious alternative to chance is an intelligent Designer." Thankfully, some who once denied a supreme Designer are starting to see Him. Truly, as Daniel stated, "There is

a God in Heaven!" It is that eternal God who created you and me.

Psalm 139 depicts for us the awesome hand of our Creator. David writes, "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well." In this beautiful chapter, David describes the awesome presence and power of God and how He knows all things. He even knew you and me while we were still being made in our mother's womb. (Please read Psalm 139:13-16.) An evolutionist made this powerful statement, "When you come right down to it, the most incredible creation in the universe is you—with your fantastic senses and strengths, your ingenious defense systems, and mental capabilities so great you can never use them to the fullest. Your body is a structural masterpiece more amazing than science fiction." According to that scientist, you are an incredible creation, and you are a masterpiece indeed! In this he and the Bible agree!

In addition to being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), **you are special because you are the recipient of God's greatest gift.** Jesus is His name! In Titus 3:4-6, you can read these beautiful words, "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Also, Titus 2:12 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." God provided

His Son, Jesus Christ, so that all mankind might have the opportunity to be saved (Jn. 8:21; Acts 2:38).

Friend, God loves you! God has demonstrated His kindness to you! He has provided salvation for you! In essence, He has said, "You are special indeed!" Have you ever calculated the enormous price tag associated with that gift? There is no need—the Bible has done the math already: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). God left heaven and came to this

world to suffer and die on your behalf. Truly, you are special indeed!

I hope this article has lifted you up today. I hope that you have been encouraged and uplifted by God's Word. The Bible states with clarity that you are special indeed, that you always have been. You are God's handiwork, God's precious jewel. In addition to having been created by the one, true, living God, you have also been given the world's greatest gift in Jesus the magnificent Christ. I encourage you to remember these thoughts and live a life that is SPECIAL before God! *WOT*

HOMES OF TODAY

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

One of the truly frightful things in America's homes, due in part to our materialistic emphasis, is the lack of love and devotion. We are so busy that many homes are merely dormitories where we sleep and cafeterias where we eat on the way through! Few can be found like Hannah, who gave her son Samuel to God's service, or like Lois and Eunice, who developed in Timothy a genuine faith and loyal commitment (2 Tim. 1:6; 3:14). Christian homes put their approval on things that are excellent (Phil. 1:10) as parents obey the biblical injunction: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house . . ." (Deut. 6:6-7)

Truly, the aged and beloved apostle John spoke of us as parents in 3 John 4: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

But always remember that children do not accidentally stumble onto the highway of holiness. We, as mothers and fathers, guide them therein! With Joshua of old we boldly exclaim: "As for me and my house we will serve Jehovah" (Josh. 24:15)

The first book in the Bible conveys vivid lessons for parents. Jacob's son, Reuben, reminds us, "Do not sin against the child" (Gen. 42:22).

And yet, so many do—through parental negligence, poor examples, and faithless lives. In Genesis 44:30 are words that are applicable to every Dad: "His life is bound up in the lad's life." When a parent loves a child deeply and wisely, he will strive to lead a godly, spiritual life before the children God has graciously given him. Worldly habits will be put aside, improper speech and attitudes will

be crucified and slain, because the life of that son or daughter is precious indeed. Longfellow summed up the deep devotion we feel for our offspring in these words: "I have you fast in my fortress, And will not let you depart, But put you into the dungeon, In the round tower of my heart. And there will I keep you forever, Yes, forever and a day, Till the walls shall crumble to ruin, And moulder in dust away."

If our lives are really bound up in our children, we will carefully lead them into the joyful hope of eternal life with their Creator. However, lest our children get the idea that only parents have responsibilities, let us hasten to discuss the duties of children in making our homes godly. Several years ago *Reader's Digest* had this timely piece of humor: Employer to departing executive: "In a way, though, I'll be sorry to lose you. You have been like a son to me: Insolent, surly, and unappreciative!"

How solemnly true are those words in many homes. And yet the Bible says: "Children obey your parents in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1). In Romans 1:30, in a severe catalog of pagan sins, Paul includes those who are "disobedient to parents." This is a more serious matter than our flippant society admits. In 2 Timothy 3:2 we learn of the progressive nature of this evil: ". . . disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy." Conversely, the writer of Proverbs tells us: "A wise son maketh a glad father . . . but . . . A perverse son is heaviness to his mother."

Our children need to be examples as they remember their Creator in the days of their youth by thinking on things that are pure, honest, lovely, and of good report (1 Tim. 4:12; Eccl. 12:1; Phil. 4:8). When

parents "withhold correction from the child," the end result is an undisciplined life void of spiritual power. Such children are in dire need of help, which only those who love the Scriptures can give (Prov. 23:13). In other words, our problem is not juvenile delinquency, but rather parental delinquency. We must put God first in our homes. This is best accomplished when we put Dad back as the head of the house (Eph. 5:23), and get mother back in the house (Tit. 2:5). It is becoming increasingly difficult to find dedicated parents, but a godly man and a virtuous woman are still priceless (Prov. 31:10-28). Indeed, "their children rise up and call them blessed."

Upon "that Rock" (1 Cor. 10:4)—the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11)—we should build our homes. Psalm 127:1 tells us emphatically: "Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it."

Homes founded upon the solidarity of Christianity can endure the storms of life. When both parents are "righteous before God" (Lk. 1:6), the future of children is bright indeed, for "the house of the righteous shall stand" (Prov. 12:7). When parental decisions are based upon God's will and not public whim, we can expect to see a foretaste of glory divine (Josh. 24:15). When the heavenly Father is the guiding light in our decisions the home truly becomes a vestibule of divine glory.

Friends, let us build our homes on solid gospel truth! Our children have a right to expect parents to be dedicated servants of God. When we so love the Lord, our offspring should grow into talented workers for Jesus. This certainly should be our constant goal *WOT*

GUS NICHOLS

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

[Editor's note: You will certainly enjoy the following delightful article by brother McCord—one of the finest preachers among us. As our readers know, his subject—Gus Nichols—was the founder (along with Glenn Posey) of The Words of Truth and served as its editor until his death in 1975.]

Gus Nichols was born January 12, 1892, in Walker County, Alabama. Can you imagine a man without even a high school education baptizing over 12,000 people?!

First Gus was a farmer, and then a coal-miner, being paid \$1.00 for twelve hours of work in the mine. He, like the rest of his family, was a member of the Baptist Church. When he was seventeen he heard C.A. Wheeler preach New Testament Christianity free of all denominations. He was convinced he should be just a Christian, and he asked brother Wheeler to baptize him. However, he had a rough time at home, and his mother called him a “turncoat.”

But he was determined to let the Bible be his guide, and any time he was not farming or coal-mining, he was studying the good Book. Therefore, he became a full-time gospel preacher, and in his ministry he studied his Bible four hours each day.

Consequently it is not surprising that his sermons were too long. He thought everybody ought to be as interested as he in acquiring Bible knowledge. He tried to justify lengthy sermons by saying that people did not object to two hours at a baseball or football game.

Gus married at the age of twenty-one. He and Matilda became excellent parents of four sons and four daughters. After eight had been born, Gus and Matilda were happy, and Gus said, “Nickels make dollars!” G. C. Brewer asked Gus, “Are you trying to

have a dollar's worth of Nichols?”

One time, when Gus' heart kept him in bed for a spell, the daughter named Carrie bounced into the room displaying energy and enthusiasm. Gus said to her, “Carrie, I wish I had a heart in me like yours!” Carrie responded, “Daddy, that would not do at all, for every time you saw a sailor your heart would go pitty-pat!”

All eight children were baptized and became good Christians. All eight went to Freed-Hardeman College, with three sons becoming preachers and three daughters marrying preachers.

Gus' daily routine of four hours a day in Bible study filled him with vast amounts of Bible knowledge. His reputation as a Bible preaching man spread all through the South. One time, at a Freed-Hardeman Lectureship, in an open forum, a man asked a Bible question, and the moderator replied, “Gus Nichols is in the audience. Let's ask him.” The man who had asked the question spoke up again, “I don't want to know that much about it.”

There was a time, in the Freed-Hardeman Lectureships, that a practice debate was presented, with someone taking the position of erring preachers and someone making a reply. On one occasion Gus Nichols was asked to present the arguments that Baptist preachers use, and a gospel preacher was asked to make the scriptural reply. But the gospel preacher was unable to refute the arguments Gus Nichols presented—arguments used by Baptist preachers. The truth took a sad defeat in that mock debate—so much so that practice debating was eliminated from the Freed-Hardeman Lectureships.

For 43 years (1932-1975) brother Gus was with the church in Jasper, Alabama. Lois and I were privileged to be in a gospel meeting there August 13-23, 1933, soon after the Nichols

family arrived. He encouraged young preachers. When I was in a meeting at Parrish, some fifteen miles away, he was in the audience nearly every night.

About thirty miles from Jasper is Carbon Hill. When I was in a tent meeting there the pastor of the Nazarene Church, on the night of July 3, 1938, was in the audience. In the sermon I had mentioned that babies are born sinless, that they do not inherit Adam's sin. The pastor spoke up from his seat and said I was wrong. I asked him publicly to come back the next night and we would divide the time, and he agreed.

I was a scared young preacher, twenty-seven years old. Gus Nichols was in the audience, and immediately after the dismissal prayer, I went to him, asking him to sit with me the next night to help me. He said he had an appointment the next night at Christian Chapel in Mississippi, but when he saw how nervous I was, he said, “I'll send Flavil (his eldest son) to fill the Mississippi appointment, and I'll be here in the morning and study all day to get ready for the debate.”

In the morning brother Gus came and brought black oil cloth and white paint, and soon he had prepared some charts for me to use. In the course of the Nazarene pastor's speech, he said the fact that a baby cries shows he is a sinner. Brother Gus leaned over to me, saying, “That makes Jesus a sinner—Jesus wept, John 11:35.” When I repeated brother Gus' words publicly, the answer so demoralized the visiting pastor that he got up and walked out.

