

## MISTAKES WE SHOULD NOT MAKE

*Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas*

Romans 15:4 tells us to profit from the miscues of the past, but, sadly, history often repeats itself because folks learn slowly. There are basic patterns in the drama of error we mortals pursue. It is truly wonderful, therefore, that Christ Jesus set a noble, perfect example for us to follow, an example that helps us escape the pitfalls of the past. Let us notice a few things we ought to detour around on the road of life.

**The mistake of Adam and Eve:** Their basic blunder was to choose the easy route instead of the correct way. But that decision was extremely costly as it brought sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12) and separated man from God (Isa. 59:2). According to 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 the very same dilemma occurs often in our own way! It pays in the long run to diligently “go with God,” even if the challenge seems greater (1 Cor. 15:58).

**The mistake of Ahab:** In 1 Kings 21 we learn of a king who coveted another man’s possession. The outcome of these passions was the murder of

Naboth and the acquiring of a beautiful vineyard. But, Ahab did not live long enough to enjoy the treasure improperly obtained. In 1 Kings 22 we read of dogs licking up royal blood by the pool of Samaria—the blood of Ahab, a man who thought he could fool God (Gal. 6:7). Many today live and act as though they can fool the Creator—but they are mistaken (Num. 32:23).

**The mistake of Robbing God:** In Haggai 1:6 and Malachi 3:8 we learn of the tragedy in the lives of those who stole from Jehovah. When people act so unwisely, they actually steal from themselves the abundant blessings God wanted them to have! When we fail to give cheerfully and liberally unto the cause of the Redeemer (2 Cor. 9:6-11) we remove much of the joy and adventure from our relationship with the One who gave all for us (2 Cor. 9:15). Conversely, generous, purposeful giving opens the window of heaven, hedges us about with the providence of God and makes each day a closer step into the heart of Jesus

who gave Himself for our sins (Gal. 1:4).

**The mistake of Martha:** In the last paragraph of Luke 10, we read a fascinating passage that is extremely pertinent to our daily conduct. It deals not with overt shame and wickedness. It actually calls for discerning, perceptive analysis. The verses in this exciting section of Scripture hit at one of our very own weaknesses. Do we put our approval on things that are excellent (Phil. 1:10), or do we choose, far too often, those matters that are temporal and defiantly ask: “Well, what is wrong with it?” Really, faithful Christians ask instead: “Is this the best thing I can do to glorify God?” There will be a lot of people in hell who wasted their earthly moments wandering around in the futility of lesser things when they could have known the beauty of holiness.

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

*WOT*

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

G.K. Wallace

We cannot over impress the importance and reasonableness of the habit of prayer.

**1. The importance of prayer may be seen by what Christ said about it.** It would take reams of paper to record and emphasize all that Jesus had to say about prayer, but we notice a few terse statements that He made. In Matthew 5:44 Jesus said, “. . . Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you. . . .” In Matthew 6:5 Jesus said, “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. . . .” And in the next verse He said, “. . . when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret. . . .” From statements like these we see that Jesus emphasized the importance of prayer and directed His children, not only that they should pray, but *how* to pray. In Matthew 6:9 Jesus said, “After this manner therefore pray ye. . . .”

Jesus taught that prayer is not just for a favorite few—preachers and elders—but that it is for every child of God. In the denominational world, especially among Catholics, people have been led to believe that the priest holds the key to heaven and that the people must go to him and have him unlock the door of mercy. Jesus taught that His disciples had the right to say, “Our Father, who art in heaven. . . .” Every disciple has a right to go to God in prayer. Of course, he must do this in reverence, because “hallowed is His Name” and thus, with reverence and respect he goes to God and not Mary in prayer.

In the prayer that we commonly call the Lord’s prayer, or in the instruction that Jesus set forth as the manner of prayer, we find that there are two major divisions. The first half has to do with the characteristics of God, His wish, and His will. The second half has to do with the necessities of human life: sustenance, relations, keeping, and discipline. This should be remembered as we pray for our daily bread because this involves the law of God that provides daily bread. When we pray for the sick or for our daily bread we must be within the limits of God’s law. Prayer was not designed to nullify God’s law. God has not promised to

answer our prayer for daily bread and at the same time ignoring the laws that govern daily bread. The laws of our daily bread are a part of His providence and a part of God’s great law. When we pray for the sick, it is wrong for us to ignore the rules that God has set up for the health of our bodies and the restoration of the health of our bodies. We should recognize, however, that we do not learn the laws of agriculture and health from the Bible but from an agricultural school and medical school. The laws that have been discovered in the agricultural schools are the laws that God made, and they have been found through scientific study. The Bible is not a book of medicine, and when medical science discovers certain laws that heal, protect, and preserve our bodies they discovered God’s laws. To ignore these scientific laws in our prayers is to reject the wish and the will of God. When men pray for the sick and ignore the rules and regulations that God has set up for our bodily care, they ignore God and His plan of prayer. Today, men who set aside the gospel and ask God to save them directly from heaven without obeying the great commission reject God. When men set aside the laws that govern the healing of our bodies and ask God to heal them without the laws that He has set up for this purpose, they ignore God.

Much of the prayer life of the disciples of Christ is private. We often pray in public, but the large part of our prayer life is private. In prayer, we need much privacy, directness, and simplicity. Even prayer for the sick is just as efficacious in the home as it is in the bedroom with the one who is ill. We believe in praying for those who are sick, but it is a mistake to pray for a man who is ill and then refuse to do for him what should be done. If you are praying for a loved one who is sick, and who is half-way around the world; you cannot touch him, you cannot go into the room where he is, but your prayer for him can be just as efficacious as if you were kneeling beside his bed. Certainly those on the scene and in connection with him must do that which is within their power in order for the will of God to be carried out.

**2. The importance of prayer may be seen by what Christ did about it.** Mark

says, “And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed.” And again he says, “And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer” (Lk. 6:12-13). We know that when He came to the grave where Lazarus was, the one whom He raised from the dead, one of the first things He did was to pray. The night He instituted the Lord’s Supper, according to Matthew 26:36, He gave thanks, or prayed. Before He faced the cross He went out into the garden, taking with Him Peter, James, and John, and there prayed three times that the cup might pass from him. Also, we find that while He was on the cross, according to Matthew and Luke, that He cried out to His Father and said, “My God, why hast thou forsaken me!” And concerning the people who crucified Him He said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Thus, we see He prayed in the morning, in time of suffering and sorrow, on the mountain, in the night, at the grave, and in the face of death. He not only preached and taught about prayer, but prayer made up a big part of His life even though He was the Son of God.

**3. The things for which Christ prayed shows us the importance He attached to prayer.** We learn to pray by observing the things for which Christ prayed. We learn to pray by noting the times that He prayed.

Christ had a great decision to make in selecting His apostles, and before this He spent all night in prayer (Lk. 6:12-16). When the faith of His disciples was in the balance and He knew that they would be tested and sorely tried, He prayed that their faith would not fail (Lk. 22:32). He was mistreated, slandered, and wrongfully used by people in this world, but for those who wronged Him, He prayed (Lk. 23:34). When He was about to leave this world and to go back to His Father, He prayed that His Name might be glorified. In John 17 Jesus prays for Himself, for His apostles, and for all people of the world, even those who are yet unborn, that they might come to believe on Him through the Word spoken by these apostles. In this, we see how He prayed for sinners and for their salvation. He did not pray for a direct operation of the Spirit, but

that all men may believe on Him through the word of the apostles.

From these things there are some lessons that we may learn about the importance of prayer. To many of us, prayer is simply an emergency device. We pray only when we are in trouble. To some of us, prayer serves as a source to gratify our selfish needs. We pray for those things that bring us comfort and peace of mind, and forget about making a real sacrifice for

those who suffer and are lost. Some try to use prayer to nullify the laws of God, to set aside the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation. Some try to set aside the laws of health and expect God to heal them without those laws. To others, prayer is used as an ultimatum—making demands of God. And again, to some it is simply a device with which we open and close a service. We begin the service with prayer,

and we close the service with prayer, but it is not designed simply as an opening or closing device. It is a most sacred privilege to pray, and its importance can be seen by what Christ said about it, what Christ did about, and the things for which He prayed.

We ought to pray and to pray always, but God cannot do much for us until we get to the end of ourselves. WOT

## WHAT ARE WE TEACHING OUR TEENS?

*Kevin D. Beard, Fayette, Alabama*

A few years back the *Christian Chronicle* contained a report of a survey done by Abilene Christian University professors David Lewis and Carly Dodd on youth and the church. The article contained data which reflected how various groups felt about some aspects of the Lord's church. A wide discrepancy was shown between Junior and Senior High groups and preachers and elders on some subjects. For example, in response to the statement "It really doesn't matter what particular church someone belongs to as long as he/she loves God," 100 percent of preachers surveyed disagreed and only 44 percent of high school students disagreed. The data from this research is frightening. What are we teaching our teens?

One portion of the survey listed the things teens found most "boring" about the church. The answers, listed in order of priority of the responses, were given: (1) Sermons; (2) Elders; (3) Bible classes; (4) Worship services; (5) Rehearsed prayers; (6) Talking things "to death"; (7) Old and outdated hymns; (8) Services too solemn. Why is it that teens find the four most "boring" things about the church to be sermons, elders, Bible classes, and worship? Can the blame be placed on the church leaders? It is possible that some church leaders have not shown the kind of leadership that is vitally important to the growth of the local congregation. But could another cause be more at the root of the problem? Could it be that teens have not been properly taught, both in the home and in the church?

Some may wish to correct the problem by addressing its symptoms. If teens find sermons boring, then make them more entertaining. Or, as seems to be the trend in some youth rallies, do away with sermons altogether, substituting dramatic

performances for them. If hymns are too old and outdated, thus boring to one segment of the congregation, then change to a new and innovative worship. But these changes do not address the real problem. In fact, they only add to the real problem. The real problem is lack of spiritual teaching. Superficial changes only entrench the spiritually bored in their spiritual immaturity. Compromise and unauthorized change will not solve the problem.

To be sure, preachers, elders, Bible class teachers, and those who lead in worship must make sure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities with determination, sincerity, and preparation. How can a preacher expect his audience not to be bored with his sermon if he has done a shoddy job in preparing it? But when sermons and classes are Bible-centered, thoroughly prepared, and delivered to the best of the preacher's/teacher's ability, then those who still find them boring must turn inward to find the reason.

This is where teaching comes into play. Have our teens been taught what it means to be a Christian? Have they had parents who have shown them, both in word and example, what it means to have Christ at the center of their lives? Spiritual maturity in Christian young people must begin at home. Parents under the old law were commanded to teach their children diligently (Deut. 6:4-9). Christian parents are instructed to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Parents who desire to see their children grow to be faithful Christians must exercise the same leadership that the mother and grandmother of Timothy exercised in teaching him. Paul told Timothy, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through

faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). If the same could have been said of the teens surveyed in the study, would the results have been the same?

But what about the role of Bible classes? What do young people learn in Bible class? Another interesting (and disturbing) piece of information revealed in the study was that the youth ministers surveyed showed much closer correlation with the teens than with the preachers and elders. Is there a connection between the fact that only 44 percent of high school students disagreed with the statement "It really doesn't matter what particular church someone belongs to as long as he/she loves God," and the fact that only 35 percent of youth ministers surveyed disagreed with it? Are those whom the church hires to work with young people teaching those young people to love Christ and His church? Are they teaching them the Bible and helping to instill within them respect for it as God's authority? If the figures given in the study are accurate, the answer must be "No."

So where does the answer lie? Should churches strive to change their practices, disregarding the authority of Scripture, in order to suit the desires of the disgruntled? Certainly not. Parents and teachers alike must work diligently to teach young people to love and know the Scriptures. But this in itself is not enough. A generation of young people able to repeat hundreds of Bible facts could be brought up. But if these same young people were not able also to apply these Bible principles and live lives that were truly affected for good by God's Word, then no real solution would have been reached.

Why were such disturbing results obtained in the study? Why are we losing our young people? Perhaps it is because we have not taught them. WOT

# CAN YOU GET TO HEAVEN FROM HERE?

Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama

“Excuse me, can you give me directions to heaven?” Most, pointing upward, would answer, “It’s up there.”

Actually, to get to heaven one must go down (into the waters of baptism, Acts 8:38), then up (out of baptism, Rom. 6:4), and proceed forward (on the Christian racetrack, Heb. 12:1; Phil. 3:13-14).

*Can you get to heaven from here? Yes!*

**Because of the love of Christ.** Jesus’ love made our trip to heaven possible. He gave up heaven (for a time), that we might enjoy it (forever). “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

He died that we might live. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). He demonstrated love that we might know the unknowable (Eph. 3:19).

He loves us and wants us to come live with Him (John 14:1-3). That is why we can go to heaven. Thus, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19).

**By obeying the gospel of Christ.** Jesus gave a plan by which sins might be forgiven. Sin is the only thing that will keep us from heaven (Rev. 21:27), and since all sin (1 Jn. 1:9), we must all obey (Heb. 5:9).

To enter the road to heaven, one must ford the waters of baptism (Mk. 16:16). This entrance is further restricted to those mature enough to understand the gospel

(Jn. 6:44-45), convinced enough to strongly believe in Christ (Jn. 8:24), convicted enough to forsake a sinful lifestyle (Lk. 13:3), and courageous enough to publicly confess faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10).

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the lamb? *Why not today?*

**By being a member of the church of Christ.** When Jesus comes back, He is taking only those to heaven whom He has added to His church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 15:20-24). He only has one (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4). Sadly, there will be many surprised people on Judgment Day who thought they were right, but were mistaken (Matt. 7:21-23). Every false church will then be uprooted and destroyed (Matt. 15:13). For this reason, it is important to become a member of the church you can read of in the Bible (cf. Rom. 16:16).

One becomes a member of the church of Christ when he is baptized (Gal. 3:26-27) and remains in it as long as he lives as Jesus commands. This includes worshiping correctly (Jn. 4:24) and regularly (Heb. 10:25), working for Christ (Jn. 9:4), having Christ’s disposition (Phil. 2:5), and being molded into the image of Christ (Gal. 4:19).

Are you a member of Christ’s church?

**By forsaking the world for Christ.** Two masters are competing for our affections—Satan and Christ. No heart is big enough for both (Matt. 6:24). Only those who

forsake the world (Satan’s domain) can go to heaven (1 Jn. 2:15-17). This means we must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit. 2:12). It means we are not conformed to this world but transformed into His image (Rom. 12:2) and have crucified selfish desires (Gal. 2:20). No one can go to heaven who practices worldliness. Popular worldly sins include: drinking (Eph. 5:18), fornication (Heb. 13:4), dancing (Gal. 5:19-21), immodest dress (1 Tim. 2:9), drugs (Rom. 6:13), and covetousness (Col. 3:5).

Giving up worldly pleasures is such a small price to pay for heaven’s joys. God gets no pleasure in saying “no”—He does so only for our good: “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psa. 84:11). We must love Him and trust His judgment.

Have you given up the world for Christ?

**If you really want to be with Christ.** It is not easy to walk the lane marked “life” (Matt. 7:13), but it is possible (Phil. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:6-8). Only those who expend strenuous effort will make it beyond the pearly gates (Lk. 13:24). It is worth giving all that we have (Matt. 13:46).