How I miss that great man of God, Gus Nichols! Two of his preaching sons, themselves being named in memory of two faithful men of God—Flavil and Hardeman—are still living and doing their best to spread the kingdom of Christ. WOT

THE PRAYER OF JESUS FOR UNITY

David W. Hester, Manchester, Tennessee

“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 words, uttered by our Lord toward the end of His prayer with His disciples in the upper room, were spoken in the shadow of the cross and with full knowledge that the betrayer was even then doing his nefarious deed. Nevertheless, Jesus was concerned for His disciples—not just the eleven—but for all those who would be obedient to Him.

How sobering it should be to realize that the Savior was thinking of *us!* In His moment of deepest anguish, He was concerned for you and me. Thus, He prayed that all His followers be united. Never has there been a time when His prayer has been more abused, misused, and set aside than *now*. Notice that Jesus prayed for *unity*, not *union*. There is a difference. Union ignores doctrine. Unity is achieved—and maintained—by coming together on the basis of the Truth: God’s Word (Jn. 17:17).

This unity is more fully described by Paul: “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). This is unity of faith and practice. Modern-day “Christendom” does not conform to this divine standard. Jesus was not praying for denominationalism.

We must resolve to preach and to practice nothing but the Truth. We must all “endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” within the local congregations of which we are members. It is in this way that the world will come to believe and obey the saving message of the Gospel.

WOT

The Words of Truth

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

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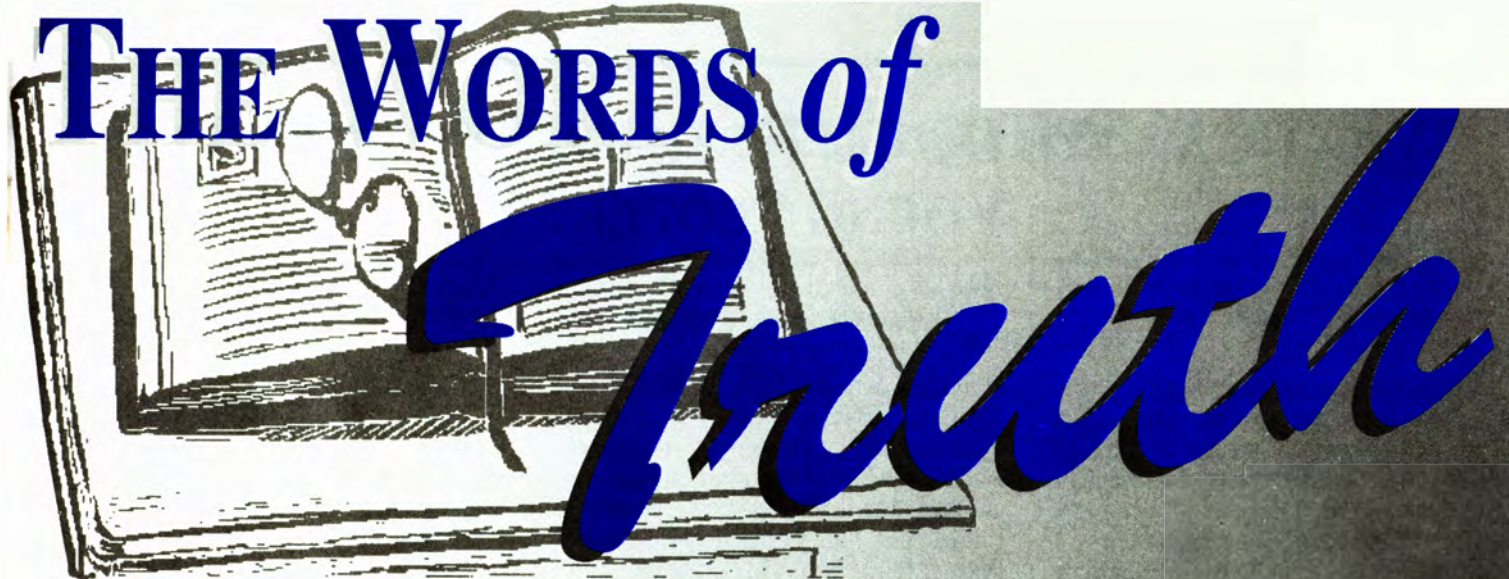
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"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

Vol. 39 No. 11

November 2002

DEVELOPING OUR CONSCIENCES

Glenn Colley, Collierville, Tennessee

The conscience is something so obvious that we all believe in its existence. Even those who have seared their consciences in order to live more comfortably in sin can probably remember a time when such hurt them.

The Greek word—*suneides*—is found 32 times in the New Testament and does not occur in the Old Testament (LXX). *Strong's Lexicon* defines it: "The soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending one, condemning the other."

Conscience is part of the mind or soul, and yet is different from our thoughts or imagination. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus warns us against the sin of lust. Certainly one might commit the sin of lust in his heart, then experience pain from his conscience as a result. Both come from the soul of a man, yet they are different.

Let's spend a few moments assembling many of the verses which discuss the conscience, and draw out helpful wisdom. Here are things we know about the conscience from God's Word:

We are commanded to keep our consciences pure and clean.

"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5). . . . "Holding faith, and a good conscience: which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (1

Tim. 1:19; cf. 1 Tim. 3:9; 1 Pet. 3:16).

People can use their consciences to improve their character by daily working not to violate their consciences.

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

In those who appreciate the difference between right and wrong, it will convict them of sin; i.e., it will pain them.

"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" (Jn. 8:9).

In those who have known right from wrong, but have over an extended period chosen wrong, the conscience can be trained not to hurt its master.

"Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:2).

We can carelessly do things which violate another's conscience.

"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ" (1 Cor. 8:12).

God has made laws which involve the use of conscience.

"Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience

sake" (Rom. 13:5; cf. 1 Cor. 10:27-29).

Conscience operates within its owner's beliefs of right from wrong; thus, it is not always a reliable guide. Some may even believe a particular action to be God's will when in fact it is sin.

"And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). . . . "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled" (1 Cor. 8:7; cf. Tit. 1:15).

A person with a good conscience will want to be baptized to be saved.

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21).

Making contact with the blood of Jesus through baptism (Rom. 6:1-6), the man whose conscience has been hurting can find sweet and welcomed relief.

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14).

WOT

WHAT CAN WE DO TO KEEP FROM LOSING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE?

PART ONE

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Try this: see if your congregation has a directory from ten years or so back. Get it and write down the names of the high school students from that year. Then look for them next Sunday at worship service. Ask around—perhaps their parents, or maybe some of the elders or older members. Find out how many of these people—now in their mid-to-late twenties—are faithful members of the Lord's church. You might be surprised.

Depending on which statistical study you read, evidence suggests we are losing 50-85 percent of our young people to the world.

Why? What can be done? More specifically, what can *we* do? What can parents, elders, preachers, and teachers do to help our young people remain faithful to God . . . what can we do to reverse the trend? Next Sunday morning, glance in at the teenage class and think, very soberly, "Where will they be in ten years?"

We set forth the following suggestions in hopes that a decade from now we can look around and thrill at what God is doing through these once-restless teenagers—now young adults.

We can help them develop their *own* faith.

Young people depend on their parents—for shelter, sustenance, protection. In fact, nearly everything they have is actually their parents'. This fact, perfectly natural in most areas, leads to danger in the spiritual arena. Too many young people never develop their *own* faith. They have a sort of *faith by proxy*; that is, they live off of their parents' faith. Then, when they leave home for college, they find themselves with insufficient depth to meet the challenges the world throws at them.

This trend suggests a significant need for something in our homes and churches to counteract Satan's inroads among our youth. The key lies in getting our young people to develop

their own personal faith . . . like Timothy's. Paul told him, "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Tim. 1:5). This verse contains two key words: "Genuine" translates a word that basically means "unhypocritical." "Hypocrite" originally referred to a play actor, somebody who played a part on stage. As the word developed, though, it lost its literal meaning and came to refer to anyone who pretended to be something he wasn't. Paul used this word—along with the negative *a*—to describe Timothy's faith. In other words, Timothy's faith wasn't fraudulent or counterfeit. It was the real thing, not just a show. He didn't attend worship services because his mother made him. He didn't sing out of obligation. Timothy did what he did religiously because he wanted to.

The second key word is "in," which points to the location of his faith: "in" him. Not *around* him. Not just at his congregation or in his home. Not in his preacher, Bible class teacher, deacons, or elders. Not just *in* his mother and grandmother. It was *in* him. Timothy's faith was his own. It had been in his mother and grandmother first, but he wasn't trying to live off of their faith. He wasn't trying to ride to heaven on their coattails. He realized that genuine faith is always personal and individual.

What about the faith of our young people? Is it also "genuine"? Is it "in" them or just "around" them?

The primary obligation in training young people, of course, is the home. Parents should be diligent early in their children's lives in giving them an in-depth knowledge of the Bible. We need to create an environment in which our children's naturally inquisitive minds find answers to their questions, not trite, meaningless responses like, "Well, that's just what we believe," or "That's

part of our tradition."

When they ask, "We can't see God—how do we know He exists?," study the evidences of God's existence with them. Subscribe them to Apologetic Press' *Discovery* magazine (subscribe at <http://www.discovery-magazine.com/> or call 1-800-234-8558). When they are curious as to the absence of mechanical instruments in our worship services, open God's Word and show them why. When they notice differences between the Lord's church and their friends' denominations, be prepared to help them search the Bible for the answers. The truth has nothing to fear.

Lead them, but don't do all of their searching for them. A crucial part of growth is the struggle involved in finding the truth.

Wise elderships also recognize the opportunities that churches have in assisting the home in molding young people's hearts. Faithful churches organize effective Bible school programs with extensive curricula designed to give students a broad and comprehensive view of Scripture. They plan seminars (such as one teaching the evidence for creation) to strengthen faith in God and bolster young people's defenses against the humanistic, evolutionist slant which bombards them.