Is your heart set on going to heaven? If you died tonight, would you go there? Are you packed and ready to leave? *You can get to heaven from here!* Serious Bible study is the key and not emotional feelings and bias. WOT

## DIFFICULTIES NOT CONTRADICTIONS

Ted J. Clarke, Mammoth Spring, Arkansas

Enemies of the Bible commonly assert that it is “full of contradictions.” Even supposed friends of the Scriptures sometimes contend for occasional contradictions in historical matters, while claiming inerrancy for strictly religious teachings. Bible believers may admit that difficulties exist with our present text and

understanding, without admitting that actual contradictions were a part of the original sacred writings. The Scriptures claim an inerrancy for themselves which does not allow for actual contradictions (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; Jn. 10:34-36; et al.).

Difficulties can be found in the text of

the Bible. 2 Peter 3:16 speaks of some things that Paul wrote as “hard to be understood,” but these are never spoken of as contradictory to the rest of the Bible. Difficulties can also arise from (1) improper translations; (2) copyists’ errors; (3) faulty hermeneutics; (4) our own ignorance or lack of sufficient information,

part of which may be due to the condensed nature of large sections of Scripture; and, (5) perhaps the largest number of difficulties are manufactured by those who wish to destroy the Bible's teaching. However, these difficulties can be solved and do not mitigate against the divine inspiration of the Bible. Anyone who asserts that actual contradictions exist in the Bible and were present in the original manuscripts strikes at the very heart of the nature of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. If the Bible has errors in it, then it does not live up to its claim to be the Word of the all-powerful, all-knowing God. Or, one could say that this supposedly omnipotent, omniscient Deity could not preserve His Word from corruption. In either case the absolute truthfulness of the Scriptures would be compromised, and we would have no infallible standard by which to guide our lives. We could only guess which parts of the Bible were true and which were false. Thankfully, God did give us a completely trustworthy Book!

Difficulties can be resolved, while contradictions cannot be. This is a crucial difference between the two terms. A

contradiction exists when a person, place, or thing is said both to be and not to be, at the same time in the same place and in the same way. Two statements about a person, place, or thing are not contradictory just because they differ. They are contradictory only when both cannot be true regarding the same thing, in the same place, and at the same time. For example, God is charged with being capricious because He said in Genesis 1:31 that His creation was "very good," while in Genesis 6:5-7 he portrays mankind as corrupt and is ready to destroy the world. Obviously, God's differing attitudes are not a result of His whimsical nature, but of drastic changes in the nature of things between these two times.

A contradiction may be "apparent," meaning that it appears to be real, but actually is not. Unless we know someone to be a liar, there is a principle of charity that attaches to one's statements—spoken or written. J.W. McGarvey properly notes, regarding these alleged contradictions, "If, on any rational hypothesis, we may suppose them both to be true, we cannot rightfully pronounce them contradictory.

We are not bound to show the truth of the given hypothesis; but only that it may be true. If it is at all possible, then it is possible that no contradiction exists; if it is probable, then it is probable that no contradiction exists; and the degree of the latter probably is measured by that of the former" [*Evidences Of Christianity, Part III* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1964), p. 31ff]. Anyone rejecting a proposed solution to an alleged contradiction must show that it is either impossible or improbable. One cannot reject possible solutions simply because he does not want to believe it, due to prejudice against the Scriptures. Those who would do so demonstrate that they are less concerned with truth than acrimony.

The fact that hundreds of alleged contradictions in the Scriptures have been shown to have real or probable solutions should fortify us against the worry that any actual contradictions will ever be found which destroy faith in God's inspiration of the Bible. "God . . . cannot lie" (Tit. 1:2).

WOT

## ELDERS NEED ENCOURAGEMENT TOO

*Franklin Camp*

There is a growing disregard for elders. This is symptomatic of our day where human wisdom is substituted for divine revelation. I want to say something on the other side.

**I appreciate elders because this is God's plan** (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). The one who fails to respect elders fails to respect God's Word and God's way. I cannot be faithful to the Bible and disregard elders.

**I appreciate elders because of the responsibility they accept.** No men on earth have a greater responsibility than elders. The President of the United States with all of our problems does not bear the responsibility of elders. Elders are responsible for carrying the gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). But that is not the end of the elders' responsibility. They must watch after souls. They will have to give an account of the

souls that are under their oversight. I appreciate the man that is willing to accept the responsibility of an elder.

**I appreciate elders because of the time they give to the Lord's work.** While others are free to use their time in various ways, elders must use much of their time in fulfilling their duties. There are meetings where time must be given to planning the work, dealing with problems, and many other things. This requires a great deal of time. I appreciate the man who is willing to take the time necessary to do the work of an elder.

**I appreciate elders because they work with the least encouragement of any people I know.** I've often wondered how long I would continue to preach if I received criticism as elders do with so little encouragement. Few people in any congregation think to give a word to

encourage elders. I appreciate men that will give years of helping the church grow, struggle with its problems, accept criticism, receive little or no encouragement, and continue to do its work.

**I appreciate elders because of their families.** First, they have done a good job in training their children and in building a stable marriage. My hat is off to the man who has a family that makes it possible for him to serve as an elder. I appreciate elders because of the sacrifices they make so that they can serve. Time that might be spent with his family is often used in doing the work of the Lord. I appreciate families that are willing to allow the husband and father to spend the time that is needed in dealing with problems, planning the work of the church, and being concerned about the welfare of people that are under the eldership's oversight.

WOT

# THE WORDS OF TRUTH 2002 INDEX

## Benson, Mike

- Remember His Revelation! (March)
- What is a True Friend? (May)
- How Much Does “Conviction” Cost? (September)

## Burk, Bill

- A Passion for Preaching (April)

## Chase, Joseph D.

- After I’m Gone (May)

## Choate, Betty Burton

- Teaching Our Children to be Spiritual (March)

## Choate, J.C.

- What is “Conversion”? (April)

## Clarke, B. J.

- The Integrity Crisis (February)

## Colley, Glenn

- In One Accord (April)
- The Christian’s Tool Box (July)
- Developing Our Consciences (November)

## Ditoro, Sandy

- The Wife of God’s Preacher (November)

## Dugger, Tracy

- Two Lessons From the Sponge (January)
- A Burial (November)

## Dutton, Ray

- Explicit and Implicit Authority (August)

## Eskew, Victor M.

- Thinking Versus Feeling (December)

## Evans, Bryant

- “The Day of the Lord” (September)

## Faughn, Adam

- Who? (August)

## Gilpin, Eddy

- “For the Assembly Was Confused” (February)
- When You Get to Where You Are Going, Where Will You Be? (May)
- Regardless (September)
- “This is That” (December)

## Harrub, Brad

- Aren’t All Churches Basically the Same? (April)
- Scientific Accuracies in the Bible (June)
- We Must Start Sooner! (August)
- A Love Letter . . . To Non-Christian Friends and Family (December)

## Haynes, James E. Jr.

- You Are Special Indeed (October)

## Hester, David

- The Prayer of Jesus for Unity (October)

## Hinds, Keith

- The Tower of Babel (July)

## Hockersmith, Tim

- The Conversion of Cornelius (June)

## Jackson, Brandon

- The Flock of God (July)
- Watch and Warn (October)
- What’s Your “Interest” Rate? (December)

## Jackson, Jason

- Exactly What We Need (March)
- Studies in 1 John 1 (September)

## Jackson, Wayne

- Effective Bible Study—An Urgent Need for Everyone (February)
- Behold, Behemoth! (June)
- You Can’t Fight Sin By Sinning (August)
- Are Infants “By Nature” Children of Wrath? (November)

## Johnson, Roger

- Worshiping God—All of Life or Part of Life? (January)
- Who is the Antichrist? (April)

## Kizer, Drew

- Peddlers Versus Preachers (October)

## McCord, Hugo

- Agape (2) (January)
- “I Go to Church on Saturday” (March)
- Judging (April)
- 2 Chronicles 29:25 (July)
- Gus Nichols (October)

## McCown, Scott

- The Quality of Music? (September)

## McLemore, Tom

- A Knowledge For Every Moment (September)
- The Unity of the Spirit: Ephesians 4:1-6 (October)

## Miller, Dave

- Book, Chapter, and Verse (December)

## Moon, Jason

- Preparation for Paradise (November)

## Nichols, Gus

- Compromise (March)

## Patton, Duane

- The Little Church With the Big Heart (January)
- Legalism or Love? (May)
- How Does God Speak To Us Today? (September)

## Pollard, Neal

- Grammatical Error (January)
- Traits of a False Teacher (May)
- What is a “Church of Christ” Position? (December)

## Ramsey, Johnny

- Implacable (January)
- God’s Preachers (April)
- How to Hide the Gospel (August)
- Homes of Today (October)

## Randles, Kevin

- Homosexuality: Alternate Lifestyle or Sin? (August)

## Richey, Neil

- Sad Sayings from Scripture (May)
- “Never Man Spake Like This Man” (November)

## Slimp, Clyde

- Let’s Outdo the Experts (March)

## Sparks, Joey

- Biblical Youth Ministry (July)

## Teske, Mark

- Love and Doctrine (August)

## Waller, Steve

- The Golden Rule (December)

## Webster, Allen

- Can You Sleep at Night? (February)
- A Wedding Ring (May)
- Calvary Irony (July)
- John Chrysostom’s Answer (November)

## Webster, Chuck

- What Does It Mean to Repent? (1) (January)
- What Does It Mean to Repent? (2) (February)
- What Does It Mean to Repent? (3) (March)
- Christians and the Occult (1) (April)
- Christians and the Occult (2) (May)
- Christians and the Occult (3): What About Harry Potter? (June)
- In Them We Trust (July)
- The “Heart” of the Matter (1) (August)
- The “Heart” of the Matter (2) (September)
- Be Careful What You Say (October)
- What Can We Do To Keep From Losing Our Young People? (1) (November)
- What Can We Do To Keep From Losing Our Young People? (2) (December)

## Webster, Wade L.

- “. . . Contend for the Faith . . .” (Jude 3-4) (December)

## Willcut, Sam

- One Flesh (February)
- If God Be For Us, Who Can Be Against Us? (April)
- “Whom Do Men Say That I Am?” (September)

## Unknown author (submitted by Hugo McCord)

- Baptism: The Dividing Line (June)

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Editor's note:** Periodically our readers have *biblical* questions about which they desire *biblical* answers. In response to that need, we intend to devote this page to these questions. Our answers will be given by various writers in the Lord's church. If you have a question you would like for us to consider, please mail it (*Words of Truth*, 1501 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., Jasper, AL 35501), e-mail it (sixthavenue@tds.net), or fax it (205-302-0595). We hope you enjoy this page.

**Question: "What is the baptism of fire? Do you think Christians should pray for it?"**

**Answer:** Let's go to the Bible for an answer. Please study the following:

1. *John the Baptist promised that Jesus would administer two baptisms—Holy Spirit baptism and the baptism of fire.* "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3:10-11). The apostles would receive the overwhelming measure of the Holy Spirit's power on Pentecost (Lk. 24:48-49; Acts 1:4-5; Acts 2:1-4); the unrepentant Pharisees and Sadducees would receive the penalty of hell at the final judgment.

2. *The baptism of fire is "hell fire."* His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12.) It is clear that John was referring to "hell fire" (i.e., eternal

destruction) in this passage. H. Leo Boles observes:

Is it credible that "fire" should have one meaning in the first and third verses, and an entirely different meaning in the second? We must conclude that "fire" has the same meaning in verses ten, eleven and twelve. With this conclusion, we must believe that two baptisms are mentioned here; that two classes are to receive the baptisms; and that one class is to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the other class the baptism of fire. "Fire" as used here cannot be taken as a symbol of the Holy Spirit; this would be a confusion to say Christ would "baptize in the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit." Where fire is used in a literal sense in the Bible, it invariably sets forth God's divine judgment upon sin; where it is used in a figurative sense it represents the process by which evil is removed, and destruction. No sound principle of interpretation admits of representing the same truth under a literal and figurative form in the same connection [H. Leo Boles, "Holy Spirit and Fire," *The Holy Spirit—His Personality, Nature and Works*, pp. 304-305].

3. *Jesus will administer the baptism of fire when He comes again.* "And to give you who are troubled rest with us 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" (2 Thess. 1:7-9). "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:49; cf. Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8).

No. Christians should not pray for the baptism of fire. Rather, they should endeavor to avoid it.

For a further study of this subject, go to: <http://www.christiancourier.com/questions/baptismFireQuestion.htm>.

—Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

**Question: In Romans 12:20, what does**

**the expression, "Thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" mean?**

**Answer:** Romans 12:20 says in its entirety, "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." The verse is an exact quotation of Proverbs 25:21-22 in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). An understanding of the background of this expression helps. Adam Clarke writes:

it is very likely that the latter clause of this verse . . . is a metaphor taken from smelting metals. The ore is put into the furnace, and fire put both under and over, so that the metal may be liquefied, and, leaving the scoriae and dross, may fall down pure to the bottom of the furnace. . . . It is most evident, from the whole connection of the place and the apostle's use of it, that the "heaping of the coals of fire upon the head of the enemy" is intended to produce not an evil, but the most beneficial effect; and the following verse is an additional proof of this.

The coals of fire are symbolic of emotional pain, which will be the direct result of our kindness. Burning coals heaped on a man's head would be expressive of intense agony (*Barnes' Notes*). It is important to note, however, that our intention isn't to cause him pain *for pain's sake*, but rather in hopes that he will be moved to repentance. We don't "get back at our enemies," but rather hope to "get through" to them and save their souls.

—Chuck Webster, Jasper, Alabama



**sixthavenue@tds.net**

# ARE YOU REALLY LIVING LIKE CHRIST?

Gary Colley, McMinnville, Tennessee

Some would be shocked and indignant if it were suggested that they were not living like Christ! Yet their lives do not seem to include His principles. The term "Christian" means to be Christ-like. His teaching is our rule of conduct. Check the following to see some areas in which we may need to improve.

1. Do we do unto others as we would have them to do unto us (Matt. 7:12)? Is this our constant practice?
2. Do we rebuke our brother who has sinned against us with the hope that he will repent, or tell everybody but him (Lk. 17:3)?
3. Are we busy-bodies in other men's affairs (1 Pet. 4:15)?
4. Lately, have we been praying for those who revile us, persecute us, and say all manner of evil against us falsely (Matt. 5:11-12)?
5. Do we do good unto all men, and especially those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10)?
6. Do we pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17)?
7. Do we obey them that have the rule over us (Heb. 13:7,17)?
8. Do we serve the Lord heartily with all our might (Col. 3:23-25)?
9. Do we love the Lord our God with all our soul, heart, and mind (Lk. 10:27)?
10. Do we visit the sick and help the needy (Matt. 25:31-46)?
11. Do we keep our appointments with the Lord for worship over our appointments with men (Matt. 6:33; Heb. 10:25)?
12. Are we willing to suffer with Christ in His cause? Are we ashamed when we do (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 4:16)?