We need to encourage young people to engage in regular periods of serious self-reflection. What do they believe? *Why* do they believe it? *Why* do they attend church services? How intimate are their private prayer lives? How thorough and frequent is their personal Bible study?

Sure, the challenges to young people's faith are significant, but God has given us adequate resources to keep our young people faithful. The first step is to help them embrace a vibrant, active, *personal* faith. Other suggestions will be offered in next month's editorial.

“NEVER MAN SPAKE LIKE THIS MAN”

Neil Richey, Lynchburg, Virginia

There are many different responses recorded by those who heard the voice of the Lord. Some said, “this is the prophet.” Others said, “this is the Christ.” Even the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees were amazed by what they heard from the Lord. On one occasion they said, “Never man spake like this man” (Jn. 7:46). Certainly no one has ever spoken quite like the Lord did. His message was unique, and His voice was heard.

His voice was and is the voice of omnipotence. The word “omnipotent” means to have “unlimited or universal power, authority, or force.” Paul wrote, “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19). Mark said that Jesus “arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:36-41). Jesus had the power to cast out demons and heal the diseased (Matt. 8:16-17). He “cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth,” and he did. Some have suggested that if the Lord had only said “come forth” then every tomb would have opened. Now that is power! His same voice has the power to save us from an eternal grave of condemnation if we will only obey Him.

His voice was and is the voice of a Shepherd. A shepherd is one who “herds, guards, and tends sheep; cares for and guides a group of people.” Sheep have no means of defense; they have neither wings nor swiftness of foot; they flock together,

but their numbers do not increase their strength. Their only safety lies in the power and carefulness of the shepherd. We are the sheep of His pasture, and can be fed and defended by no one else but the Son of God. Jesus is the Shepherd who says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). There were two men who went to a party. One was an actor, and the other was an older feeble man. The actor stood before the crowd and quoted the 23rd Psalm with great emotion and perfection. When he was finished there was great cheering. The older man said, “I too would like to quote the 23rd Psalm.” He did so—making many mistakes. When he finished, there was not a dry eye in the place. The actor was asked, “Why the different responses?” He replied, “I knew the Psalm, but this gentleman knew the Shepherd.”

His voice was and is the voice of a Savior. A savior is one who “rescues another from harm, danger, or loss.” John wrote the familiar words: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (Jn. 3:16-17). Luke records these words, “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Lk. 2:30). The Lord came to save the lost (Lk. 19:10). The saved are those who belong to the Lord (Jn. 17:10). The saved are those

who have obeyed the Lord (Acts 2:38). The saved are only in His church (Matt. 16:18). What a thought! Christ was made a sacrifice for us to be our Savior.

His voice will be the voice of a Judge. A judge is one who has the authority to pass sentence. When speaking to the Romans, Paul said for them to “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22). Matthew 23 includes several statements of “woe.” Can you imagine, on the Day of Judgment, the Lord’s saying “Woe unto you”? To those who do not obey the Gospel, the Lord will say “Woe unto you” (Mk. 16:16). To those who neglect their salvation, the Lord will say “Woe unto you” (Heb. 2:3). To those who chose to love the world, the Lord will say “Woe unto you” (1 Jn. 2:15-17). We are told in several passages that there is a day coming in which Christ will pass sentence. “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto his Son” (Jn. 5:22). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8).

Certainly the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees had it right when they said “Never man spake like this man.” We can hear the voice of omnipotence *now*. We can hear the voice of a Shepherd *now*. We can hear the voice of a Savior *now*. Yet, *one day* we will hear the voice of our Judge. WOT

A BURIAL

Tracy Dugger, Austin, Texas

If you were to consult an English dictionary for the definition of the word “baptism,” you would find its *current* usage—immersion, sprinkling, or pouring. However, we are not always interested in the *current* usage of a word. When we want to know the definition of a *Bible* word we want to know how it was used during the times of the original writing. The word “baptism” is a very important word in the New Testament. To determine its meaning we want to know how it was used in the first

century—when the New Testament was written. To do this we must consider two things. First, how do standard lexicons define the word? Second, what does the *context* of the word tell us about its usage and practice?

Reliable and standard lexicons inform us that the word “baptism” during first century times meant to immerse, dip, or plunge. This alone is a strong argument against sprinkling or pouring. But even stronger is the evidence found within the pages of the Bible itself. In

fact, much of the evidence used by the lexicographers arises from the context. Consider a few passages:

Acts 8:35-39: “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he

answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” We learn from this account that baptism led Philip and the eunuch “down both into the water,” and when they were finished they both came “up out of the water.” If sprinkling had been the normal practice there would have been no need for *both* to go into the water!

John 3:23: “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.” Some have objected by saying, “This simply says there was much water in the place and does not say that he used much.” It is not true that it “simply says there was much water in the place.” It says John was baptizing in this place “because there was much water there.” The implication is that baptism requires “much water.” Consider the statement: “Tracy was canoeing in the Arkansas River because there was much water there.” Canoeing demands much water. If a little is all that were needed I could canoe in my backyard using a water hose. John was baptizing in Aenon near Salim because he needed a location which had a place to plunge people into the water.

Think of how silly the passage would read if baptism meant (or allowed) sprinkling: “And John also was sprinkling in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came and were sprinkled.”

Romans 6:3-5: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”

Immersion signifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—sprinkling and pouring do not. Neither sprinkling nor pouring constitutes a burial and resurrection! The fact that baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a very significant argument against sprinkling or pouring:

- Baptism represents **death**—Christ died for sin; we die to sin through our repentance and baptism (put to death the old man).
- Baptism represents a **burial**—Christ was buried in a tomb; we are to bury our old man in the waters of baptism.
- Baptism represents a **resurrection**—Christ was raised; we are raised out of the waters of baptism to walk in

newness of life.

In Romans 6:3-5, this symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is destroyed by man-made substitutions of sprinkling and pouring. There is no likeness between sprinkling or pouring and the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Immersion perfectly fits the analogy given in Romans 6. To sprinkle or pour is to substitute something which does not typify the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Romans 6:5, we learn that baptism is a planting. Sprinkling or pouring a little water on someone will not meet those requirements. If the word “baptism” demands a burial, then sprinkling and pouring are excluded. How long would a funeral home remain in business if it substituted sprinkling a little soil on top of a casket for burial in the ground?

Also, the very places where baptism was administered argue against the idea of its meaning to sprinkle or pour:

- In the Jordan River (Mk. 1:5).
- Where there was much water (Jn. 3:23).
- Going to it rather than bringing water to the candidate for baptism (Acts 8:36; 16:33).

When we approach the subject of baptism with sincere, seeking hearts and consult all the Bible says about it, then we can clearly understand that baptism involves a burial in water. WOT

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM’S ANSWER

Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama

John Chrysostom was a Christian who lived in the fourth-century after Christ (A.D. 347-407). He was perhaps best known for his eloquent and strong preaching.¹ (The name *Chrysostom* was a nickname meaning “golden-mouthed.”) His criticism of the opulent life of the court, his perceived tactlessness, and opposition of the Patriarch of Alexandria brought him considerable trouble.² He preached so strongly against sin that he even offended many church and government officials, including the unscrupulous Empress Eudoxia. Eventually, he was summoned before the Emperor Arcadius. The exchange that

took place at that meeting is one of the jewels to come down to us from all of that historical period.³ Let’s consider his answer⁴ phrase by phrase.

Emperor Arcadius threatened Chrysostom with banishment if he did not cease his uncompromising preaching. His response was, “Sire, you cannot banish me, for the world is my Father’s house.”

Chrysostom must have had in mind, of course, David’s famous statement: “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa. 24:1; cf. 50:12; 1 Chron. 29:11; 1 Cor. 14:26). Or, maybe he had

been reading Deuteronomy, “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD’S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is” (10:14). This comforting thought has made its way into our songbooks. One old hymn is called, “Anywhere is Home,” and its message of “let come and go what may” has lifted many a heart. Wherever we go on planet earth, we are still “at home” with the omnipresent Father (Psa. 139). As Abraham left home, but never missed it, many gospel preachers and missionaries leave the comfort of familiar surroundings to serve Christ in cities distant from grandparents and places far

from the nearest McDonald's.⁵ One example is Sarah Andrews of Dickson, Tennessee. While a teenager, she heard J. M. McCaleb tell of his work among the Japanese. Years later (at 35), single, and supported by her family, she sailed from San Francisco in 1925 to spend her life in Japan teaching Bible classes to children and their mothers. She was captured during World War II and left to die, but recovered and continued to teach. Four congregations are traced to those she taught. When a friend asked her, "What if you die over there?" she replied, "It is as close to heaven from Japan as it is from the United States."⁶ Like Abraham, preachers and missionaries look for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). That's the only city any Christian will really ever call "home" (Phil. 3:20).

Next Arcadius said, "Then I will slay you." "Nay, but you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God," came the answer.

Here Chrysostom quoted Colossians 3:3. Paul's word (*krupto*, translated *hid*) means, "concealed or kept secret." Where are we hidden? In our Father's hand. Jesus said, "... no man is able to pluck⁷ them out of my Father's hand" (Jn. 10:29). Paul adds, "... the peace of God ... shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). *Keep (phroureo)* is a compound word that literally means, "to stare at before." It is used in military contexts for "mounting a guard as a sentinel" or "posting spies at gates." Figuratively, it means "to hem in and protect as with a garrison of soldiers." Remember Satan accused God of doing this for Job, and God did not deny it (Job 1:10).

Still, we should not get the impression that we will never suffer harm or hardship. Job suffered, but God brought him through it (Job 42). Jesus once said, "... the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:30-31), which is the equivalent of saying, "Don't worry—you are in the Father's hand." Then, with the same breath, Jesus warned, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and

the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household ... and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it ..." (10:34-39). This simply means that men cannot harm what really counts. God protects our souls—and, if He so chooses can take us out of physical harm's way, too. But, if not, Jesus taught, "... fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul ..." (Matt. 10:28).

"Your treasures will be confiscated" was the Emperor's next threat. John replied, "Sire, that cannot be, either. My treasures are in heaven, where none can break through and steal." Chrysostom took personally Jesus' words, "... lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:20-21). *Treasure (thesauros)* here is actually "deposit." Chrysostom had made deposits in a heavenly bank and knew that Arcadius had no access to its vaults. Paul added, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom ..." (Col. 2:3).

Finally a frustrated Arcadius came full circle and said, "Then I will drive you from man, and you will have no friends left!" This final, desperate warning did not bother Chrysostom. He said, simply, "That you cannot do, either, for I have a Friend in heaven who has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

The last promise Jesus made to us was, "lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). He kept this promise to the early disciples (Mk. 16:20) and does to us, "for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). Paul found that "... the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me ... I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17). Once the Lord even appeared to him to say, "For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee ..." (Acts 18:9).

What finally happened? Chrysostom was banished, first to Armenia and then farther to Pityus on the Black Sea, to which he never arrived because he died

on the way. But neither his banishment nor his death disproved or diminished his claims. The things that a Christian values most not even an emperor can take away (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10).

Endnotes

¹Interestingly, copies of some 650 of his sermons still exist. These sermons must often have lasted for an hour or more. They portrayed a deep compassion for the poor and a zeal for social righteousness.

²Howard F. Vos, *Exploring Church History*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994.

³This story is found in *John MacArthur's Commentary* (Matthew 1-7), pp. 232-233.

⁴Peter said Christians must be ready to give an answer for their faith (1 Pet. 3:15). The word *answer* comes from a root (*apologeomai*) which means, "to give a legal plea of oneself, make defense."

⁵Incidentally, parents, grandparents, and other relatives also make a sacrifice for their sons to preach, and will be rewarded for so doing (cf. Matt. 10:42). We need parents who *encourage* their children to become preachers and missionaries. Something is wrong when Mormon families get practically *every* young man to give two years to spreading false doctrine (with the family paying the way!), and we don't encourage our young men to do as much for the Truth! The world is lost, and many of our most talented young people are going into secular fields who could do a wonderful job preaching the gospel. Some who show interest are discouraged by parents who don't want them to move away, or to make less money than they might make in business, or be less thought of among the parents' worldly friends. Let's reverse this trend! There is no more honorable or rewarding life than preaching. Certainly preachers and their families will receive more reward on Judgment Day than anything this world has to offer.

⁶This was related in the *Gospel Advocate*, November 1999, p. 14.

⁷*harpazo*, "to seize, take by force." No one can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:35-39), though we may remove ourselves from it (as the prodigal did, Lk. 15).

WOT

ARE INFANTS “BY NATURE” CHILDREN OF WRATH?

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

During a speech some time back before the American Humanist Association, television mogul Ted Turner leveled a blast at Christianity for its alleged doctrine that infants are born in sin. The fact is, though this teaching is popular with certain denominational groups, it is unknown to the Bible. However, a few biblical passages are perverted in a futile attempt to support the doctrine. In Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul wrote: “And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience: among whom we also once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

Here, the apostle describes unregenerate people as being “by nature children of wrath.” Calvinists appeal to this verse for support of the doctrine of hereditary total depravity. They feel the passage is affirming that humans are “by birth children of wrath.”

Baptist writer B. H. Carroll contended that Ephesians 2:3 “knocks the bottom out of the thought that sin consists in the willful transgression of a known commandment.” He argued that the allusion is to “original sin” (pp. 105-106). This is the theory that all people are born tainted with the guilt of Adam’s sin.

The assertion is absolutely false. There are several interesting observations that can be made in connection with Ephesians 2:1ff.

First, note that in verse one the apostle plainly declares that spiritual death is the consequence of “your trespasses and sins” (ASV). Note the word *your*. This emphasizes *personal* sin. We are not spiritually dead as a result of Adam’s transgression. Though the term “your” is not found in the King James Version (following the Textus Receptus), it is amply supported by evidence from ancient Greek manuscripts, early versions, and the

writings of the “church fathers” in the post-apostolic period (Salmond, p. 283).

Second, in verse three Paul affirms that all of us “were . . . children of wrath.” The verb *emetha* (“were”) is an imperfect tense form. The imperfect tense describes continuity of action as viewed in the past. Thus, here it depicts the habitual style of life which had characterized these saints prior to their conversion. Had the apostle intended to convey the notion of inherited sinfulness at the time of their birth, he easily could have expressed that idea by saying, “you *became* by birth children of wrath.”

Third, it is also significant that the verb is in the middle voice in the Greek Testament. The middle voice is employed to suggest the subject’s personal involvement in the action of the verb. The language therefore stresses that the sinful condition of the Ephesians had been their *individual* responsibility. Hence, combining the imperfect tense and middle voice aspects of the verb, we might paraphrase the passage like this: “you *kept on making yourselves* children of wrath.”

Fourth, it is probable that the King James Version, and most subsequent translations, reflect a Calvinistic bias in the rendition, “by nature children of wrath.” The Greek word *phusei*, rendered “nature” in our common versions, can denote “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” (Thayer, p. 660). Edward Robinson observed that the term can be understood of a “native mode of thinking, feeling, acting” on the part of those who are “unenlightened by the influence of divine truth” (p. 771). Clearly, these people, by habitual practice, had become worthy of divine wrath.

Hugo McCord’s translation has an excellent rendition of this passage. It suggests that the Ephesians had “by custom” become children of wrath. Winer contended that their trespasses and sins had made them “natural children of wrath” (p. 270). Moule suggested that the phrase rendered “by nature children of wrath” might be equivalent to saying,

“left to ourselves we are destined to suffer the consequences of sin” (p. 174). Thus, the Ephesians, in their unregenerate state, had become, by long practice of sin, deserving of the wrath of God. These thoughts are consistent with the immediate context and with the tenor of the Bible as a whole.

Fifth, it is worthy of note that if this passage teaches that babies are born totally depraved, one would have to infer necessarily that infants who die in that condition are *lost* since they are clearly designated as “children of wrath” (cf. the expression “son of perdition”—John 17:12). Yet, this is a conclusion that even denominationalists are loath to accept.

The Bible does not teach the doctrine of inherited depravity. The dogma is strictly of human origin. And it is a serious tragedy that those who profess to be friends of the Scriptures will teach this error, thereby subjecting the Christian system to unjustified criticism. Ephesians 2:3 does not teach inherited depravity.

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[For other excellent articles, visit the author’s web site at www.christiancourier.com—one of the most valuable resources for biblical material.] *WOT*

THE WIFE OF GOD'S PREACHER

Sandy Ditoro, Pinellas Park, Florida

“Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Cor. 9:5). The Apostle Paul indicated that the other Apostles were married and took their wives with them. He claimed the same right, though he never married. What would marriage to and traveling with the Apostle Paul have been like? Well, here is a partial list of some of the things Paul and his wife would have experienced together:

“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in peril of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own country men, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:24-28).

She helped her husband to move all their belongings and eight children into a tent after the brethren threw them out of the preacher's house because her husband preached the truth on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. They lived there until a flood came and destroyed everything. That was over thirty years ago. They have been with the same faithful congregation for years now. I learned awhile back that her husband was having a new house built just for her.

A couple of weeks ago, she basked

in the joy of attending a gospel meeting conducted by her two sons at the congregation where her husband preaches full-time. I recall one of her sons saying of his Mom once, “She taught us that sacrificing can be fun and adventuresome.”

She spent seven years in Zambia with her husband and children, doing mission work. They caught several strange diseases and suffered inconveniences that we cannot even imagine. Together they brought many lost souls to the Lord.

The above-mentioned women are the wives of three of God's preachers whom I am blessed to know and by whom I have been inspired.

The wife of God's preacher's today, like God's preachers, is challenged to evince the courage of deep conviction also. God's preacher's wife, don't let your husband outgrow you spiritually. Study and know God's Word. This will help you to mature and to understand and to laud your husband's stands for the truth. When he is doubting himself, you can be ready with a scripture that reinforces what he has taught or is thinking.

If you are married to a preacher with the courage to preach the truth, praise him, thank him, encourage him!

Never side with weak members to pressure him to compromise. Be willing to sacrifice whatever it will cost when he takes a stand.

Pray for him constantly! Pray for his preaching ability. Pray for his soul-winning efforts. Pray for his health. Thank God for him. Pray for proper attitudes for you both and for personalities that will not hinder the truth. The truth he preaches will be such strong medicine for some, he will need to serve it with an attitude of humility and a generous dose of love.

Try with all your ability to live

what he preaches and to train your children to do so as well. This not only supports him and the truth, but it also proves to others that it can be done. There is a severe shortage of good examples in the world today!

Do your best to stay far away from the controversies that develop. Smile. Be polite and let it all be like water off a duck's back. If you love souls, the arrows won't penetrate. When we get caught up in how wounded we are, it becomes all about us. It's not about us! Christ is the wounded one, and souls will be lost if those in error will not repent!

God's preacher's wife, you are the one blessed with the responsibility of caring for the needs of God's preacher. Do your job well! Make his home his haven! Every day should be Father's Day for him. Every day should be his birthday! Prepare his favorite foods! Romans 10:15 says, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things.”

Study nutrition and prepare meals that will nourish his health. Take walks together or do other forms of exercise together. This not only will keep you both fit physically to do God's work, but also helps you both to deal with stress and to avoid depression.

As much as is possible, be available to go on visits or Bible studies with him or to travel with him. Be diligent in your housekeeping. This not only keeps down stress levels but makes showing hospitality easier.

Keep a cheery, pleasant disposition. Be funny and lighthearted. Be optimistic. Be loving. Be patient with his long hours and the moodiness brought on by the cares of his work.