The question, "Are you a Christian?", does not always direct itself to those outside the church. Let us adorn the gospel by lives that are truly faithful to the Lord. WOT



**Book recommendation:** Bob Spurlin, from Hartselle, Alabama, has written an excellent book—*Dial 911: Essentials to Living Right in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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

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

Address Service Requested

## 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.

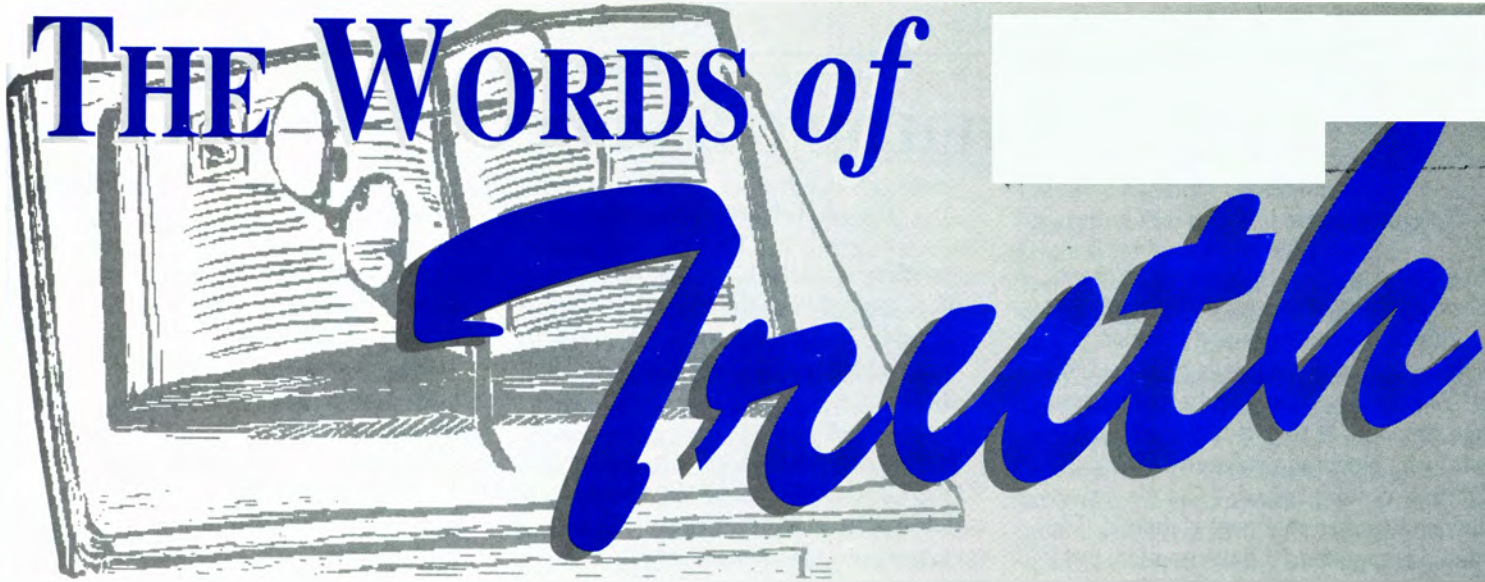
Please send all correspondence to:

### The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





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

Vol. 40 No. 2

February 2003

## HOW CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?

*Roger Hamlet*

The Bible is a most unique book. Through the passing centuries no book has been so copied, translated, and treasured. Some have expressed doubt regarding its accuracy, however. In an age of advanced knowledge and technology, when things are minutely dissected and examined, can one still regard the Bible as being reliable? This is a good question—one that deserves an answer. We approach this study by raising other pertinent questions.

**Can we trust the Bible as a *document*?** The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books handed down for generations. With the invention of the printing press, copying the Bible became easier, because in earlier years the Bible had to be copied by hand. Sometimes this objection is raised against trusting the Bible: "Since the Bible has been copied and recopied, can we be sure that through the long centuries it has been copied correctly?" The same question applies to any book from ancient times. How is it that today we are able to read the Greek and Latin poets, or the writings of Plato and Aristotle? The fact is all these works have come down to us by hand-produced copies! Yet, in one important respect the Bible is in a class all to itself: the texts of all other ancient books are derived from a small number of manuscripts, while the text of the Bible is verified by thousands of ancient authorities. Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum, said, "The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and quotations from it in the oldest writers of the church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book of the world."

**Can we trust the Bible as a *historical document*?** Recently, there has been a new surge of interest to study the Bible as a history. A hundred years ago the trend of Bible research was in the opposite direction; and at the end of the nineteenth century skepticism toward the Bible had grown to such an extent that many scholars regarded Bible names and places as little more than the accumulation of a legend. But how remarkably changed are the views of today's scholars! Within the past few years the science of archaeology has uncovered a wealth of material that sheds light on and confirms hundreds of details recorded in the Bible. A few years ago Dr. W. F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University wrote an article entitled "Return to Biblical Theology." In it he stated concerning the Bible, "Thanks

to modern research we now recognize its substantial historicity. The narratives of the patriarchs, of Moses and the exodus, of the conquest of Canaan, of the judges, the monarchy, exile, and restoration have all been confirmed and illustrated to an extent that I should have thought impossible forty years ago."

**Can we trust the Bible as a *scientific document*?** Although it was not written as a book of science, the passages that relate to science are in perfect harmony with the known scientific facts. In 1861 the French Academy of Science published 51 "supposed" facts held to be true by men that were supposed to prove the Bible to be in error. But now, 141 years later, not one of these facts is held to be true by men of science. Science has confirmed the Bible as being accurate.

**Can we trust the Bible in *geography*?** Luke records, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho" (Lk. 10:30). It is a fact that Jericho's elevation is below Jerusalem. The angel of the Lord told Philip, "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza" (Acts 8:26). The angel was correct—the road lies south of Samaria and it runs downward from the mountains toward the sea.

**Can we trust the Bible as a *message of salvation*?** The Bible was not intended as a mere book of history. It was written to convey the theme of God's love for helpless man. It reveals the gospel that saves. But the question of belief in the Bible must not be overly simplified. What connection is there between Jesus' death on a Roman cross and salvation from my sins? From a human standpoint, no explanation can be given. This is something that must be received by faith: God set forth Christ "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom. 3:25). But aren't there many things in life that must be accepted by faith? The Bible, some say, is a book that staggers faith. Yet, if the Bible is to be believed as an historical document, are we not compelled to accept that it is true in other matters as well? When the Bible speaks, it is man's duty to listen and obey. When it comes to faith, what better foundation than God's Word? Trust the Bible and obey it; there is no better way. It will be the standard at judgment.

*WOT*

# BUILDING BRIDGES

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Stephen Ambrose, in his book *Citizen Soldiers*, tells of an American medic who stumbled upon a wounded German soldier in the closing days of World War II. The medic retrieved a bag of plasma and prepared to give it to the soldier, who was bleeding profusely. The German quickly asked, "There's not any Jewish blood in that bag, is there?" The medic responded, "I have no idea, but if you don't take it you'll die." The soldier responded, "I'd rather die than take Jewish blood."

That story, though set in Germany in 1945, could very well have been set in the United States during the 1960s or 70s—or even today—with only a slight change in details. Blinded by long-imbedded cultural notions, many people refuse to look at others simply as human beings created in God's image; instead, they divided them into classes based most commonly on race, but also on social class, educational background, etc. Though we have made great strides in the last few decades, vestiges of prejudice are still evident in some . . . even some who claim to be Christians.

Lest we think we are the only generation who has struggled with cultural conflicts, though, consider a relatively obscure text in Luke's account of the church's growth in the first century:

"Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should

continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord" (Acts 11:19-24).

[*Textual note:* The NKJV ("Hellenists"; KJV: "Grecians") and ASV ("Greeks") differ in Acts 11:20 as the result of a textual variant. Most scholars feel that the manuscript evidence is inconclusive, but that the internal evidence is strongly in favor of the idea that these brethren were preaching to Gentiles (cf. Wayne Jackson, *Acts*, p. 140).]

This brief account may appear somewhat unremarkable at first glance. The text is short and apparently simple enough: several men preached Christ to Gentiles in Antioch (v. 20), many obeyed the gospel (v. 21), and when the Jerusalem church heard about it, they sent Barnabas to the city (v. 22). When he arrived in Antioch, he encouraged the new Christians and even more were converted (vv. 23-24). A closer look, however, reveals a nugget of beautiful truth that is amazingly applicable to our modern culture. A brief background study will help.

The ancient world was filled with strife. There was *class* friction between slaves and freemen and *gender* friction between men and women. But the strongest friction of that day, and perhaps of *any* age, was *racial*—between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). To put it mildly, there was no love lost between these two distinct groups of people. The Jews' feelings toward Gentiles is illustrated in several laws that had developed in their oral traditions:

- It was unlawful for Jews to render aid to a Gentile woman in her hour of childbirth, for that would simply help bring another Gentile into the world.
- The marriage of a Jew to a Gentile was looked upon as the equivalent of death, and the death rites of the Jewish boy or girl were immediately carried out.
- Entering a Gentile house made a Jew ceremonially unclean.

- The Jews said the Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell.
- The Jews said one should crush the best of serpents and *kill* the best of Gentiles.
- When a Jew entered Palestine he would shake the dust off his sandals and clothing in order not to contaminate the Holy Land with Gentile dust.

These feelings led F.F. Bruce to state that "no iron curtain, color bar, class distinction, or national frontier of today is more absolute than the cleavage between Jew and Gentile was in antiquity." Though in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter said that the gospel was for all that are "afar off" (Acts 2:39; a reference to Gentiles), it took a vision to get him to preach the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile (Acts 10).

With that background of our text in mind, we understand better the Jerusalem church's response. A great number of Gentiles were believing and obeying the gospel (Acts 11:21), which, in turn, created a dilemma for Jewish Christians, because the Jew-Gentile issue was still very sensitive. The church was young, so the church in Jerusalem felt an obligation to keep "under surveillance" infant congregations that were springing up across the land east of the Mediterranean. Whom should they send to "check into" this mass conversion of Gentiles? It could very well have been an explosive issue, had it not been handled properly—many Jewish Christians were still very reluctant to accept Gentiles into full fellowship. Who was capable of handling such a delicate situation?

Luke tells us: "they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch" (Acts 11:22). Notice what happened when he got to Antioch. Did he begrudge his new Gentile brethren? Did he grant them an inferior place in the Lord's church? Did he suggest that perhaps we must let them in, but only on the "back pews" (cf. Jam. 2:1-13)? Did he, in the spirit of Jonah, hope that the news he was hearing about Gentiles'

being converted was untrue? Listen to Luke: “when he came, and had seen the grace of God, [he] was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). What a tremendous attitude he had! No remorse. No extra conditions for Gentiles. No “separate-but-equal” accommodations. Barnabas was a man who built bridges between people. “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (Acts 11:24). Though Luke does not expound on the significance of this event, Barnabas accomplished a tremendous feat. In the midst of an extremely delicate situation, he brought people together, creating harmony between previously antagonistic cultures. He obeyed the Lord’s command to be a peacemaker (Matt. 5:9).

The result was marvelous: “. . . and a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24). Because a man was able and willing to look across racial boundaries that had seldom been crossed, scores of people were baptized into Christ.

Two brief applications are appropriate: Where are the chasms that need to be bridged today?

#### **Racial friction.**

Even in our modern, politically correct, integrated world, there remain residues of racial prejudice in some people, even among some in the Lord’s church. Perhaps it is not as obvious as the separate bathrooms and water fountains of the 1950s, but sometimes it is just as damaging. It manifests itself in “effective” segregation, a division of the races not mandated by law, but just as real nonetheless (e.g., “white” churches and “black” churches). It results in a haughty, “I’m-better-than-you-are” attitude. Christians, however, are color blind. We recognize that in Christ there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:29). It would not be presumptuous to modernize Paul’s words, “There is neither black nor white, there is neither Northerner nor Southerner, there is neither American nor Oriental . . .”

Be a Barnabas. See souls, not skin; redemption, not race; Christ, not color. Take steps, however small they may be, toward restoring racial unity in your congregation and community.

**Class friction.** The people to whom James wrote struggled with favoritism, which he candidly condemned, suggesting that it is evil and ungodly to give a wealthy man in nice clothing a position of importance and to the poor man in ragged clothing an inferior seat (Jam. 2:1-13). The same, of course, is true today. Our attitude toward the man in an Armani suit should be the same as our attitude toward the one in bib overalls. People in our communities ought to recognize the church of Christ as the people who are friendly and inviting, regardless of the quality of your wardrobe or the make of your car.

Be a Barnabas. Seek out those whom others shun. Is there someone in your congregation whose clothes are out-of-style? Befriend her. Is there someone whose sanitation habits are different from most? Sit beside him. Is someone attending whose racial background is different from yours? Welcome her with open arms. Let everyone know that the eyes of Jesus see no classes, and His arms are open to people of every segment of society.

Be a Barnabas. Build bridges, not fences.

WOT

## MAN—NO LONGER ENDOWED BY A CREATOR?

*Brad Harrub, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama*

“In the beginning was matter, which begat the amoeba, which begat the worm, which begat the fish, which begat the amphibian, which begat the reptile, which begat the lower mammal, which begat the lemur, which begat the monkey, which begat man, who imagined God.” This, according to atheist Charles Smith, is the genealogy of man. Sadly, he is far from being alone in his views of man’s origin. In fact, a vast majority of modern-day scientists cling vehemently to this Darwinist view of origins as “gospel” on the matter. It has become the light under which all new data is examined. It has become their religion—one for which they will fight in order to secure its place in academia. And it appears that they are winning.

While you may find the concept of men evolving from some primordial slime

repulsive or sickening, the reality of the current political climate is far worse. For in our country, the only theory about man’s origins allowed in the classroom is this fallacious concept of organic evolution: amoeba to man. And although our country declared its independence with these words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (emp. added), we now live in a land where we can no longer discuss that Creator in the classroom. When Thomas Jefferson penned those famous words, he illustrated that from the very beginning, America recognized human rights as a gift of God, not something created by government.

Yet, science and “political correctness” have accelerated the complete renunciation of God from public affairs. Displays of the Ten Commandments [which we are no longer under—BH] have been banned from public schools, courthouses, and other public property. Religious clubs have been denied equal access to public school grounds. Valedictorians risk losing their position if they make reference to God in speeches, or offer voluntary prayers at graduation ceremonies. And recently a court in California found the words “One nation under God” in our nation’s pledge of allegiance unconstitutional. Individuals who support these court decisions claim to be acting in defense of “the freedom of religion.” Yet, they are systematically tearing away the very foundation of that freedom—and

abolishing any reference to an Almighty Creator. God has become a “bacteria” in our culture that must be expunged and eradicated at all costs. At some point, however, we must ask our politically correct society, without a Creator, what can “endowed by their Creator” possibly mean?

This war to erase God has taken place in every form of media. If this movement had a special forces unit—such as the Navy Seals or Army Rangers—it would most surely be called evolution or neo-Darwinism. The belief of a special creation has been discounted in magazines, on the television, and has now fallen under attack within the church. The atheists and agnostics of the world have been effective at casting doubt on the very first verse of the Bible, where it clearly states: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth” (Gen. 1:1). These words are no longer viewed as the words of Almighty God, but rather as a nice introduction to a fable or myth. Day after day our children sit at the feet of professors who, using fancy words and scientific theories, teach that man’s origins are the result of some Big Bang or Punctuated Equilibrium. And thus we find ourselves in a nation that has outlawed God from the classroom, and who now believes their own origin can be explained by some cosmological accident.

But that is not the most heart-rending part. The truly tragic part is that Christians are now clinging to this fictitious theory of how man arrived on the Earth. People who have confessed the name of Christ are suddenly giving more credence to a CNN news report than to the inspired, God-breathed, Holy Bible. They, too, are willing to toss aside those powerful words—“In the beginning God created . . .”—in favor of man’s latest scientific theory. Sadly, in the process of discounting the first few chapters of Genesis, these Christians are undermining the very foundation of their own religion. If they question the way the Bible explains how man arrived on this Earth, then what makes them think they can believe what it says regarding salvation and the afterlife? If God did not do it the way He said He did, then why should we believe He sent His only Son to die for our sins? Have Christians not realized the embodiment of all that they are compromising when they buy into

evolution and the idea of a six billion year old Earth?