God's preacher's wife, you are so special! I know God will reward you in a very special way in eternity! *WOT*

PREPARATION FOR PARADISE

Jason Moon, Lewisburg, Tennessee

The words of Jesus in John 14:1-6 may be some of the most familiar in Scripture. In these verses Jesus promises "mansions" (rooms) in his Father's house. Every believer hopes for this reward. But we must remember that attached to the mansion is the Man and there would be no reward without the Redeemer. Since this is true, we must honor the plan Jesus secured for our redemption.

After Jesus described the remedy for a troubled heart, He uttered words of eternal importance when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." From these well-known words we should observe the following in our preparation for Paradise.

Jesus provides direction. He stated that He was "the way, the truth, and the life." Since Jesus is "the way," without Him we are lost. Since Jesus is "the truth," without Him we are in error. Since Jesus is "the life," without Him we are dead. One should note that today we get direction through God's Word (Psa. 119:105). Through Jesus' blood-sealed covenant we find the way, truth, and life.

Jesus promised destiny. He said that we may go "to the Father." Remember it's in Jesus' "Father's house" that the destiny of true believers will be enjoyed. But remember that everyone will not "enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21; cf. Matt. 7:13-14). Jesus taught that there are two destinies: everlasting punishment or eternal life (Matt. 25:31-46).

Jesus prohibits denominationalism. Jesus said it was only "through me" that one comes to the Father. In dying for the sins of every individual who places his or her faith in Him, Jesus also died for the collective body of the saved—the church. Paul said Jesus "purchased" the church "with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). This church is often called "the body" (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12). But Paul taught that there was only "one body" (Eph. 4:4). Paul taught that Jesus is "the head of the church; and . . . the Savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). Jesus never sanctioned denominationalism nor many of its deceiving doctrines. Our faith is in Jesus, and our relationship with Him is in His church (Rev. 21:9). Jesus promised (Matt. 16:18), purchased (Acts 20:28), and will present this church to Himself (Eph. 5:27) as His bride in eternity (Rev. 21:2). Just as it would be adulterous to have more than one bride per groom, just as it would be atrocious to have more than one body per head, today it is absurd to sanction more than one church for the world!

WOT

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

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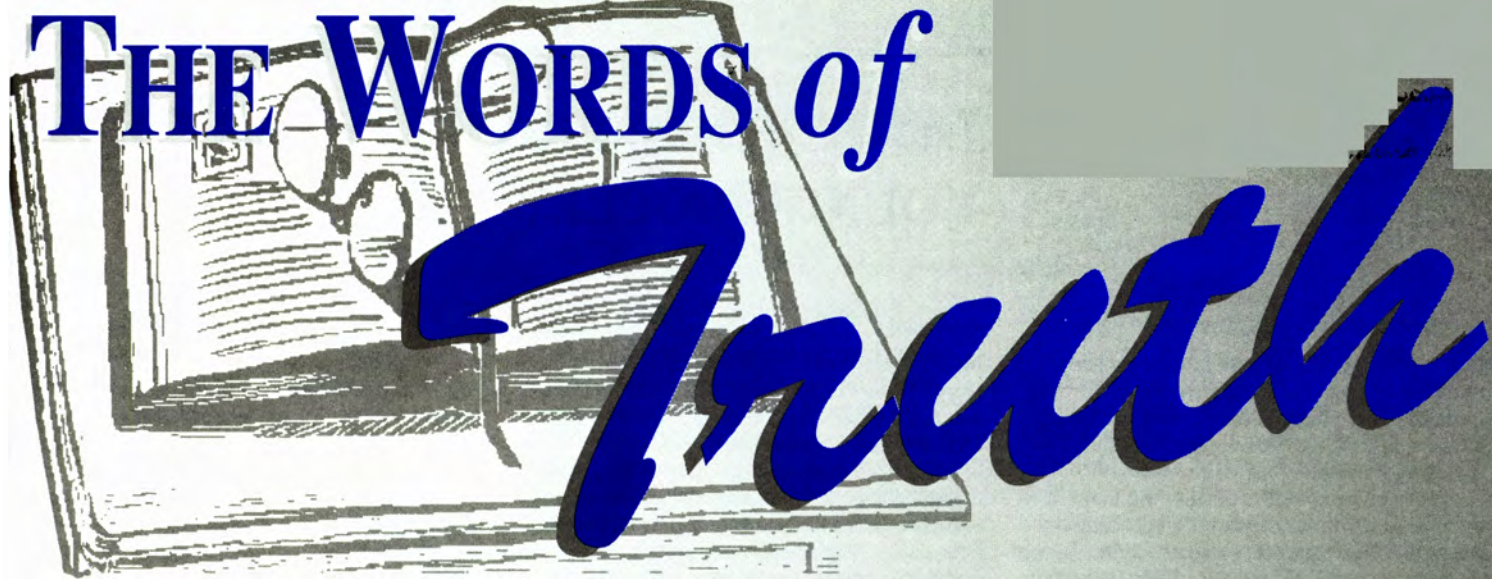
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THE WORDS of Truth

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

Vol. 39 No. 12

December 2002

BOOK, CHAPTER, AND VERSE

Dave Miller, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama

In recent years, an increasingly popular sentiment has arisen which maintains that the explicit citation of Bible book, chapter, and verse in pulpit proclamation is somehow unsophisticated, ineffective, or inappropriate. With this emerging mentality has come a dramatic reduction in both the amount of Scripture incorporated into the sermon and the extent to which the sermon's subject matter is derived directly from biblical texts. Many preachers now pad their sermons with appeals to modern "experts" in theology, psychology, and sociology. They pride themselves on staying abreast of the "latest thought" available from the academic community and draw freely from this body of information as source material. We have "set ourselves up" for an extremely dangerous and spiritually destructive circumstance which historically has heralded the decline of God's spiritual nation (e.g., Deut. 6:6-9; Josh. 1:18; Psa. 1:2; Hos. 4:6).

Please consider why gospel preachers ought to provide their listeners with direct scriptural citations:

1. Such a practice helps hearers learn the Bible. Countless are the times that one's grasp of the content and structure of the Bible is facilitated by knowing precisely where a particular doctrine, principle, or truth is taught in Scripture. One learns and memorizes passages by reading and meditating for oneself (Acts 17:11; Lk. 16:29; 1 Tim 4:13). If the preacher does not use and identify Scripture in his sermon, he is at the very least failing to contribute to his hearers' acquisition of Bible knowledge. Perhaps he is even hampering this extremely vital process.

2. Quoting Scripture and requiring direct citation minimizes the tendency to make vague allusion to Scripture and, in so doing,

to fail to take context into consideration.

Error is often undetectable when disguised in the garb of a few familiar-sounding words or phrases severed from their original context. Even when inspired writers refrained from giving a specific Old Testament source, they were careful to quote the passage verbatim (cf. Heb. 2:6ff; 4:4-7; 5:6). Doctrinal deceptions are constantly being foisted upon the simple and innocent (Rom. 16:18) by the denominations and false brethren as they evade decisive and definitive contextual support for their erroneous religious views. Many disagreements and misconceptions would be settled and clarified if individuals did not justify their religious views by saying, "Somewhere in the Bible it says . . ."

3. Direct Scripture citation impresses upon the hearer that the preacher is not speaking "of himself" (cf. Jn. 7:16; 8:28; 14:10), or asserting his own ideas (1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), but rather permitting God to speak for Himself. Explicitly telling the audience where the words are found in Scripture emphasizes to them that they are accountable to God—not the preacher. It is His words (not the preacher's) that are "powerful" (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12) and able to save them (Jam. 1:21). Additionally, even academia held that it is only fair and ethical to give full documentation when alluding to the work of someone else.

4. Finally, giving hearers sufficient information for them to locate a passage is appropriate because Jesus and others did essentially the same thing. Of course, chapter and verse divisions were unavailable in apostolic times, but faithful speakers gave sufficient indication by which their claims could be verified. Though occasionally a speaker would preface his biblical quotation with a simple formula such as "It is written"

(Matt. 4:4,7), he usually included more details which enabled the listener to "zero in" on the specific text. Study carefully the following passages and notice how the inspired speaker provided clues to the specific source by identifying the Old Testament book, author, or canonical division (e.g., law, Psalms, or prophets—Matt. 3:3; 12:39; 13:14; 15:7; 24:15; Mk. 7:6; Lk. 20:42; 24:44; Jn. 1:23; Acts 1:20; 2:16,25; 2:22; 13:33,35,40; 15:15; 28:25).

Christians living today are not addressing Jews who were so familiar with the Old Testament that they needed to be reminded of a passage. We are addressing the denominations and the irreligious—both of whom are woefully ignorant of Scripture—all the more reason to specify our scriptural source.

Why do some seem so reluctant to give book, chapter, and verse in their preaching? Perhaps some are threatened by the practice because their own knowledge of Scripture is inferior to that of those who are able to do so. Perhaps some have embraced false doctrines which cannot survive the straightforward scrutiny of Scripture. Avoiding explicit scriptural citation facilitates religious seduction. Maybe to them, constantly quoting Scripture does not fit well with the modern, "sophisticated," "educated," "smooth" approach. Such "education" is akin to what Paul called "false knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20). Such "smoothness" sounds like the "smooth things" which Isaiah denounced (Isa. 30:10).

Brethren, there will never come a time when cultural or historical circumstances will warrant an abandonment of straightforward, Scripture-quoting proclamation of God's Word. Let us not be ashamed (Rom. 1:16) of the Bible. Let us present it faithfully to lost humanity and do all we can to encourage them to "check it out" (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21) as did the noble Bereans!

WOT

WHAT CAN WE DO TO KEEP FROM LOSING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE?

PART TWO

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Last month's editorial addressed a growing problem among God's people—the disturbing trend of many young people losing their faith in late adolescence. We suggested that reversing the trend must begin with an emphasis on our youth's developing their own, personal faith, instead of depending on the faith of their parents or other adults.

The second "antidote" is closely related to the first . . . in fact, it is an essential part of developing a personal faith: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

We can encourage them to be serious Bible students.