### **The Miracle Before All Other Miracles!**

“If we cannot measure it with our five senses, then it must not be real.” This is the central dogma of science. The scientific method is concerned only with those things that can be measured, tested, and observed (which is extremely ironic given that evolution itself has never been measured or observed, and cannot be tested). Anything that falls outside of this scientific method is called into question. Thus, our society has been trained to discount and discredit ideas or theories that cannot be measured, tested, and observed. This mantra is repeated over and over by evolutionists who claim special creation is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. After all, it relies on supernatural miracles—something that scientists are quick to point out are unscientific in nature. And sadly, many Christians find themselves trying to defend their faith by excising miracles out of the Bible. They do not want to appear unlearned, so they stick to verses that are far-removed from miraculous events.

This, however, is not what God intended when He said: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). We should not be scared to discuss miracles—for their main purpose was to point back to our Almighty Creator. Throughout past human history, God has performed many wonderful miracles for man. He caused the burning bush not to be consumed in speaking to Moses (Ex. 3). He parted the Red Sea so Moses and the Israelites could escape from Egypt’s army (Ex. 14). He caused Balaam’s mule to speak (Num. 22), and brought the walls of Jericho crumbling down without anyone ever laying a hand on them (Josh. 6). He caused the Sun to stand still so the Israelites could win a battle against their enemies (Josh. 10). He even raised His Son, Jesus, from the dead three days after He was crucified (Acts 10:40).

But none of these miracles would have been possible had it not been for a significant miracle that occurred many years before. When Moses wrote in

Genesis 1:1 that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” he summarized in a single sentence one of the most important miracles of all—the miracle of creation. In a period of six literal days, God brought into existence a universe full of galaxies, solar systems, planets, stars, and the first inhabitants of the Earth. The writer of Hebrews said: “We understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (11:3). When God created, He did not use matter and energy that already were in existence. Rather, He spoke them into existence “by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). The psalmist wrote: “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa. 33:8-9). This is the Bible’s way of letting us know that God did not use natural processes to bring the universe, the Earth, plants, animals, and humans into existence. Instead, He used a great miracle—the miracle of creation! One that we should neither neglect nor be afraid to defend.

Christ is given credit for healing the lame, walking on water, and feeding the five thousand. To Christians, those miracles are demonstrations of the power of God. We readily accept and believe them along with the resurrection of Jesus following His crucifixion. Yet we question God’s ability to create the universe and the Earth on which we live. Scientists have inundated society with their scientific method and the belief that it would be impossible. “Six literal days? It would break all the known laws of science. It would be a Herculean task just to create one animal, much less all of them in just forty-eight hours. After all, with all of our knowledge and wisdom, we still cannot produce life from non-life.” And yet that is the whole point—it was miraculous! It was Herculean! God was able not only to break the laws of science, but He also then shaped those laws and put them into place. Have we forgotten that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient? If we are to believe and protect the rest of the Bible, then we must be ready to believe and defend that God did it the way He said He did—in six literal days. WOT

## PRAY FOR THE ASTRONAUTS

*Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana*

I didn't want to believe that it had happened again. In fact, the first couple of times I walked past the television, there was no audible narrative—just a repetitive film clip of what appeared to be some sort of bright “streak of light” across the sky. With the memory of the *Challenger* disaster still keen in my mind, I could hardly accept the fact that I was watching the last few moments of the space shuttle *Columbia* and her crew.

The news was hard to hear. Seven brave souls had perished during their return trip back to earth. Barely sixteen minutes from touch down, the shuttle had suffered some devastating event and had broken up thousands of feet above Texas and Louisiana. I couldn't help but think of the surviving family members—husbands, wives, and children—huddled around some NASA television screen in Florida—waiting, and watching, for loved ones who would never return home. My heart was heavy as I pondered their tragic loss.

President Bush sought to console grieving kin with a personal telephone call. Then, in an address from the White House Cabinet Room he offered these words to a grieving nation, “We can pray they are safely home . . .”

As American citizens, we were touched by the President's compassion. We found a certain solace in his effort to share in our collective pain. We appreciated his attempt at offering condolences to those who were

hurting so deeply. I personally was thrilled that he would publicly endorse a spiritual concept like prayer. But as a Christian, I could not condone what he affirmed. Read it again . . . he said, “We can pray they [i.e., the astronauts] are safely home.”

This is not the first time this kind of sentiment has been expressed. Following the 9/11 tragedy, Mr. Bush offered similar words in an effort to lessen the emotional burden of the occasion. He said, “Pray for those whose lives were lost, and for their families.” If you pay close attention to his sentiments, you realize that the President espouses prayer for the dead.

Certainly prayer at a time of loss is appropriate. Prayer is powerful (1 Kng. 18:1:41ff) and effective (Jam. 5:16). It can change things (Matt. 6:13; 7:7ff; Jn. 14:14; 1 Jn. 5:14-15). It can heal the wounded spirit. But Mr. Bush urged us to do something outside the realm of possibility. He suggested that our prayers could somehow impact the destiny of those who had died in the accident. Dear reader, that simply isn't possible. While I commend our Commander and Chief for his expressions of support, I respectfully disagree with his theology. Prayer cannot change the lot of those who have stepped into eternity. Their everlasting portion was sealed the moment they died. When the spirits of the astronauts separated from their bodies and were ushered into the Hadean realm, their future was fixed (Lk.

16:26; cf. Heb. 9:26). Our petitions—no matter how sincere—could not, and cannot, change that. As one brother observes: “While it is natural to have the inclination to pray in times of acute distress, the only thing one really knows about the parameters of valid prayer is that which is revealed in the Bible. The Scriptures constitute the only legitimate prayer manual. And there is ample evidence in that sacred volume that prayers for the dead are not only futile, [but] the practice is antagonistic to certain aspects of divine truth . . .” [Wayne Jackson, <http://www.christiancourier.com/penpoints/prayDead.htm>].

Brethren, we need the “ear of God” during times of human tragedy. But we do not have the authority nor power to alter the teaching of Scripture simply because we seek comfort. Stating that one will be safe when he accidentally falls off a twenty-five-story building does not change the law of gravity. Neither does praying for the deceased amend their status before God. Jehovah sets forth the conditions of salvation, not the good intentions of man.

We applaud the President's leadership during this troubled time. However, like others who mean well, we encourage him to give strict adherence to the teaching of Scripture—without addition or subtraction (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19).

*WOT*

## THE PROPER MEANING OF ROMANS 1:18-28

*Lee Butt, Denison, Texas*

Some assert that Romans 1:18-28 does not apply to loving, committed, consensual homosexual relationships. They suggest that Romans 1 only applies to temple worship where sexual intercourse was engaged in with temple prostitutes. They also claim that those who were doing these things were heterosexual men who were going against their natural sexual orientation and thus committing indecent acts that God condemns. So, the conclusion they reach is that Romans 1 does not condemn most homosexual

relationships. In addition, they claim that the ancient writers of the Bible knew nothing of homosexuality; therefore they could not have been condemning it.

They claim that we are taking the passage out of its historical and contextual context when we say that Romans 1 condemns homosexuality. But actually, the opposite is true. Look at the opening verse in this section: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”

(Rom. 1:18). It clearly says that God's wrath is revealed against **all** ungodliness. So in the whole context God is showing His wrath toward all sin, not just idolatry. In verse 22 we see that they became fools by rejecting the knowledge of God. They were departing from God because of their sin and rebellion. Therefore, God gave them up to uncleanness, and they dishonored their bodies through the lust of the flesh (Rom. 1:24.) Idolatry is first mentioned in this passage in the next verse. So their idolatry was a result of God's giving them over to

commit the lusts of their hearts. Because they refused to acknowledge God they had become their own gods, and they served themselves. The Bible teaches, of course, that idolatry is becoming a servant or slave of something else other than God. So, the real idolatry that was taking place was the worship of their own desires. The sins of the flesh they committed could be traced back to their refusal to follow God. This resulted in God's giving them up, and since they were not serving God they began to serve themselves.

The next two verses show that they began to have same-sex sexual intercourse, which God condemns. "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural

use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due" (Rom. 1:26-27).

It is clear, then, that these sins were the results of their turning their backs on God, and that they are *sins*, not only when committed as part of an idolatrous act, but anytime . . . because they go against nature. God created men to be with women, not with other men, and He created women to be with men, not other women. Anything else goes against the way He created us. This is an eternal principle that goes all the way back to the

Garden of Eden, one which Jesus affirmed in Matthew 19:4-6: "And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

God made them **male** and **female**, and for this cause the **man** shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his **wife**. This is God's will, and anything else is sin.

WOT

## SHOULD WE BE SHOCKED?

*Roy Williams, Jasper, Alabama*

An editorial by Leonard Pitts, a staff writer for the *Miami Herald*, appeared recently in the *Birmingham News*. The article chronicled a man who committed suicide while engaging in conversation with others on an internet chat room. The man was only twenty-nine years old.

Mr. Pitts described how others did nothing to stop the man. As a matter of fact, they encouraged him and then made light of his death as they—through computer technology—watched him take his last breath. Mr. Pitts was shocked at the callous indifference to human life, especially the cold way in which they joked about the man's demise.

My question is this: Should Mr. Pitts or any of us really be shocked by this depraved and, sadly, increasingly familiar story?

### Devaluing of Human Life

Think with me for just a moment: we are right now aborting over one million innocent children legally in our country each year. This horrible practice takes place with the full support of our government, even though the Bible and science agree that a child becomes a living soul at conception (Jer. 1:5; Psa. 139:13-16).

Do we realize how twisted our logic (really it is not logic at all) has become? As a teacher, I would violate the law if I lead

my students in prayer, but not if I counseled a student to have an abortion! Baby eagles are protected by law, but baby human beings are not! Have we lost the ability to think rationally?

God gives life (Acts 17:24-25), and He is the only One who can authorize the taking of life. God hates the shedding of innocent blood (Prov. 6:16-19), and there is no one more innocent than the child in the mother's womb. We must cherish the sanctity of human life from the youngest in the womb to the eldest in the nursing home! When we do not, tragedies like this become all too common.

### From Animals to Humans

We are constantly being bombarded with the idea that man simply evolved from animal ancestors. We, along with our children, are being taught that God does not exist, that the awesome design of this universe and the human body is a simple accident! If one believes in the creation account of Genesis 1-11, he is labeled as ignorant and unlearned.

What is the end result of this kind of thinking? In his book *Creation Compromises*—a book in which he masterfully chronicles the compromise of theistic evolution—Bert Thompson quotes from French philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, who wrote: "Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is

in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself . . . Nor, on the other hand if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior."

In other words every man becomes a law unto himself. Is this the world we want to see our children and grandchildren grow up in?

God created everything in the six-day creation week (Gen. 1ff, Ex. 20:11). God is therefore the Creator and Ruler of the universe, and He has communicated His will through the Bible. This being true we have the great responsibility of studying and applying these truths to our lives (Jam. 1:22).

Is it any wonder so many are calloused about life when we do not uphold the sanctity of it? When we teach that we are nothing more than some higher form of animal? It has been said those who believe they evolved from an animal will likely act like an animal.

We must awake from our sleep! In Ephesians 5, Paul spoke of those who formerly were dead, asleep in sin, but he admonishes them to awake and walk in the light which only Jesus can provide (Jn. 1:1-5). May we as individuals and as a country awake from our sleep.

WOT

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Question: "If a man possesses all the other attributes necessary to become an elder, is it wrong for him *not* to desire the position?"

Answer: There are several elements pertaining to your question which need to be addressed. Please consider the following:

1. **Development.** Every congregation of the Lord's church needs to be constantly developing sound men for the eldership.<sup>1</sup> Shepherds are not born; they are cultivated incrementally over time. They do not suddenly appear when the need for them arises. One author observes:

"We must face it—we really don't want elders! Congregations exist for years without ordaining elders. Congregations with elders go for years without ordaining additional elders. Preachers, having had bad experiences, have a distaste for elders. Mediocre elders or power-hungry elders look upon prospective elders with suspicion and resentment. In such cases elders have to, literally, be forced into [office]. Cliques are always trying to get an opponent out or a champion in. . . . Most elderships have been born in necessity or strife—this is not as it should be. Young men are repulsed with such antics—they have no desire to qualify as elders.

*There must be a constant development of spiritual elders!* Weak or bad leadership will catch up with you! It can be 'crutched' or 'covered up' only so long. *We must develop godly elders!*" [Charles Hodge, "Elders Are Tempted," *Gospel Advocate*, March 22, 1979, p. 184. Emphasis mine—MB].

2. **Readiness.** A brother is to "be ready for every good work" (Tit. 3:1). Paul indicates that one must not stand coldly aloof

from any praiseworthy endeavor, but ought to be prepared to do whatever is good.

[Compare this with his words earlier in 2:14 where one is instructed to be "zealous of good works."] Consider: Since a man is to be ready for every good work, and since serving as an elder is, in fact, a "good work" (1 Tim. 3:1), then why wouldn't he *want* to serve—assuming he is qualified to do so? [While the Greek words translated "good" in Titus 3:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1 are different, this would not nullify the implication which might be drawn.] A brother who desires to glorify God and help his fellow saints go to heaven will be open to the opportunity to lead and serve.

3. **Ambition.** Every Christian man should aspire to mature to his fullest potential in the kingdom (cf. Phil. 3:7-15; 1 Cor. 15:9-10). Consider: If a brother is qualified to serve as an elder, and he *settles* for being "just another member of the local congregation," is he actually trying to bring himself to perfection in Christ? We correctly stress that a man should not serve due to constraint<sup>2</sup> or monetary gain (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:7), but what can we say about the motivation of a man who is qualified, but refuses to accept the helm of leadership? It would seem to me that if he is unwilling to lead and superintend when he is fully capable of doing so, not only is his heart suspect, but the future of the local church is adversely affected. Not only does this brother rob himself of the growth he can achieve in his own life, but the local congregation is cheated too because he doesn't "step up to the plate." One who truly possesses all of the qualities enumerated by the apostle Paul cannot fold his hands and think that he has exonerated himself from responsibility. The more God blesses him with talents and skills, the more he will be accountable for what he does with them (cf. Matt. 25:24-30).

4. **Reluctance.** It is natural and appropriate that a man feel a certain sense of hesitancy about accepting the office of an elder.<sup>3</sup> In fact, if he doesn't experience any trepidation about leading with other men in the church, he probably is not qualified due to the fact that he has failed to consider the gravity of what is involved (cf. Heb. 13:17). "Any sensible man is aware of responsibility; it is frightening!" [Charles Hodge, *Ibid.*, p. 184]. "But it is . . . an

awareness of this great responsibility which will make a man who is an elder a good elder" [Bobby Duncan, "Desire The Office," *The Elders Which Are Among You*, p. 14—recommended reading].

5. **Unknown.** In some cases, there are mitigating circumstances which prohibit a brother from serving as an elder. He may have all of the overt qualities which are necessary for the oversight of the church, but he may decline from accepting such a position due to factors beyond his control. For instance, he or one of his immediate family members may suffer with personal health problems which might impede his ability to serve effectively. Then again, there may be private family circumstances beyond our knowledge which hinder his suitability for leadership in the church. Whatever the reason, we need to be cautious before judging a brother's motives for not accepting a place in the eldership.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Local churches can provide study classes and other personal growth-oriented venues to inspire and encourage men to qualify themselves for this role.

<sup>2</sup>"Not constrainedly but voluntarily," not because they must but because they want to; not like drafted soldiers but like volunteers; not needing to be urged to every task but as running to put their hands to it, delighted to do it [R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, p. 218].

<sup>3</sup>Biblical characters like Moses, Gideon, and Solomon were not initially anxious about leading God's people, but they certainly possessed the qualities necessary to do so.

—Mike Benson  
Evansville, Indiana



sixthavenue@tds.net

# “I JUST DELIVER THEM”

Tracy Dugger, Austin, Texas

Along our street, I recently met our mailman at the box. I jokingly told him not to bring me any bills. He, in a very witty manner, quickly responded, “I don’t make them—I just deliver them.” The simple point he transmitted to me was clear. This is the same point that some need to understand about teachers and preachers of the Word. When a godly proclaimer of the truth broadcasts God’s Word without compromise, he is not its source (2 Pet. 1:20-21), just the messenger. When he preaches against the sins of the day (social drinking, denominationalism and false religion, dancing, immodest apparel, etc.), he may upset some people. This is not his intention. However, we must realize that he does have a duty to speak the whole truth in love:

(1) Acts 20:26-27: “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

(2) Ephesians 4:15: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

The sincere preacher of the gospel has a love for souls who need the saving message of the gospel (1 Tim. 4:16; Jn. 8:32). It is as useless to become upset with him as it would be to become upset with the mailman for bringing a bill or a letter containing unhappy news.

Whenever you hear God’s Word, and it “steps on your toes” or you are offended, don’t become upset with the messenger. Instead, remember the mailman—“I just deliver them.” WOT



**Send us your questions!** We are excited about the new emphasis of page seven of *The Words of Truth*—questions submitted by you, our readers. If you have biblical questions, please submit them (anonymously, if you wish) in any of the following ways:

- E-mail: [sixthavenue@tds.net](mailto:sixthavenue@tds.net)
- Mail: Editor, *The Words of Truth*, Sixth Avenue Church of Christ, 1501 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., Jasper, AL 35501
- Fax: 205-302-0595
- Phone: 205-384-6446

## The Words of Truth

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

Address Service Requested

## 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.

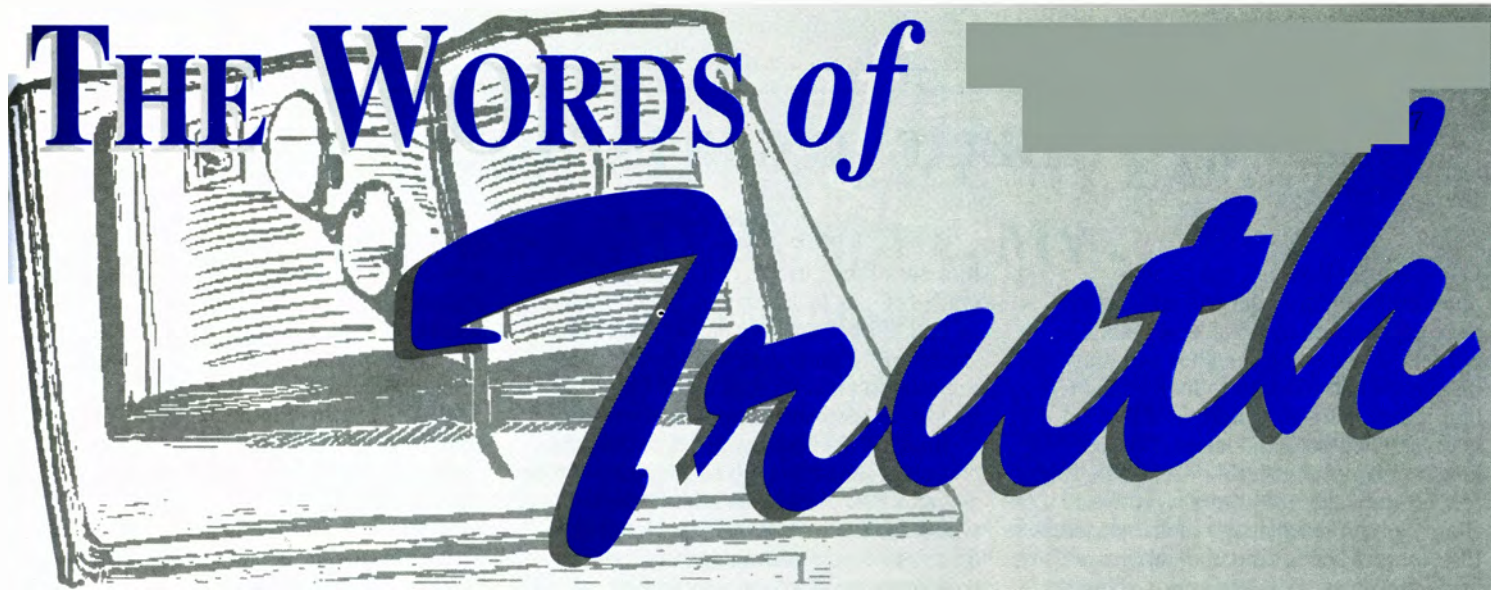
Please send all correspondence to:

### The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: [sixthavenue@tds.net](mailto:sixthavenue@tds.net)

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





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

Vol. 40 No. 3

March 2003

## MODEST APPAREL

*Neil Richey, Lynchburg, Virginia*

Despite the fact that the Bible says we are to clothe ourselves in "modest apparel" (1 Tim. 2:9), there are still those who ignore this biblical principle. To them, the subject is *purely* subjective—what is immodest to you is not necessarily immodest to me. This view of modesty allows society, culture, and conscience to set the standard, which makes God's command on the subject of wearing "modest apparel" a moot point. Is this right? As our souls hang in the eternal balance, can we allow man to dictate what modesty is, or shall we follow what the Bible has to say on the matter of "modest apparel"? Notice the following verses:

Paul wrote, "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2:9-10). In order for us (women in the immediate context) to profess godliness with good works, we must adorn ourselves in modest apparel. The word "adorn" means to arrange. The word "modest" is from the Greek, *kosmios*, meaning: orderly, well arranged, decent, modest, harmonious arrangement, adornment (*Strong's Dictionary*). Webster defines modest as "observing the proprieties of sex, chaste, decent." So modesty has to do with action, speech, and dress.

Second, consider Genesis 3:6-10. Following their sin, Adam and Eve discovered that they were naked, or immodest. They tried to clothe themselves with fig leaf

aprons. These aprons, from the Hebrew word *chagora*, were loin cloths or hip clothing comparable to the modern swimsuit (the lower part). Though they had a portion of material on their body, Adam still referred to himself as being "naked." God shared this sentiment, saying, "Who told you that you were naked?" (Gen. 3:11). So one may conclude that someone clothed in today's modern swimsuit is still naked, or at least immodest, in the eyes of God.

Third, note that God clothed Adam and Eve properly. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). This coat, according to the Hebrew word *kethoneth*, was a long shirt-like garment, generally with sleeves, that covered Adam and Eve from their shoulders to their knees (*Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*).

One immediately asks the question, "Why clothe Adam and Eve in this way when there was no one else around to look at them?" Is it not possible that God was setting a moral standard for man with regard to "modest apparel"? Remember that God's moral law never changes. It is quite obvious that God's standard for "modest apparel" exceeds man's. Someone may say, "It seems a little radical to say that I ought to wear a garment that covers me from my shoulders to my knees." Friends, God wants us to be pure. He tells us what we should do, say, think, and wear because He loves us. Will we love Him enough to listen to what He says on this vital subject?

WOF

# BELIEVING IN OTHERS

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Dante Bartiel Rossetti, the famous nineteenth-century poet and artist, was once approached by an elderly man. The old fellow had some sketches and drawings that he wanted Rossetti to look at and tell him if they were any good, or if they, at least, showed potential talent. Rossetti looked them over carefully. After the first few he knew that they were worthless, showing not the least sign of artistic talent. But Rossetti was a kind man and he told the elderly man as gently as possible that the pictures were without much value and showed little talent. He was sorry, but he could not lie to the man. The visitor was disappointed, but seemed to expect Rossetti's judgment. He then apologized for taking up Rossetti's time, but would he just look at a few more drawings—these done by a young art student? Rossetti looked over the second batch of sketches and immediately enthused over the talent they revealed. "These," he said, "ah, these are good. This young man, whoever he is, has great talent. He should be given every help and encouragement in his career as an artist. He has a great future, if he will work hard and stick with it." Rossetti could see that the old fellow was deeply moved. "Who is this fine young artist?" he asked. "Your son?" "No," said the old fellow sadly. "It is I—forty years ago. If only I had heard your praise then . . . for you see, I got discouraged and gave up—too soon."

Perhaps there are a number of people like this old man . . . people who would have succeeded—been used by God to His glory—if someone had encouraged them. In fact, the Bible speaks of a young man in a similar situation . . .

When we understand Saul's background as a persecutor, we understand the reluctance of the Jerusalem Church of Christ to accept him as a member when he "assayed to join himself to the disciples" there (Acts 9:26). After all, he admitted that he had persecuted Christianity "to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). When Christians were executed, he gave his "voice against them" (Acts 26:10). His hatred of Christianity consumed him; he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). But then he met the Lord on his trip to Damascus and was subsequently baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27). After he preached for awhile in Damascus, the Jews hatched a plot to kill him, but his Christian brethren sneaked

him out of the city (Acts 9:23-25). He later made his way to Jerusalem, the city which he had left a short time earlier with the intentions of persecuting Christians. He returned to preach Jesus in the city where he had so adamantly opposed Him.

Imagine his discouragement when the church at Jerusalem did not believe he was sincere. You can almost hear their whispers: *It's a trick! He's pretending to be a Christian to get inroads into our congregation and then imprison us all.* So they turned him away. "Go to another church and place your membership," they might have said. "We don't believe you." Oh, how their words must have stung the young man! Thus, in Saul's short Christian life, Jews had tried to kill him and now his new brethren were doubting his sincerity. Many, perhaps most, would have given up and thrown in the towel. And maybe, just maybe, Saul would have as well . . . had it not been for an amazing man who placed confidence in him.

Perhaps you can see the young man Saul, walking dejectedly away from his first worship service with his new Jerusalem brethren whom he had approached with such great excitement. Somehow, somewhere, he ran into Barnabas, the Great Encourager. Read Luke's brief account of what happened next. "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27). Barnabas took him by the arm, led him back to the church, and confidently said: *This man is for real. His faith is genuine. It's not a trick. Accept him wholeheartedly into your fellowship.*

Imagine what it must have done for Saul! Once floundering with no one who trusted him, he was now working "with them coming in and going out." Dejection turned into elation, discouraged inactivity into optimistic enterprise. The new Christian was working!

In most churches there are some who are like Saul. Maybe they have not been overtly turned down for membership, but perhaps they simply do not "fit in." Sometimes churches are characterized by "cliques"—exclusive groups of friends who remain somewhat aloof from others. During worship services and fellowship meals, they sit together. In the foyer after

service they talk to each other. They go out and eat together. There is nothing wrong, of course, with closeness (even the Lord had His "inner circle"). The problem arises when people are left out.

Where are the "Sauls" in your congregation? Perhaps it is the fidgety sixth-grader or the reticent teen. Maybe it is the somewhat odd twenty-something who tends to stay to himself, or the new convert with a closet full of skeletons. Maybe it is the visitor from the community who feels ill at ease in a gathering of people she feels to be too "perfect" for her.

Go find Saul at your home congregation and help him or her really feel accepted and part of the family of God. Get out of your comfort zone—away from your circle of friends—and lead someone into closer fellowship with Christ and His body of believers.

Mary had grown up knowing that she was different from the other kids, and she hated it. She was born with a cleft palate and had to bear the jokes and stares of cruel children who teased her non-stop about her misshaped lip, crooked nose, and garbled speech. With all the teasing, Mary grew up hating the fact that she was "different." She was convinced that no one, outside her family, could ever love her . . . until she entered Mrs. Leonard's class. Mrs. Leonard had a warm smile, a round face, and shiny brown hair. While everyone in her class liked her, Mary came to love Mrs. Leonard.

In the 1950s, it was common for teachers to give their children an annual hearing test. However, in Mary's case, in addition to her cleft palate, she was barely able to hear out of one ear. Determined not to let the other children have another "difference" to point out, she would cheat on the test each year. The "whisper test" was given by having a child walk to the classroom door, turn sideways, close one ear with a finger, and then repeat something which the teacher whispered. Mary turned her bad ear towards her teacher and pretended to cover her good ear. She knew that teachers would often say things like, "The sky is blue," or "What color are your shoes?"

But not on that day. That day, seven words out of Mrs. Leonard's mouth changed Mary's life forever. When the "Whisper Test" came, Mary heard the words: "I wish you were my little girl."

Our congregations are filled with people like Saul . . . and Mary. Let's find those people and encourage them.

# TATTOO MY FACE, PIERCE MY EAR, MY NOSE, MY TONGUE, MY . . .

*Scott McCown, Parrish, Alabama*

Perhaps you have gone to a restaurant and had concerns when the wait staff assigned to your table had a tongue stud induced speech impediment, something gold protruding from the side of a nostril, and a gold loop through her left eyebrow. Such an event can leave you wondering, "How sanitary can that be?" If a waitress does not care, or appear to care about her own health, why would she care about mine?

I admit that the preceding thoughts are just that . . . thoughts. Recently, however, someone asked what the Bible says about tattoos and body piercing. After giving some thought to the question, I wanted to share my answer. Let me begin by saying that this article concerns multiple piercings and not an earring or two. It concerns what some call "body art" and not a personal tattoo.

## What does the Bible say about piercing and tattoos?

There are two Old Covenant passages we should consider as we begin to search for an answer. These two passages are part of the law God gave to Israel through Moses. They served a purpose for the people then and have a principle that applies to us today:

- Exodus 21:5-6: "But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever" (NKJV).
- Leviticus 19:28: "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead,

nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord."

Exodus 21:5-6 is a law concerning masters and slaves. If a slave chose to continue in his master's service after being offered freedom, his master would pierce his ear signifying perpetual servanthood. The slave volunteered to be a servant for life. This passage has no specific application to the body piercing that is part of our culture. However, this passage *does* teach us the depth of dedication we should have for our Lord and Master. Compare this thought with Romans 6:16-18 where Paul tells us that we are slaves of the one we obey.

Leviticus 19:28 is in the context of warnings of idolatrous worship. God gave Israel laws that prohibited them from imitating the ceremonies of those worshiping idols. The mutilating of the body in this passage is how many cultures mourned for their dead. They would cut their skin to show sorrow to their gods and neighbors. The tattoos were symbols in memory of the dead (*Pulpit Commentary*, Vol II, p. 289).

Again there is no specific correlation to our present custom of piercing or tattooing. The message for us is that we are "called out," separate from the world. Compare Deuteronomy 26:18 and Titus 2:14. Like Israel whom God called out as His own special people, so are we "called out" as Christians today. We cannot allow ourselves to be molded by the world. This thought *does* speak to tattoos and piercings. Whom am I trying to imitate? After whom am I molding myself? Am I imitating God or the world?

Now we turn to the New Covenant. Paul discusses jewelry in 1 Timothy 2:9-10: "Women adorn (yourselves) in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." Here Paul is contrasting the worship of the living God with worship given to idols. Worship of idols was a social event. Participants wore their best to impress one other and to impress the gods. Paul is telling Christian women that godliness and good works are more important to God. He is not impressed by how much gold they can wear. This passage teaches us that we are always to be modest in our manner of dress. We (men, women, boys, and girls) are not to dress to attract undue attention to ourselves. We live our lives to give glory to God and not to bring glory to ourselves. Peter says this same thing specifically to wives in 1 Peter 3:3-4.