It is a simple concept: living things, from the single-celled organism up to the amazingly intricate human body, grow by consuming nutrients necessary for their survival. A branch cut off from the trunk dies because it is separated from the source of its nutrition. A human body that does not receive adequate nourishment dies of starvation. More importantly, though, Christians who do not "eat" wither away. Peter writes, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). The psalmist uses a similar metaphor: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD. And in His law he meditates day and night" (Psa. 1:2). A faithful person is like a healthy, well-nourished tree that is "planted by the rivers of water" (Psa. 1:3).

Consider Timothy, for example. It is not difficult to determine what made Timothy's faith the kind of faith that sustained him throughout his life: he studied God's Word. Paul told him, "And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Timothy's faith had grown because it had been fed; he was a student of the Scriptures. Notice the personal pronoun: "And that from childhood *you* have known . . ." Timothy's mother and grandmother had not reasoned, "Well, he'll learn what he needs to know during worship services . . ." They had evidently taught Timothy the importance of the Scriptures almost from infancy. Timothy's faith had become *his* because he had studied—the only way faith ever grows (Rom. 10:17).

The same is true of Christian young people today. If they are going to remain faithful, we must teach them that God's Word "effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). "How can a young man cleanse

his way? By taking heed according to Your word" (Psa. 119:9). Meditate on the Word day and night (Psa. 1:1-3). Crave it like you do food for your physical body (Psa. 119:127).

We need to encourage them to ask, "Why do we believe in God? Why do we believe that He created the world in six twenty-four-hour days? Why do we worship Him as we do? Why don't we use mechanical instruments of music? Why do we observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? Why do we believe that baptism is for the remission of sins? Why do we believe that one must be a faithful member of the Lord's church in order to go to heaven?" They are going to be faced with these questions . . . so we should encourage them to ask them now while they are still living at home, while they can sit down with their parents, Bible class teacher, elder, or preacher and study the Bible together. They can ask them *now* . . . and then open up their Bibles and study.

We should give them opportunities to put their faith into practice.

Most high school curricula now include foreign language studies, and two points about these courses are almost universally consistent: (1) Students passionately despise them, and (2) They learn much of the vocabulary, verb tenses, and grammatical construction, and in ten years cannot form one intelligible sentence in that language. Why? Because the old cliché is true: if you don't use it, you'll lose it. On the other hand, the best way to learn another language is to use it in your everyday conversation.

The same thing is true of Christianity. It is one thing to read the Bible (a good habit!). It is another thing to take those verses and put them into practice. Christianity is a religion of *action*, not just a religion of *belief*. That is why James wrote, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. . . . But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (Jam. 1:22,25). Here are some ways we can help our young people use their faith:

Encourage them to be soul-winners.

Those who love souls rarely fall away, which brings up an interesting point . . . If we can turn our youth into *evangelists*, Satan will find it difficult to undermine their faith. Plan a personal work course for your teenagers where they learn how to conduct home Bible studies. Take one of them with you on each study that

you conduct and let them observe. Turn your youth group into an exciting personal work team that looks for opportunities to bring others to Christ.

Create opportunities for them to demonstrate compassion. It is good for young people to have fun together—going to amusement parks, playing games, etc.—but entertainment must not be the exclusive pursuit of our youth programs.

Christianity is a religion of compassion. In fact, a cursory reading of the New Testament reveals a striking thing about Jesus: He was *always* concerned about people. We see an oft-expressed sentiment in the statement, "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36; cf. 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; et al.). The fact is, Jesus cared about people—their needs, their wants, their hurts.

And so should we. Putting our faith into action helps to keep the embers of our faith burning brightly. In order to erect a barrier between us and unfaithfulness, we must tear down the walls separating us from the world's downtrodden, thus emptying ourselves in selfless service to hurting people.

Do you want to safeguard the faith of your young people? Keep them busy helping others. The possibilities are endless. They can mow a widow's yard or go to a shut-in's house and clean out his gutters. They might take up a collection in the youth group and buy fruit baskets for nursing home residents. They could watch the local newspaper for tragedies and be the first one to help. The faith that cares rarely collapses. Young people need to understand that Christianity is an *active* religion.

It is a scary thought to realize that many of our young people are turning away from the faith. Can we prevent it? Not completely, of course. Some will always choose to follow the world to destruction. I am convinced, however, that we can do better than we have done in the past.

- Help them develop their own faith.
- Encourage them to study the Bible themselves.
- Give them opportunities to practice their faith.

Where will the young people in *your* congregation be in ten years?

Reflect soberly and prayerfully . . . and then act. Let's not lose another young soul.

A LOVE LETTER...TO NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Brad Harrub, Ph.D., Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama

Dear friend,

I have been contemplating this letter for a long time, and have only now gotten up the courage to write it. Even as I pen these words my stomach churns in nervous anticipation. The reason for it is quite simple. I want you to know about the very best thing that has ever happened in my life. I want to make sure before I die that I introduce you to my "first love." You often comment that I seem so happy all the time. Allow me a few minutes to explain why. But before I explain, let me share with you why it has taken me so long to write this letter.

Our relationship stretches back through many smiles and many tears, and throughout that time I knew that you were someone I could count on. Each one of those smiles and tears represents a lifetime of cherished memories. You know my favorite foods, that I love lasagna and don't like liver. You stood by my side on several occasions when it seemed like the entire world was against me. You have lifted my hand high as we celebrated victories and held my hand through my defeats. In many ways we are like two peas in a pod. And it's this relationship that has kept me from writing this letter. I cherish our relationship so much that I don't ever want anything to jeopardize it or see it falter. So I beg you to read the remainder of this letter full of love, compassion, and an open mind—knowing that it was written out of my love for you.

You and I have a tremendous amount in common—always have, and probably always will. However, there is one thing that we don't have in common. A while back I made a decision in my life that started me down a different pathway—a pathway on which I desperately want you to join me. Some time ago I began studying the Bible, and I soon realized that I was only "playing" Christian. I was a "member" of a local church that had many members, and I was there almost every time the door was opened. However, it became evident fairly quickly that the church where I was attending was doing things that were not described in the Bible. Sure, we met each Sunday for worship, and we sang songs of praise, but a great deal of the service was devoted to traditions that men had incorporated into the worship service. In fact, a large part of the worship service could be classified as entertainment. As I

read through the New Testament, I quickly discovered that entertainment, and these traditions of men, were not a part of the original church that Christ established.

You and I both know that religions are a dime a dozen these days. Seems like there is a church building on almost every street corner. But I began to ask myself if all of these religious groups were the *same* in God's eyes. After looking through the Scriptures I realized that they were not. Even though many of them do altruistic acts for the needy, and even though they have many sincere people in their pews, they still were not carrying out Christianity the way that God Himself ordained. They are sincere—but they are sincerely wrong according to the Scriptures.

So here's what I did (and what I encourage/beg you to do)—I began looking in the Bible for examples of the church that Jesus built. In Matthew 16:18 Christ told the apostle Peter that upon this rock (the rock of truth that He was the Son of God) He would build His church. So I began investigating the details about His church. I read in Acts 2 where it was started in Jerusalem. I continued reading in Acts to see how those early Christians worshiped and how others became Christians. And I began to see a divine pattern. I quickly realized that many of the books in the New Testament were written to different congregations of this church which Christ had founded. In fact, many of the books in the New Testament were letters written by Paul to various churches that were scattered abroad. In each of those letters, there are instructions and commands of things that we should and should not be doing.

For instance, I know that in many churches you officially "join" the church, or they vote you in. But I never found this process in my study of the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament is very specific that God is the One who adds people to the church (Acts 2:47). However, He only adds those who have complied with His will. And dear friend, it is with a humble and compassionate heart that I admit that I am scared that maybe you have not complied with His commands. For instance, the Bible instructs that we must *hear* the gospel (Rom. 10:14-17; Jam. 1:21-25), and we must *believe* in Jesus Christ (Jn. 8:24; Mk. 16:16). And while many people have done these steps, relatively few have taken the

next steps of *repenting* of their past sins (Acts 3:19; Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30), and *confessing* the name of Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:36-38). After someone has done this, he is ready to be buried with Christ in *baptism*, so that past sins can be forgiven. This act of baptism, for the remission of sins, is mentioned throughout the book of Acts (see chapters 2, 8, 9, 10, 16). The importance of being immersed can be identified by the words of Jesus found in Mark 16:16 when He declared: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

In Matthew 16:18 Christ said He would found one church—"my church." In Ephesians 1:22-23 we read where the church is called the body (with Christ being the head). A few chapters later, in Ephesians 4:4, we are told that there is only one body. My plea with you is that you will do whatever it takes to make sure you are in that one body, and ensure that God has added you to the church (Acts 2:47). Read through the New Testament and see for yourself what the Bible says regarding the church, and then ask yourself this simple question: Am I a member of the church that Christ purchased with His blood? If not, why not?

It's funny that I can talk to total strangers about this—and have done so many times in the past—and yet I remain silent around those to whom I am closest. I never talked to you about heaven and eternity because I didn't want to mess up what we had here on Earth. But see, I realize that this earthly relationship is temporary. One day the memories that you and I share will fade away. And I don't want to leave this life without telling you about Christ, and how He changed my life. Therefore I am penning this letter in hopes of extending our friendship into eternity.

Please allow me to paint a picture so that you can understand the genuine urgency of this letter. Suppose you were sitting in the first class section of a luxury Boeing 747. There you are sipping on a drink, relaxing, reading a magazine, when all of a sudden someone comes up, and tosses a parachute into your lap without saying a word. You might become a little agitated that someone would toss a bulky parachute into your lap, and then just walk on by. You might even decide to push it

aside or onto the floor so that you could return to your drink and magazine. That parachute would be nothing more than a nuisance. And after awhile you might even resent the person that tossed it in your lap. Now, suppose the person who had given you that parachute also took the time to tell you the airplane you were on was going to crash. How different would your attitude be towards that parachute and the person who gave it to you? Well, dear friend, one day soon our plane will go down. Hebrews 9:27 states very plainly that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." I simply want to make sure you have a parachute that will save you from destruction. Don't resent me for delivering

the message. Please understand that I simply want to do what I can while I still have the chance.