So what does the Bible teach about body piercing and tattoos? Specifically, it says very little. What can we say then? Is it wrong to pierce my ear, nose, eyebrow, tongue, etc.? It is sinful to cover my body with tattoos? To answer in one word, "yes." Yes, if I am doing it to draw unnecessary attention to myself, which seems to be the very motivation behind today's custom of tattooing and piercings. They are done simply to get attention. It is ostentatious, self-serving, and rebellious in nature, and that makes it wrong. WOT

## SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

*Tom McLemore, Selma, Alabama*

"In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover'" (2 Kng. 20:1; Isa. 38:1).

### A house set in order in domestic matters

In 2 Kings 20:1 (parallel Isa. 38:1; cf. 2 Sam. 17:23), Isaiah instructed Hezekiah to "Set your house in order," because he would not recover from his illness. The word translated "set in order" conveys the

idea of giving orders. When the orders have been given, assuming they will be followed, things are said to be set in order.

Thus, anticipating his impending death (Gen. 27:1-2), Isaac charged Jacob not to marry one of the Canaanite women (Gen. 28:1). With his death in view, Jacob

charged that his body be buried in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 49:29). In each of these passages, the word translated "set in order" in 2 Samuel 17:23 and 2 Kings 20:1 (cf. Isa. 38:1) is used of orders given with the assumption that they would be followed. When such commandments were given, one could be said to have set his house in order.

Many today see the need to set their house in order when it comes to domestic affairs. They make wills, they give instructions to their heirs, they prearrange their funerals, etc. They are following the same course as Hezekiah, Ahithophel, Isaac, and Jacob as cited in the passages above. Yet, there is another sense in which the Bible teaches we must set our houses in order, viz., with regard to *spiritual* matters.

#### **A house set in order in spiritual matters**

In Genesis 18:19, God said, "... I have chosen [Abraham], that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." In this passage, the word translated "charge" is also the same as that translated "set in order" in 2 Samuel 17:23 and 2 Kings 20:1 (cf. Isa. 38:1). God recognized that Abraham would provide instruction for his children and future generations, particularly regarding the covenant he has entered with God. This activity would not be limited to the time just prior to death, but would shape the home life of Abraham and his immediate family as well as succeeding generations. In this way, Abraham would be setting his house in order, spiritually speaking.

This type of setting one's house in order is crucial for us today. Our houses are in order spiritually when God's order for the home is honored. Consider what this involves. The house honoring God's order will have a husband as a loving and considerate head, a wife submitting to her husband's leadership, and children obedient to their parents (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-6:3; Col. 3:18-20; 1 Thess. 4:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7). A house in order will honor Christ's teaching regarding marriage (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). A household in which a man and a woman are living in adultery or one formed as a result of a homosexual union is clearly *out of order*.

Also, a house in order will be a household worshipping scripturally and faithfully and serving Christ as the center of daily life. The procedure for setting one's house in order after this fashion is described in such passages as Deuteronomy 6:1-25 and Ephesians 6:4. In summary, one's house is in order when all of God's orders for righteous living are being taught and followed. Joshua was a man whose house was in order in the spiritual sense. He said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

#### **God's house set in order**

The word translated "set in order," and "charge" in the passages studied thus far is also used frequently of the orders God gave to Moses about life and worship among the Israelites. These instructions were given to "the house of Israel," which was also God's own household (Num. 12:7; cf. Heb. 3:2). As one reads the directions God gave Moses regarding the tabernacle service and other matters, one is impressed by the emphasis upon *order* (e.g., Ex. 40:4,23; Lev. 1:7-8,12; 6:12; 24:3-4,8; Num. 10:28). God made His arrangements for His house in all strictness and seriousness. He gave His orders upon the assumption that they would be followed. He said, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2; cf. 11:13,20,27; 28:13-14; Josh. 23:6; 2 Kng. 22:2). In this way, God was setting His house in order.

From the way God set His house in order in the Old Testament, we can learn much of how He intends for the church to proceed in the New. In the present age, the church of the living God is the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15). Just as He set in order the religious procedures and life of His household (Israel) *before Christ*, He has set in order the household over which Christ the Son is head, viz., the true Israel of God, the church of Christ (Heb. 3:6; cf. Gal. 3:26-29; 4:1-7; 6:16; Phil. 3:3; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18-19). He has revealed how men ought to behave in His household. Christ set His house in order before His death. The church is "his own house" or household (Heb. 3:6). He promised to build His church and made arrangements for His instructions to be communicated and

enforced after His return to God (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:18).

The church, or the household of Christ, was indeed established on the day of Pentecost following His resurrection and ascension, and the administration of the affairs of His household was established by His inspired apostles through their teaching (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 7:17; 14:37; 16:1). The teaching Jesus delivered during His earthly ministry, along with His teaching delivered through His appointed representatives, forms His will or testament (Heb. 9:16-17), which conveys the stipulations of the "new covenant" (Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 9:15).

Thus, Christ's household has been set in order because His will has been communicated in authoritative written form with the assumption that it will be honored by obedience. By means of Christ's testament, and only on this basis, His house can be in order today. This is at the heart of the restoration quest. Pioneers in pursuit of the restoration ideal have gone in search of "the ancient order of things." Deviations from Christ's instructions and appointments relative to His house have resulted in His house being "out of order." In fact, if the house is out of order in terms of His arrangements, it is not truly "his house" (Heb. 3:6—note "if"; cf. 2 Jn. 9; Rom. 6:17). Those in our age who find repulsive the idea of a religious form, pattern, or order should give full weight to the fact that God's house is a house in order (cf. 1 Cor. 14:33,40; Col. 2:5; Heb. 8:5)!

#### **Consider yourself**

Is your house in order as pertains to both fleshly matters and spiritual matters? Please consider all the facets of this question which have been discussed. If anything is out of order, set it in order now. God says to us, "Set *your* house in order!"

Are we truly Christ's house? If we make that claim, are we following His orders? If anything is out of order, set it in order immediately. If any is walking disorderly, and not according to the apostolic teachings (2 Thess. 3:6-11), let him get back in order. Do not procrastinate. God says to us, "Set *my* house in order!" Attention to these matters is of the utmost gravity and urgency. They are of eternal significance.

# A UNIQUE CHURCH

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

All that is involved in the Lord's simple promise—"I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18)—is beyond human comprehension. From everlasting to everlasting is its scope. Fascinating and gripping is a study of the universe's greatest institution. In a realm alone it stands by itself, unique, solitary, a *sui generis*, a *monogenes*, the only one of its kind.

## NOT UNIQUE IN LANGUAGE

The word on Jesus' lips in His promise to erect His church, *ekklesia* (a "called-out group"), was not unique, and by itself it has no religious or sacred meaning. To the Greeks a group of people "called out" for a town meeting or to see an Olympic race would be named an *ekklesia*. Luke employed the word in describing an angry mob seeking to kill Paul (Acts 19:32,41, where it is translated not "church" but "assembly"). Also, just as an unlawful assembly could be styled an *ekklesia*, so a lawful assembly the Ephesian townclerk designated as an *ekklesia* (Acts 19:39). Furthermore, a large group of Israelites (called out of Egypt by Moses into a wilderness) Stephen described as an *ekklesia* (Acts 7:38, mistranslated "church" in the KJV and the ASV).

To us the word *ekklesia* becomes exceedingly important because Jesus used it to refer to those people whom He would call out of the world to live only for Him (Matt. 11:26-28; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). They would be sinners called by the gospel to a new life of righteousness (Rom. 6:1-17; 2 Thess. 2:14). The idea Jesus presented is of the highest importance, but the word He used to set it forth was not unique.

## UNIQUE IN FIVE WAYS

There are at least five ways that the New Testament church is in a realm to itself, the only one of its kind.

### A display of God's wisdom

"The eternal purpose" which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord for a long time "was not made known to the sons of men" (Eph. 3:5,11). From of old men knew from what the prophets had said that something stupendous was coming. "Many prophets and righteous men desired to see" and to hear about what God was planning (Matt. 13:17). But no eye had seen, nor had any ear heard, and no heart had imagined the things God had "prepared for them that love him" (Isa. 64:4; 1 Cor. 2:9). Prophets themselves "sought and searched diligently" to no avail until "the fulness of time" had come (Gal. 4:4; 1 Pet.

1:10). Even angels were in suspense, but they were not lacking in interest. The divine plan of the ages they desired "to look into" (*parakupsai*) just as Mary "stooped and looked" into the tomb (1 Pet. 1:12; Jn. 20:11).

That the Gentiles, also a part of God's creation and precious to Him, should, along with the Jews, be "fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" was a glorious revelation (Eph. 3:6). In due time the uncovering of the eternal purpose was made known by the Spirit to the "holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:5). Then that combined group of sinners, Jews and Gentiles, now redeemed and forgiven through the gospel, now brothers together in one family, now members of one body, the church, that unified called-out group the angels in heaven could finally see!

As a result they praised God for His matchless wisdom in effecting so glorious a project. As a quilt on exhibition at the state fair, displaying a lady's careful and beautiful handiwork, gives glory to its maker, so the church, without blemish and without spot, is a living exhibit of what God is able to perfect. The many strands of His divine wisdom are reflected brilliantly when one's eyes fall on the incomparable church. Nothing like it is known to man or angel.

### Its purchase price

That combined group of called-out peoples, the whole family in heaven and on the earth, living and dead, before or after the cross, that group was paid for by the Savior's blood (Acts 20:28; Eph. 3:15; Heb. 9:15; 11:40). Church members have been redeemed, not by corruptible things, as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot and without blemish, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

In the moonlight of Gethsemane, with Jesus' face on the ground, displaying "strong crying and tears," being in "an agony," with His sweat like "great drops of blood falling down upon the ground," praying the father who loved him to remove the impending blood-letting, nobody could ever ask, "Could God have thought of any other way to save sinners?" (Matt. 26:39; Lk. 22:44; Heb. 5:7).

Truly the purchase price of the church is one of its unique features. Genuine church members praise Him who loved them and washed them from their sins by

His blood (Rev. 1:5). They cannot understand how an alleged Christian denomination can be so unappreciative of Calvary as to purge from its hymnals any reference to blood.

### Its membership

Church members have a quality belonging to no other organization: they are a saved group, enjoying the assurance that their sins have been forgiven. From their souls their guilt has been placed on the head of Jesus as a scapegoat. Thank God, He has carried their sins "into the wilderness" far away (Lev. 16:20-22). A God whose Word is sure has promised that their iniquities He will remember no more (Heb. 8:12).

One does not join the church. Instead, after he is saved, the Lord adds him to that called-out group. When one has believed, repented, confessed the Savior, and has been baptized, he is pronounced saved (Acts 2:36,38; 1 Jn. 4:15; Mk. 16:16). A sinner is active in obeying these commandments; when they are done, he is passive as the Lord adds him to the church (Acts 2:47).

The church does not save; it is the saved. Only the Savior saves, and the saved ones make up the church. From the birthday of the church until now, day by day as sinners are being saved they are being added to the church.

J.D. Tant was asked if only members of the church would be saved. His reply was, "Not half of them." In truth, there are two salvations: one from past sins, and one into heaven (1 Pet. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:9). When one has been saved from past sins, that salvation is forever and will never be canceled (Heb. 10:14). But that saved person, even though a church member, if he misbehaves he falls short of the grace of God (Heb. 12:15), and will no more go to heaven than the backsliding Israelites could go into the promised land. To them God swore that they would not enter into their rest (Heb. 3:18). "They were overthrown in the wilderness," and are set forth as a warning to church members lest they fall short of going to heaven (1 Cor. 10:5-11). "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

### Its namelessness

The New Testament church is unique in that it has no proper name. Denominations have proper names. The word "denominate" means to "name" something. But the New Testament church is nameless. Though it is called the house of the Lord, the family of

God, the body of Christ, and the kingdom of Christ (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:15; Col. 3:13; Heb. 3:5-6; 1 Tim. 3:15), yet it has no proper name.

Individual members of the church do have a proper name. That name is not "disciple," though they are disciples (Acts 9:1). That name is not "brethren," though they are brethren (Acts 9:30). That name is not "saints," though church members are saints (Acts 9:32). Their proper and divinely given name is "Christian" (Acts 11:26), but to call the church the "Christian Church" is to give it a proper name, not known in the Bible.

To speak of the New Testament church as the "church of Christ" is right, as it is to speak of it as the "church of God" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2), but neither is a proper name. To speak of "Church of Christ" congregations and of "Church of Christ preachers" is to denominationalize the church which is unique in that it is not a denomination (a named society).

#### **Its destiny**

The last of the five features of that divine organization that is like none other is its eternal destiny. No institution except the Lord's church can survive the physical

death of its members. But the divinely built church is so constituted that its membership is enjoyed in this life and even more abundantly in eternity. Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:8). Faithful church members, adding the Christian graces, will "never fall. In this way the entrance to the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be richly provided" (2 Pet. 1:5-11). "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

WOT

## DUE PRAISE FOR OUR SOLDIERS

*Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia*

Recently, I have been impressed by and reminded of the daily battles Christian men and women are waging against the power and influence of Satan in this world. As Jesus faced the burden of imminent death at the hands of those of the world. He prayed for His disciples and said, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:15-16, NASB). We are told not to "love the world" (1 Jn. 2:15), that "friendship with the world is hostility with God" (Jam. 4:4). In reference to the world, we either succumb or "overcome" (1 Jn. 5:4). We "light" it (Matt. 5:14), but cannot delight in it. We can educate it, but woe to those who emulate it (cf. Jn. 14:17). It is far better to appear abnormal than amenable to it (Jn. 15:19).

God's people, entrenched in their faith, hope, and love, are on the firing line every day. They bear the brunt of Satan's attacks—on their jobs, in their neighborhoods, and even in their own families. We are often held in contempt simply for living like the Bible tells us to live. Satan's soldiers, the "world"—i.e., "the evil order of the earth and its inhabitants, under the control of Satan" (Lanier, 47)—have a different purpose in life and are hurtling toward a darker destination. They have a different set of rules, lower standards, and a meaner purpose. Christians have a completely different set of marching orders (cf. Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:1). While some of Christ's colonels and the Prince of Peace's privates have deserted, many are toiling admirably in the trenches of daily battle.

Remember that you are not serving without pay (1 Cor. 9:7). One version reads, "Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service?" Christians are fighting for the Lord, and His retirement benefits are completely unparalleled. In

fact, Satan's soldiers can expect "death" (Rom. 6:23) and "rebuke" (2 Pet. 2:15-16) as ultimate payment for their services. Christian living may at times seem a thankless job, but the service will be honored with an unfathomably splendid spiritual salary (cf. Jam. 1:12).

Remember that you have not enlisted alone (Phil. 2:25; Phile. 2). We have fellow soldiers who have set their faces to the Son and refuse to give the devil a shot at their backs. You are not the only one fighting with conviction. There are even others in the local church who are fighting the same exact battles. Find them and draw strength from the common bond you share together. Camaraderie builds morale, so "Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11).

Remember that you are not fighting an easy war (2 Tim. 2:3-4). Paul tells Timothy that this struggle includes "hardship" and "isolation." From early childhood, we are told that nothing worthwhile in life is easy. That adage is nowhere truer than here. Peter encourages battle-weary Christians: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Pet. 4:12). In the church's infancy, we find the apostles "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22). So we find ourselves today in circumstances where it is tempting to surrender to the world. They seem an overwhelming majority. They seem to be winning not only the war but also our personal battles. It does not seem fair to suffer when we are just trying to live right, but remember the soldiers who fought,

endured, and pleased the One who enlisted them. It can be done!

Remember that you have been given the best equipment (Eph. 6:10ff; 1 Thess. 5:8; 2 Cor. 10:3-4). To Ephesus and Thessalonica, Paul lists the equipment—the whole armor includes a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, faith, and love, shoes of readiness, a shield of faith, a helmet of hope and salvation, and a breastplate of faith and love. To Corinth, Paul lauds the equipment. They transcend the weapons of the world and overwhelm them. Here is tremendous encouragement to us, as we stand on the battle line. When Satan causes darts to be hurled at us, we can deflect their harm with an unbreakable faith. When neighbors are unloving and unkind, we can inundate them with love. When coworkers gossip and try to get us fired, we can find shelter in the truth. When stressed by adversaries, we can rely on the reinforcement of hope and righteousness. This God-given equipment will not wear out, misfire, or malfunction under even the harshest conditions. With it, we can overcome in our battles.

Thank God for brothers and sisters, enlisted men and women in the army of the Lord, who refuse to wave the white flag of defeat. Do you remember the admonition Peter writes after giving a reconnaissance report on the devil in 1 Peter 5:8? He writes, "But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you" (vv. 9-10). Spiritual soldiers fighting Satan on fronts far and near are winning. All who refuse to give up will ultimately gain the victory. God bless all our faithful fighters. Do not grow weary (cf. Gal. 6:9)! WOT

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Question: "I recently visited a congregation where many of the members held up their hands not only during the prayer, but also during the song service. Can Christians hold up their hands in the worship assembly? Is there biblical precedent for this practice and does it enhance the acceptability of our worship?"

Answer: These are important questions. Our answers must not be determined by the current popularity of the practice, but by that which is revealed in the inspired Word of God (Jn. 4:24; Psa. 145:18). Consider the following:

**1. Prayer postures.** The Bible identifies several distinct prayer postures such as kneeling (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:54; 2 Chron. 6:13; Psa. 95:6; Dan. 6:10; Lk. 22:41; Acts 9:40), bowing (cf. Gen. 24:26; Ex. 4:31; 12:27; 34:8), lying down (cf. Matt. 26:39), standing or kneeling with lifted hands—palms down (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:22; 2 Chron. 20:15; Psa. 88:9), standing (cf. 1 Sam. 1:26; Mk. 11:25; Lk. 18:11,13), lifting the eyes (cf. Jn. 17:1), falling on the ground (cf. Gen. 17:3), and sitting (cf. Neh. 1:4-11; 1 Chron. 17:16). Bodily posture during prayer seems to have been contingent upon the circumstances and was culturally based.

**2. Lifting up hands.** There are some notable examples of the lifting up of hands during prayer in the Old Testament. David assumed this posture—"Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary" (Psa. 28:2; cf. 63:4; 143:5-6). Solomon assumed this posture upon the completion of the temple—"Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven" (1 Kgs. 8:22). Ezra assumed this position after learning of the lax and immoral behavior of the citizens of Jerusalem—"At the evening sacrifice I arose from my

fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God" (Ezra 9:5). "This posture was used in antiquity to approach a king or even a pagan deity. The posture was not simply a meaningless positioning of the body, but rather communicated the idea of appealing to the higher authority in hopes of securing his approval for the specific requests being made" [Dave Miller, "Changes In Worship," *Spiritual Sword*, Vol. 28, Oct. 1996, No. 1, pp. 26-27].

### 3. Observations:

The lifting up of hands is not superior to any other posture of prayer. The position of one's body does not affect the efficacy of his prayer. Kneeling or lifting up hands is not more reverential than standing. The New Testament also mentions lifting up hands. "Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. 2:8). Since we are under the jurisdiction of the Law of Christ today, it is essential that we understand what the apostle, through inspiration, taught in this passage. Note first the *identity* of those who lift up hands—"men" (Greek *andras*). "Only men are authorized to lead a prayer when an assembly of both sexes is convened . . ." [Wayne Jackson, "Leading Prayer," *Notes From The Margin Of My Bible*, Vol. 2—NT, p. 128]. Scholars tell us that only the brother audibly delivering the prayer would raise his hands, not the non-verbal participants in that prayer. Note second the internal emphasis associated with the posture—"holy." Paul was concerned with the disposition of the heart and not so much the overt position of the hands. "The point is that only men should lead in public prayer who can lift up morally clean hands" [A.T. Robertson, "1 Timothy," *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p. 569]. Clean and/or holy hands were symbolic of a blameless life (cf. Psa. 24:4; 2 Sam. 22:21). See also Psalm 66:18; 109:7; 1 John 3:22.

If the acceptability of our worship depended upon our physical posture, God surely would have told us so in His Word (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). He has not done so. Physical posture in prayer is incidental and optional; holiness of character is not (cf. Jam. 5:16). The brother who employs intimidation tactics in order to coerce others to be "more spiritual" through lifting up of hands needs to be lovingly but firmly corrected. He is not walking in love (2 Jn. 1:6). In fact, his "hands" emphasis serves only to expose

the shallow nature of his own faith.

Note some parallel passages: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (Jam. 4:8). Is James enjoining a literal hand washing, OR is he teaching that cleansing our hands is equal to purifying our heart? "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example . . ." (Jn. 13:14-15a). Is Jesus requiring us literally to wash one another's feet, OR is He urging the attitude of service? POINT: Paul's emphasis in 1 Timothy 2:8 is not on the actual physical posture of the body, but on the internal posture of the heart when one approaches the Father in prayer. Much of the modern trend of lifting up hands is foreign to what we read about in the Scriptures. Those who lift up their hands often do so, with their arms swaying side to side—palms down, not only during prayer, but also during singing and preaching. ". . . They are doing something which is totally unknown in the Bible! They are simply mimicking the denominational practices spawned by false religion. The purpose? Lifting up one's arms is strictly a way to feel religion. It is a way to substitute *feeling* in place of actual compliance with biblical worship action" [Dave Miller, p. 27]. Singing "Seek Ye First" in an open-air Bible camp assembly might create "goose bumps," but to purposely attempt to recreate that same physical sensation in any worship setting [including public prayer] is to put man on the throne, not God. Jesus warns us of the dangers of performance worship (Matt. 6:1ff).

Thank you for this good question. May we all be anxious to adhere to the Spirit's teaching in the realm of prayer. ". . . I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding . . ." (1 Cor. 14:15a).

—Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana



sixthavenue@tds.net

# IF "IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE," . . .

*Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia*

We are told by most religious groups that baptism "doesn't make any difference." It is said to be unnecessary, non-essential, certainly not something required for salvation. However, when we read about it in the Scriptures we get a completely different picture. The Bible reveals it to be "for [in order to] the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), in order to "wash away sins" (Acts 22:16), a necessity to contacting the blood of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), and that it "saves" (1 Pet. 3:21)

In Acts 19:1-5, the Bible demonstrates yet again the fallacy of the idea that baptism "doesn't make any difference." Paul encountered twelve men as he came into Ephesus. He asked them if they had "received the Holy Ghost since ye believed" (v. 2). Their answer revealed ignorance in their knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked, "Unto what then were ye baptized?" (v. 3). There was a connection between their baptism and their reception of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38). Their answer revealed that they had been baptized "unto John's baptism" (v. 3). What did "John's baptism" involve? A quick survey reveals it to have been: in water (Jn. 3:23); "unto repentance" (Matt. 3:11); and, "for the remission of sins" (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3). In light of these facts, why baptize these men again? If "it doesn't make any difference," then what difference does it make? And, yet, baptize them again is exactly what Paul did (v. 5).

Baptism is a critical Bible subject, one on which men place too little emphasis. It is, after all, baptism that puts one "into Christ" (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), where salvation is found (2 Tim. 2:10). If salvation is "in Christ" (and it is), and baptism is the only means the Bible reveals that puts one "into Christ" (and it is), then how is baptism not essential to salvation? The answer is simple—it is essential to salvation!

One other point should be noticed about this matter in Acts 19. After baptizing them "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5), Paul proceeded to lay "his hands upon" these men (v. 6). It was then, and only then, that they received the ability to speak with tongues and prophesy ("the gift of the Holy Spirit"—Acts 2:38). This should come as no surprise, since the Bible reveals that it is through (and only through) "the laying on of the apostles' hands" that such ability is given (Acts 8:18). Therefore, such is not being done today.

The next time you are approached with the idea that baptism "doesn't make any difference," kindly turn to Acts 19 and inquire about these twelve men. If "it [baptism] doesn't make any difference," then what difference does it make? WOT



**Send us your questions!** We are excited about the new emphasis of page seven of *The Words of Truth*—questions submitted by you, our readers. If you have biblical questions, please submit them (anonymously, if you wish) in any of the following ways:

- E-mail: [sixthavenue@tds.net](mailto:sixthavenue@tds.net)
- Mail: Editor, *The Words of Truth*, Sixth Avenue Church of Christ, 1501 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., Jasper, AL 35501
- Fax: 205-302-0595
- Phone: 205-384-6446

## 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.

Please send all correspondence to:

### The Words of Truth

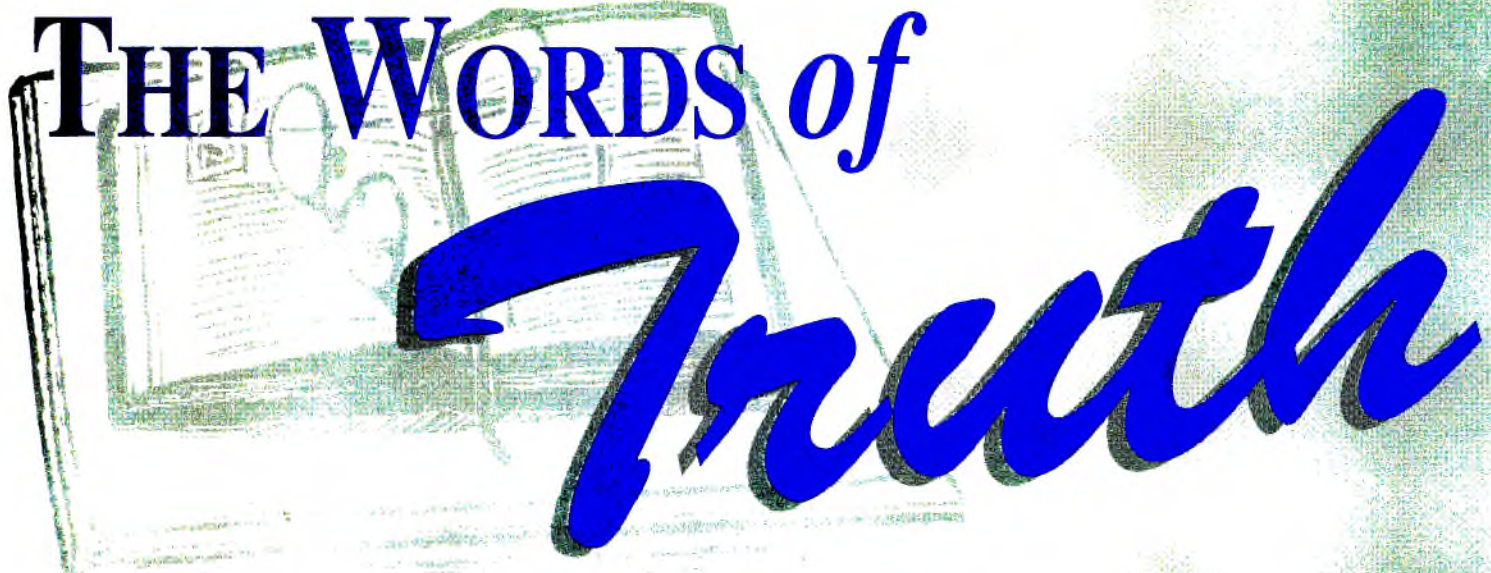
Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: [sixthavenue@tds.net](mailto:sixthavenue@tds.net)

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411

Address Service Requested



# THE WORDS of Truth



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

Vol. 40 No. 4

April 2003

## I'M COMING BACK

*Mark Lindley, Ripley, Mississippi*

Those who visit the wayward often hear the above statement. The one who has been out of service and irregular in attendance will often say that he plans to "come back." Yet, after weeks pass, the one who said he was coming back to church services never does. Obviously, this is not true in every case. Sometimes, the erring child of God follows through and returns to the Lord. But, far too often the words "I'm coming back," are spoken with no resolve.

Some who make this statement add, "but I don't know when." In effect, they are saying, "I know I'm lost; for now, I'm making a deliberate choice to remain lost; and, I have no specific time in mind when I will be restored." Think about the rationale of such a reckless declaration! How could one who is reasoning properly, willfully and consciously remain lost? How could he ever feel at ease, knowing that if he died in his present condition he would be eternally lost? Surely, if one thought seriously about being lost for eternity he would repent.

Why, then, do erring church members sometimes say they are coming back but never do? There are several reasons. Some are just saying what they think the one who is visiting wants to hear. They say they plan to be restored, but never intend to do so. Others feel that they must work out all their "problems" before they can return to the Lord. They do not seem to realize that many of their problems would work out if they would only be restored to their first love. After restoration, the child of God can look to the Lord and brethren for strength. Then, others say they are coming back but never do (and this is the main reason) because they know they should come back, but their faith is too weak to move

them to action. Yes, in the final analysis, it is a faith problem. The unfaithful one must make a decision to get out of his spiritual rut and begin growing in faith once again.

The Lord, however, does not approve of one who only "says" he will follow Him. Jesus told of one who, seemingly, had good intentions. The man said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." Notice Jesus' response: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:61-62). The lesson taught here is: the Lord comes first. One cannot put Him on hold. Jesus demands that we follow Him—now!

One cannot afford to procrastinate: there are dangers involved. One's heart may become so hardened he cannot be reached (Heb. 3:13). It gets easier to dismiss the pleas of brethren by saying, "I'm coming back one day." Also, one never knows the day of his death. Isaac said to Esau, "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death" (Gen. 27:2). Death is certain, while life is unpredictable (Josh. 23:14; Prov. 27:1). Isaac did not know the day of his death . . . no one does. No, one cannot afford to procrastinate.

If those who say they are coming back would do so, congregations would have more in attendance, families would be strengthened, elders would be encouraged, the church would grow, and the time spent trying to restore the wayward could be used in teaching those who have never heard the gospel.

In view of these thoughts, if you are wayward, will you please come back—now?

*WOT*

# CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT IMMERSION

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Several years back I ran an article in the local newspaper entitled, "A Controversial Question." In response to the article I received a letter from a kindly gentleman in the community which initiated correspondence that lasted for several months. Below, for your interest, I include the original article, his letter, and my first response to him.

## "A CONTROVERSIAL QUESTION"

Immersion, sprinkling, or pouring? Infants or those who can understand the gospel? *Because of* forgiveness of sins or *in order to obtain* remission? Controversial and intriguing questions, no doubt, and certainly ones that have divided many sincere, religious people. Should we, as some suggest, simply throw up our arms and say, "It doesn't matter anyway. God isn't concerned with the particulars, as long as we're sincere"? But if tempted to make that statement, we ought to be aware of the fact that if God *isn't* concerned about the particulars of obedience, it marks the first time in history that such has been the case (just ask Cain, Naaman, or Nadab and Abihu!). We should remember that these examples are written for our learning and serve as illustrations of God's nature (see Romans 15:4). From them we learn that God is a God Who expects us to obey Him in the way He's commanded us.

Now . . . back to our original question. Immersion, sprinkling, or pouring? Certainly God wouldn't leave us in the dark about a matter as important as baptism, and indeed He didn't. The translators of the King James Version of the Bible, when rendering the Greek word *baptizo*, didn't translate the word: they transliterated it, which means they simply changed the Greek letters into English letters. Thus, they created a new word—i.e., *baptize*. Greek lexicons unanimously agree the word means "to dip, plunge, or immerse" (see Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich's *Greek-English Lexicon*, a highly respected work, for a representative definition). Consider also the fact that baptism is frequently described as a "burial" (Rom. 6:3-4), an action that is symbolically reenacted by immersion.