While the world around us thinks that the majority of people will end up in heaven, this is not what Jesus Christ Himself told us. In Matthew 7:13-14 He cautioned us to: "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*" (emp. added).

Please do not be mad at me. Please do not shy away from me. Please do not despise me. For this letter was not written

to drive a wedge into our relationship. But rather it was written out of love and compassion, hoping that we can stand hand-in-hand before Almighty God. Yes, I am a happy person—because I know and love my Savior, and He is my best friend. Please consider what I've said. Look through the Scriptures on your own. Examine where you stand. For I want nothing more than to introduce my earthly best friend to my spiritual best Friend and Savior—Jesus Christ. Thank you for allowing me this short opportunity to tell you about Him.

Sincerely,
Your friend

WOT

WHAT IS A "CHURCH OF CHRIST" POSITION?

Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

Sometimes a new or weak Christian, still learning, says, "The church of Christ believes that . . ." Such a statement is dangerous if the person making the statement has the concept that the beliefs and teaching of the church of Christ are merely part of a man-conceived system peculiar to the group of which he now is a part. Proper teaching should change that mind set through the course of time. Perhaps, positively, one who speaks of a "church of Christ position" speaks of the distinctiveness of the Lord's church on a Bible matter as contrasted to how the world and denominations stand on such.

It is disturbing to think, however, that some within the body of Christ who speak of a "church of Christ position" speak disparagingly of some of the doctrinal stands gospel preachers and godly elders take on issues like modest apparel, mechanical instruments in the singing portion of worship, woman's role in the worship and leadership of the church, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, along with a host of other moral and doctrinal "positions." There are several unfortunate implications stemming from a statement like the one under consideration.

Is it implied that one view is as good as another? One viewpoint on a matter of judgment may be as good as another, but the examples given above do not fall within the realm of judgment. For example, it is not scriptural to teach that immodesty is acceptable to God. It is dangerous to limit a biblical matter to a "church of Christ position" as if it were a single stance among several other, equally acceptable

positions. The net result of such tolerance is the religious confusion that exists today. No rational person would say, "It is his position that an untreated rattlesnake bite will kill the one bitten." It probably is "his" position, but what other position would one take? In the same way, when the "church of Christ preacher" preaches "one husband, one wife, for life, except for spousal fornication and death," that is clearly "his" position as he derives it from Bible study. However, what other position could one hold and still please the Lord? And, it is the same with every matter of faith within the Bible.

Is it implied that the Bible and belief therein is purely subjective? In a cultural climate that is openly tolerant of diverse views and expressions, some religious people may feel the pressure to be as tolerant with every religious view and conclusion. Yet, it is important to see that the Bible is an objective standard rather than a subjective suggestion. Such attempts to dilute the pattern of Scriptures opens the door for any "position" to be valid. If there is no set right or wrong on a matter, is everything right? The Bible teaches that there is a "form of doctrine" to be obeyed (Rom. 6:17). "Truth" sanctifies (Jn. 17:17), but if there are a hundred truths, which one should be believed? The Bible commands that one "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). God and Christ expect religious unity (cf. Jn. 17), and one can be confident that they have made it possible for such unity to exist.

Is it implied that erroneous views will

not be condemned? If the church of Christ holds the "position" that baptism is essential for salvation, and the Baptist believes that faith apart from baptism saves, will both be saved? Can it be said that those who believe, teach, obey, and thereafter live according to error will be lost? Of course, no one desires to be offensive in teaching the Bible, and one should never be unnecessarily offensive. However, moral courage must cause Christian teachers to identify sin and its wages (Rom. 6:23). The Bible teaches that many will be condemned (Matt. 7:13-14). Those who stand condemned are those who are disobedient and who walk contrary to the will of God (cf. Matt. 7:21-24; Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17; etc.). Certainly Christ will be the Judge before whom every individual stands (Matt. 25:31-34). But, as certainly, He will judge justly—according to the written Word of God and the book of one's life. If He will save those who lived contrary to His will, who will be lost on that day? Will anyone be lost?

One should never accept anything simply because a "church of Christ" preacher, teacher, elder, or other member says it! The standard of right will always be the Bible. Whatever is done religiously must be according to the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). May one never dismiss Bible teaching by crediting the stand as *only* a "church of Christ position." May our every position, as God's people, be what God teaches. Let us stand boldly there (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-12)! Then, the position one holds can confidently be shared with the saints and the lost.

WOT

WHAT'S YOUR "INTEREST" RATE?

Brandon Jackson, Jasper, Alabama

Countrymen, relatives, families were struggling to make ends meet. Nearly two months of working on the walls, overpopulation, a recent famine, and Persian taxes were all catalysts bringing poverty to the common man. Those who had at one time enjoyed the benefits of rich land and fertile soil were now gathering corn behind the reapers. This was the Old Testament equivalent of the welfare system (Lev. 19:9ff; 23:22; Deut. 24:19).

They were in such great despair that they turned to their neighbors for help. From their countrymen, their relatives, their family, and their brothers they secured what relief they could. It did not come without a cost. "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards" (Neh. 5:5). Nehemiah heard these cries, and he became angry. And why shouldn't he? He was a Jew. Those were his brothers and sisters. But instead of acting rashly, he consulted with himself and most likely with his Father.

He then rebuked the nobles and the

rulers. "We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer" (Neh. 5:8). Nehemiah rebuked the nobles because they had sold the redeemed back into slavery. They had provided relief for their countrymen, but that relief had its cost. The nobles had demanded interest, and that interest would never be paid. They had once again made captive those who had been free. It must be a terrible thing to be born into slavery and never know freedom, yet it must be devastating to know and experience freedom and then feel the crushing bonds of servitude.

Can we be guilty of the same today? Can we place shackles and cuffs upon the limbs of those who had once been freed? Can we charge too much for "interest"? "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Rom 6:6-8). So precious is the soul willing to make that escape. So terrible the captivity that one is willing to crucify

the old man and become a new man. So beautiful is the new-found freedom one can hardly understand why anyone would return. Yet, some do. When life gets tough, trials seem overpowering, burdens too heavy to lift. Where does one go? To whom does one turn? "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Tim 2:24-26). Paul writes that "servants of the Lord" assist their Christian family by becoming involved, and thus help prevent them from returning to the captivity of Satan. Will we be servants of the Lord? Will we be gentle, patient, convincing, able and willing to help others in their time of need, or will we charge an "interest" rate that is too high? What will cause us to "invest" in our brothers and sisters? Will we be out seeking others whom we may help or must they persistently knock upon our door? Let us be people who never charge "interest" to our Christian family.

WOT

"THIS IS THAT"

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

There is no greater guarantee of the proper interpretation of a prophetic passage than the words of another inspired writer confirming it. Whenever an inspired man takes notice of a prophetic utterance and then comments on it in such a fashion so as to reveal its fulfillment, there should be no question about the time element involved in its fulfillment. Numerous Messianic passages serve as examples of this very thought (cf. Isa. 11:10; Rom. 15:12; etc.).

One passage which has been greatly misapplied in our day is a perfect illustration of this principle. The passage is found in Joel 2:28-32. In this article

we will examine some thoughts from this passage, especially in light of Peter's comments about it in Acts 2:16-21.

First, notice the most obvious comment by Peter, which is also the most important as it concerns the time element involved with this prophecy. In Acts 2:16 Peter stated, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." Peter continues by quoting from the passage in Joel 2. Thus, whatever is under consideration in this passage in Joel must be considered in and maintained by the inspired phrase, "this is that" (Acts 2:16). In this instance man can know beyond doubt that the items spoken of in

prophetic (and figurative) terms by the prophet have been fulfilled. Not only this, but man can also know the precise time when these matters were fulfilled—the day of Pentecost, A.D. 33.

Any study involving Joel 2:28-32 must be considered in the light of its revelatory passage in Acts 2:16-21. Man has gone far and wide in his attempts to make Joel's prophecy one of "latter-day" fulfillment. However, these three words spoken by Peter dispel every such notion. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter loudly proclaimed to that ancient crowd gathered on Pentecost Day that Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled at that very

moment before their very eyes. Anyone who attempts to teach otherwise does so without divine approval and in contradiction to an inspired text.

A second point to be considered about this matter is the fact that Peter helps explain to us just what the phrase "last days" means. Joel's statement was, "And it shall come to pass afterward" (Joel 2:28). In quoting this prophecy Peter said, "And it shall come to pass in the last days" (Acts 2:17). What, then, are the "last days?" Whatever they are, they at least began on the occasion in which Peter spoke these words. Remember, concerning these words of Joel, Peter said, "This is that."

Further consideration of this phrase reveals that Isaiah spoke of the "last days" (Isa. 2:2). He prophesied that the "Lord's house" would be established at that time. The house of God is the church of our Lord (1 Tim. 3:15). Thus, Isaiah's prophecy refers to the same time as Joel's, since both apply to the day of Pentecost on which the church of Christ was established (Acts 2:47). (Also note Mic. 4:1).

The Hebrews writer stated that God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). To whom is man to listen concerning spiritual matters today? The same One about whom Paul wrote in Hebrews—Jesus. Hence, it is during "the last days" that Jesus is the authority. He said, "All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:19). He is the authority as long as the world stands.

In 2 Peter 3, the Bible states: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" (vv. 3-4). This is another indication of "the last days." Worldly man will mockingly ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" until He returns. However, this is said to transpire in "the last days."

What conclusion can we draw about this matter? Peter reveals that the "last days" spoken of by Joel were there on that day of Pentecost. These other writers demonstrate that the last days will continue until Christ returns. We are in "the last days" now, and have been since that notable day on which Peter spoke almost 2000 years ago. The "last days" is a reference to the Christian dispensation; the last dispensation of time.

A third matter to be considered from

this passage involves what Peter called the pouring out "of my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17). Recall that Peter said "this is that" concerning this prophecy of Joel. Joel had revealed that in the "last days" the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon "all flesh." As a result, "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28). Quite obviously, then, this pouring out of God's Spirit upon mankind would result in miracles being performed. But, to whom was this promise made? Joel said it would be upon "all flesh." However, this phrase (in its figurative context) should be viewed in relation to other scriptural principles regarding it. For example, "all flesh" does not and could not mean every kind of flesh. Paul told the Corinthians, "All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds" (1 Cor. 15:39). Certainly Joel's promise did not include the beasts, fish, and birds. Immediately, then, it can be seen that the phrase "all flesh" has to be seen in its context.

Further, since the passage deals with the miraculous, it is likewise limited by the time element involved with the ability to perform miracles as given by God. To be certain one can read of miracles performed by our Lord and by many of His disciples. However, one can also read of the limitations placed upon this time of miracles by God Himself (1 Cor. 13, etc.). Keep in mind the words of Peter as you study this context. Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." Today, we are the benefactors of all that was done by the Lord and by these early disciples.

A fourth matter to be considered is this concept of the sun's being "turned into darkness, and the moon into blood" (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20). Should this be taken literally? Or, rather, is it figurative in nature? Whatever it refers to, it happened on that day of Pentecost because Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," and then proceeded to quote from these words of Joel. A comparison with other passages will show that these words are figurative in nature and indicate a phenomenal event. For example, Ezekiel 32:7-8 states: "And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun

with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God." About whom were these words spoken? None other than the Pharaoh of Egypt (Ezek. 32:2). Similar words are used by Amos in his prophecy against Israel (Amos 8:9).

Legions have been the men who have attempted to make the words of Joel refer to some literal, latter-day event of the pouring forth of God's wrath. If these men would stop for a moment and consider the words of Peter, the interpretation of Joel's prophecy would be apparent. Of the comments by Joel, Peter said, "This is that." This should conclude the matter for any honest person who examines it.

The fifth point concerning this passage is the statement, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel 2:32). Peter's quotation of this passage states, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). What does it mean to "call on the name of the Lord?"

The same phrase is used in Romans 10:13. The Bible says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is simply a statement of fact. It is not a definition of what "calling on the name of the Lord" is. However, the phrase is also used in Acts 22:16. In this passage we are told what it means to call on the name of the Lord. In speaking to Saul, Ananias said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." What does it mean, then, to "call on the name of the Lord"? It means to obey the authoritative Word of the Lord—doing what He says, in the way He says, and for the reason(s) He says. Having reached the biblical conclusion as to what this phrase means, let us return to Acts 2 and see what those to whom Peter spoke on this occasion did. Acts 2:41 reveals: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." They did exactly what Saul did. They obeyed that which they were told to do (Acts 2:38). They were baptized into Christ, thus calling upon His name. Have you "called on the name of the Lord"? WOT

THINKING VERSUS FEELING

Victor M. Eskew, Paragould, Arkansas

Thinking is an essential part of the Christian religion. Many passages of Scripture reveal how important one's thoughts are. Thoughts impact the words we speak. Jesus said, "... for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). Thoughts also have a direct bearing upon our actions. Again, the Lord said: "... that which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man" (Mk. 7:20-23). Thus, we are not surprised by Paul's admonition of Philippians 4:8. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

One major difficulty many have is allowing their feelings to dictate their lives. In his book, *Habits of the Mind*, Dr. Archibald Hart writes: "But more often than not, the heart tends to get in the way of sensibility. I can't

begin to tell you how often I've come across people who have trusted their hearts over their heads and have lived to regret it" (p. 10).

There are numerous areas wherein individuals act in accordance with their feelings instead of their mind. One area involves the decision to marry.

The area of life where this mistake is made most is, as you would suspect, in the area of romance. In this realm the heart always asserts itself and tries to dominate the head. This is so much the case that romance easily blinds us to certain realities that if we could keep our sanity, our head would see quite readily. The problem is that romantic love is really a temporary form of insanity (my tongue is halfway in my cheek, of course) that blinds our rational eyes. Unfortunately, the cure for this blindness may only come when romance has faded and one realizes that feelings can't always be trusted by themselves (Ibid., p. 10).

Dr. Archibald has definitely hit the "nail-on-the-head." Romance, passion, and sexual desires have driven many couples to the marriage altar. Once the fires of deep feelings

are quenched, they no longer love one another. Sometimes this may take one or two years. For others, it only takes months or weeks.

Multitudes then find their way to divorce court.

Some—out of passion, or loneliness, or fear of never getting married—will reject the plain teaching of God on marriage. They will enter adulterous marriages because feelings win over sober thinking. Some come to their senses and get out of their sin. Most wake up in a dilemma. Years have passed. Numerous children have been born into the relationship. Now the question is asked, "How do I get out without hurting people I love?"

Thinking must always be put before one's feelings. Thinking based upon the truth of God's Word must always be placed before my emotions. Peter stated it well: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:13-16). WOT

"... CONTEND FOR THE FAITH..." (JUDE 3-4)

Wade L. Webster, Crossville, Tennessee

Jude wrote, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 3-4). Jude saw the need to write the brethren and to exhort them to "earnestly contend for the faith" because of false teachers that had "crept in unawares." Jude could write this same letter to any host of congregations today. Let's notice three things that these verses teach the Christian about contending for the faith.

First, we see the MANNER in which we are to contend. Jude said that we are to earnestly contend. The phrase "earnestly contend" is literally "to wrestle, strive, or agonize." The secular writers used these words to describe the intense effort that the athletes put forth to win the Grecian games of the first century. Paul, in comparing the Christian life to a race, used similar terminology (1 Cor. 9:24-25). Likewise, the phrase "earnestly contend," describes the intense efforts which are to characterize the faithful as they stand for the truth. We cannot

give a halfhearted stand for truth and fulfill this command. The Lord has never been satisfied with those who are trying to remain in the middle between what's right and what's wrong. He condemned the Laodiceans for their lukewarmness and the congregations of Pergamos and Thyatira because they failed to stand against the false teachers that were among them (Rev. 3:14-16; 2:12-15,20). We must never be "ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Second, we see the MESSAGE for which we are to contend. Jude said that we are to earnestly contend for "the faith." The phrase "the faith" stands for the system of faith that we have revealed for us in the New Testament. For example, in the book of Galatians we read concerning Paul, "But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed" (Gal. 1:23). Also, in the book of Acts we read that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). As Christians, we are not to contend for just any religious doctrine, but, rather, for what the New Testament teaches.

Third, we see the MEN with whom we are to

contend. Jude wrote, "For there are certain men crept in unawares..." (Jude 4). Here, Jude told the brethren about the men against whom they were to contend for the faith—false teachers. These false teachers were trying to turn "the grace of our God into lasciviousness." Jude wanted the brethren to stand up for the truth, which included standing against these false teachers. After warning the brethren of the presence of the false teachers, Jude begins a lengthy description of them to help the brethren to be able to detect them (vv. 8-16). Jude wanted these brethren to have the attitude that Paul expressed in the book of Galatians. Paul wrote, "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour: that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:4-5). We are not to harbor false teachers but rather to mark and avoid them (Rom. 16:17-18). False teachers may appear to be the ministers of righteousness, but they are in reality the ministers of Satan (2 Cor. 11:15). We must not support them in any way lest we become partakers of their evil deeds and suffer with them in their condemnation (2 Jn. 9-11).

May we heed Jude's words and stand against the false teachers of our day who are making "havoc of the church." WOT

THE GOLDEN RULE

Steve Waller, Jakarta, Indonesia

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). The "Golden Rule" is one of the highest ethical rules of conduct for man given by the Lord. How we treat others is very important to God. He is watching and listening (Heb. 4:13).

As elders, do we treat preachers with respect, as the Lord wants them to be treated? As preachers, do we honor the elders as He expects us to do? Do men treat women with honor and respect, and do women treat men the same? Just ask yourself those questions about people in your various walks of life and see if you really follow this rule.

Are we really treating others as we would want to be treated? Are we taking the initiative in treating others properly before we find out how they will treat us? Do we set the standard? Or, do we see what advantage we can gain over someone else in order to have the "upper hand" and put others at a disadvantage? Are we kind, helpful, fair-minded, forgiving, merciful, generous, and loyal? A married couple spoke of the success of their marriage. They said, "We always try to follow the Golden Rule. We always try to treat the other one as we would want him or her to treat us."

What if we were treated the very same way that we treat others? Would that treatment make us feel good or bad? Honored or dishonored? Would that treatment be a glory to the Lord, or would He be ashamed and disappointed in us? "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another. . . . Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (Rom. 12:10,16). "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). God is watching and will judge us on how we deal with one another. WOT



Book recommendation: Bob Spurlin, from Hartselle, Alabama, has written an excellent book—*Dial 911: Essentials to Living Right in the 21st Century*—which will encourage all who read it. Disabled with multiple sclerosis since 1995, brother Spurlin is still using his abilities to God's glory. All proceeds from this book go toward his escalating medical expenses. Curtis Cates, director of Memphis School of Preaching, writes this review: "This 208-page paperback book is packed with interesting and vital information. From chapter one, "Dial 911," to the last chapter, "Banned From Church Services," one finds a wealth of biblical, practical, and challenging information. The past eight years Bob has been confined to a hospital bed in his home. However, he has continued to serve the Lord by writing. His first book, *Tackling Life's Troubles*, is now in its third printing, and the book has gone all over the world. This new book will be as successful, perhaps more so. Bob will reach out from his hospital bed to thousands of people through this book, and he will stir up their minds and their hearts for good. You may order this book from: Bob Spurlin, 2101 Glenwood Dr., Hartselle, AL 35640. The cost is \$10 per book, plus \$1.50 per book for shipping. A box of thirty books may be ordered for \$300.00, and there is no shipping charge. Congregations may want to order a case of these books. When you order the book why not take a moment to write Bob a card or letter? Your card, letter, or note will bless him."

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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