Should we baptize people in their infancy or when they're mature enough to understand the gospel? Again, if we accept the Bible as authoritative, the answer is clear. In *every* example of baptism in the New Testament, the ones being baptized are of sufficient age to comprehend the spiritual meaning of their action. In *every* case, baptism is preceded by such mental actions as faith and repentance. Jesus said, "He that

*believeth* and is baptized . . ." (Mark 16:16). Peter said, "*Repent* and be baptized . . ." (Acts 2:38). Furthermore, there is absolutely no example of an infant's being baptized. Our conclusion, then, must be that only those who are capable of believing and repenting can be scripturally baptized. Practicing otherwise would be to add to scripture and violate its principles—actions that God takes extremely seriously (see Deut. 4:2).

Now, another crucial question: baptism or salvation—which comes first? In other words, is baptism *for* the remission of sins, or is it *because of* the forgiveness of sins? Well, our space is limited, so that critical discussion must wait until next time. Thanks again for your interest in spiritual matters. May God richly bless you.

## LETTER FROM GENTLEMAN WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY:

Good Day Mr. Webster:

I read with interest your, "A Controversial Question," in the [newspaper and date].

I certainly agree with you that God is concerned with particulars. He is a God of order.

Holy men of old penned the Holy Scriptures, however unholy men have done exactly what the Scriptures forbade them to do, and yet these same Scriptures tell us that they will do this very thing in the last days.

The Bible is its own commentary and needs no critiquing.

I found that you went to three outside sources to attempt to prove your position of water baptism.

I would ask you to look in your Bible concordance for the word "immersion." then find the words "sprinkle" and "pour."

Please show me how you find in Acts chapter 2 the things you offer us in your article in the paper.

**Who** administered the water baptism? **When** were the 3,000 baptized? **Where** did the baptizing take place? **How** were these 3,000 devout Jews that were converted to Christianity baptized?

I shall be waiting for your written response.

Yours truly,  
[Name]

## MY RESPONSE:

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

I sincerely thank you for your letter dated

\_\_\_\_\_. It is good to find people such as you who are interested in biblical truth. I'm glad we agree on the fact that God is concerned with particulars and that He gave us His inspired Word which He expects us to follow. I really want to do and teach what is right, as I know you do, and I take God's Word very seriously. For that reason, I appreciate your pointing out areas in which you believe me to be wrong. Though you didn't state specifically, I'm assuming your main contention with me is over the question, "Is Bible baptism immersion, sprinkling, or pouring?" If that assumption is wrong, correct me, and I'll gladly address other aspects of this topic [Note: future correspondence verified that this *was* the primary point with which he disagreed.]

I could not identify the three outside sources you said I used. One must have been the Greek lexicon I consulted. I'm not sure what the other two were. I, like you, know that it will be God and His Word that will ultimately judge us at the last day. As you know, the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language, and was later translated into English. With your Bible knowledge, I'm sure you're aware that sometimes translators make mistakes; after all, they're fallible, just as you and I are. For that reason it's helpful to study the language which the inspired writer actually used. With that in mind, I quoted the Greek lexicon to show that the original Greek word (*baptizo*) means "to dip, plunge, or immerse," a definition which, as I explained in the article, is currently accepted by all Greek lexicons. I encourage you to study the etymology of the English word "baptize." You'll find it originated as a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo*. Also, I encourage you to study what the Greek word *baptizo* means. Since the New Testament was written in Greek, if we know what this Greek word means, we'll know exactly what it is God meant for us to practice.

But of course it isn't essential that a Bible student know Greek in order to understand God's will. Concerning that you wrote: "The Bible is its own commentary . . ."—a statement with which I completely agree. That's why in the article I explained how baptism is called in the Bible a "burial" (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12). Of the three modes under consideration (immersion, sprinkling, or pouring), which one best parallels a burial? I would have, if adequate space for the article had been available, also mentioned verses such as John 3:23, where it is said, "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, **because there was much water there**: and they came, and were baptized" (emphasis added). Why did John

need "much water" if he were simply sprinkling or pouring water on those he "baptized"? Acts 8:38-39 is also relevant: "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: 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" (emphasis added).

You asked several questions concerning Acts 2. Again, although you didn't state specifically, I'm assuming your reason for asking these questions is that you believe it would have been impossible for 3,000 people to be immersed in one day in Jerusalem. If that assumption is wrong, let me know, and I'll address whatever aspect you have in mind.

"Who administered the water baptism?" The Bible doesn't say, but I would assume it was the apostles, with other Christians perhaps assisting. It certainly would have

been possible that the ones who were baptized began baptizing others.

"When were the 3,000 baptized?" Acts 2:41 says that "they that gladly received his word were baptized: and **the same day** there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (emphasis added). Since believers are "baptized **into** Christ" (Gal. 3:27; emphasis added), which means being baptized into the church (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:13), they were "added" when they were baptized. The answer, then, is they were baptized "the same day." It would have been possible for twelve men (the apostles) to immerse 3,000 in one day. If one apostle baptized one person per minute, the baptizing would have been completed in just a little over four hours. Assuming other Christians helped, including those who themselves were immersed that day, the time would have been much shorter.

"Where did the baptizing take place?" Again, the text doesn't specifically say, but those familiar with the ancient city of

Jerusalem tell us that there were several pools in Jerusalem suitable for the task.

"How were these 3,000 devout Jews that were converted to Christianity baptized?" I don't understand what you mean by "How?" You understand that I am suggesting they were immersed in water for the remission of their sins. If you intended something else by your question, feel free to explain it further, and I'll be glad to answer it.

In summary, on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 penitent believers were immersed in water in pools in Jerusalem by the apostles (perhaps others assisting) for the remission of their sins to be added to Christ's church.

Thank you again for your interest in spiritual matters. If I've misunderstood you in any way, or if I haven't clarified my position sufficiently, please write again, and I'll do my best to give you a Bible answer.

For His Cause,  
Chuck Webster

WOT

## CAN A CHRISTIAN STILL BE AN EVOLUTIONIST?

Brad Harrub, Apologetics Press

If one were to believe everything that the scientific community has offered regarding man's origins, we would find that very few theories include acts by a supernatural Creator. In fact, scientists are quick to point out that the Universe took billions of years to form, and thus it would be absurd to believe that it was created in just six days. For instance, consider what Thomas Hayden recently wrote when he added another "certainty" of life, besides taxes and death. His effort to shore up the ever-faltering theory of evolution was the cover story of the July 29, 2002 issue of *U.S. News & World Report*. In explaining "how evolution works, and why it matters more than ever," Hayden stated, "It's an everyday phenomenon, a fundamental fact of biology as real as hunger and as unavoidable as death" (2002, 133[4]:4).

Sadly, this type of grandstanding and propagandizing in the media occurs all too often. And people by the millions accept it as the "final word" on the subject—without any real knowledge as to what the evidence truly reveals. Even within the church, Christians often subconsciously find themselves favoring science over the Bible. We have forgotten the Truth on the matter, which can be summed up simply with the first ten words that appear in the Bible: "In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, emp. added). If this is not true, then every word that follows should be called into question.

Because of the prevailing idea of an ancient Cosmos, many people have tried to find ways to fit evolution and its billions-of-

years time frame into the biblical account of creation. In essence, they still espouse belief in God and the Bible, but they also pledge a great deal of allegiance to science and the evolutionary theory. As the old adage says, they want to "have their cake and eat it too." But can both the Bible and evolutionary theory be true? People clinging to both the Bible and evolution are commonly known as "theistic evolutionists." "Theistic" comes from the Greek *theos*, which means "God." Thus, theistic evolutionists believe God does exist, but they also hold to the theory of evolution as true. They rationalize their beliefs by stating that "yes, God created the heavens and the Earth," but then He used (or allowed) evolutionary processes to produce the Universe we see today.

Thus, "Bible believers" find themselves in the awkward position of compromising the opening chapters of the Bible. If Genesis 1-11 is tossed aside as merely a mythological story, then we must toss out the entire Bible because the one **major** theme that is taught throughout the Bible is redemption. Man's relationship with God started at the pinnacle of Creation week in the Garden, and degenerated from there. Christians need to be fully aware that theistic evolution teaches that man started out at the bottom and worked his way to the top (via the old amoeba-to-man story). Therefore, either man started at the top and fell, as the Bible indicates, or he started at the bottom and rose to the top, as evolution indicates. Both cannot be correct! The prophets long ago declared the fall of humans, and the resulting need for a Savior

Scripture indicates that this was the reason for Christ's death—to bring men back into a covenant relationship with God. If men truly did not fall as described in the Creation account, then why did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, come to this planet and suffer a cruel death on the cross?

Additionally, consider the following: Surely evolution will not have to reverse itself and concede that it reached its zenith with the birth of the Christ child a long, long time ago. Surely this colossal system will not have to concede that it is less able now to produce a greater than Jesus than it did produce two thousand years ago. If evolution is not now able to produce a greater than Jesus, then it seems the system has ceased to be evolution and has become devolution, at least in one sense (Taylor, 1974).

Today, this theory appears more like "devilution" than devolution!

As long as we are tossing aside Scripture, we might as well get out our scissors and cut out all references to the Creation, starting with the gospel accounts.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Jesus Christ Himself made reference to the Creation when He stated in Matthew 19:4 (c.f. Mark 10:6), "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female." These words indicate that Adam and Eve had been on the Earth "from the beginning of Creation" (Mark 10:6). Of course we also would have to throw out John, because the first few verses of chapter one review the beginning and Creation. Other scriptures such as Acts

4:24, Acts 17:25, Romans 1:20, Colossians 1:16, 1 Timothy 2:13, Hebrews 1:2, 1 Peter 4:19, and Revelation 4:11 also would be called into question if the Creation account is merely a nice "story" and not historically accurate. As a matter of fact, the only books that do not refer to the Creation in some form are the books of Jude, Philemon, and 2 and 3 John!

Additionally, if we do not accept that God created the Heavens and the Earth in six literal days, then we are making Jesus Christ—our Savior—a liar. Jesus stated: "But from the beginning of the Creation male and female he made them" (Mark 10:6), affirming that Adam and Eve were on the Earth since the beginning of Creation. Paul affirmed in Romans 1:20-21 that the things God had made had been "perceived"

even "since the Creation of the world." According to evolutionists, man did not come into the picture until about 3-4 million years ago. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if the Earth is supposedly 5-6 billion years old, then the last 3-4 million is not, by any stretch of the imagination, "from the beginning." Rather, it is "from the end." Therefore we are left with a choice: either Jesus Christ lied and the evolutionists are correct, or we can believe that the words Jesus Christ spoke are true, and therefore evolution is 100% wrong. The belief in theistic evolution allows for the Savior to be called a liar!

Ah, but you say, "Adam was just a mythological creature. We know today that man originated from a Neanderthal-type creature." However, if this is true, why did

the inspired apostle Paul pen these words: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22), and then in reference to Christ write, "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45)? If Adam and Eve are merely mythological, does this mean that this "last Adam," Jesus Christ, was a mythological creature as well?

#### Reference

Taylor, Robert (1974), "More Problems for Theistic Evolution," *Gospel Advocate*, January 3. WOT

## THE GREATEST FRIEND IN THE ENTIRE WORLD

*Duane Patton, Tanzania, Africa*

Webster defines a "friend" in various ways: A friend is "a person whom one knows well and is fond of; close acquaintance . . . a person on the same side in a struggle; one who is not an enemy or foe; ally . . . a supporter or sympathizer" (*Webster's New World College Dictionary*, p. 540). Certainly most of us are familiar with the value and necessity of a friend, especially when we are in time of need. The Proverbs writer declared, "a friend loves at all times . . ." (Prov. 17:17). In a world of hatred, violence, and hurt how wonderful it is to have a friend!

Although the world hated Him, Jesus made friends with many people while He walked on this earth. Luke recorded that Jesus increased "in favor with God and men" (Lk. 2:52); He epitomized the Proverb which says, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Prov. 18:24). On at least one occasion Jesus was accused of being a friend of "tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 9:10; 11:19). Jesus was a "friend of sinners," but not the way His accusers considered Him to be (Matt. 9:12-13; Mk. 2:17; Lk. 5:32; Jam. 4:4)! Friends, we would all do well to learn about the friendliness of Christ as we have Him for our example in all things (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Pet. 2:1-24).

Note the following characteristics of a friend as seen in the life of Jesus Christ. A friend is one who . . .

**F**inds time for others: Jesus always seemed to find the time to be with and do good to those around Him, even after a "long, hard day at work" (Mk. 6:30-44). Christians are to exercise wisdom in time management especially in spiritual matters so that they may have a

good understanding of God's will (Eph. 5:15-17).

**R**ids himself of pride: Certainly no one would accuse Jesus of being full of pride. To be sure, Paul informs us that although Christ existed "in the form of God, counted not the being on equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself . . . humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8, ASV).

**I**nterests himself in the personal lives of others: Curiously enough, nearly every chapter in the account of the life of Christ that John wrote reveals Jesus as one who spent time with a particular individual. I've often wondered what He did during the thirty years or so before He began His earthly ministry outside of His trade of carpentry; perhaps He created a reputation of being friendly to those with whom He came into contact daily; He sure seemed to be well-known and liked until He began teaching the truth (Mk. 6:1-6)!

**E**difies others when the world tears them down: The story of Zacchaeus provides for us a great example of the support Christ gives to those whom the world deems less than honorable. While the greater part of his brotherhood snubbed Zacchaeus because of his occupation of being a tax collector, Jesus knew that he needed the gospel as badly as others. Jesus' friendly approach opened up a door of spiritual opportunity for this "despised" Jew, thus causing him to show fruits of repentance (Lk. 19:1-10). Oh, how we need to be more like Jesus (Acts 10:34)!

**N**ever withholds truth from them

merely for the sake of comfort: Jesus Christ is, according to fulfilled prophecy, the "Prince of Peace" (Gen. 49:10; Isa. 9:6; 53:5; Jn. 14:27; 16:33; Eph. 2:14ff). However He Himself declared that He came *not* to bring peace but "a sword of division" (Matt. 10:34). This could mean nothing but that truth divides right from wrong, and when wrong is exposed often there is turmoil in the lives of those who refuse to change or who do not yet understand God's will. Jesus rightfully accused Peter once of being His "adversary" because of his lack of understanding of God's purpose for redeeming men from sin. Nevertheless He loved Peter and gave Him an opportunity to repent (Matt. 16:21-27; Jn. 21:15ff). What a friend!

**D**ies in the place of others to demonstrate love for them: According to the Lord, the ultimate measure of one's love is found in one's willingness to place his very life on the line for another, even if the other is one's own enemy! Christianity involves a great paradox: It is the religion whereby in order truly to live one must first die. Christ died to set men free from the slavery of sin; when we *die to self* we can *live for God*, thereby helping others to see more clearly their need for God and His will for them (Jn. 15:13; Rom. 5:8ff; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 2:20)!

Truly, Jesus is the best example found anywhere of a *true* friend. Let us endeavor to be the kind of friend that Jesus is to those who love him!

"You are my friends if you do whatever I command you" —Jesus (Jn. 15:14). WOT

# THE BAD, THE GREAT, THE HEAVENLY

James E. Haynes, Jr., Pottsboro, Texas

The book of Ephesians has been considered by some to be one of the most difficult books in the New Testament. In this book the Apostle Paul requires that the reader join him in venturing into eternity in order to see God's marvelous plan for saving mankind from sin through Jesus Christ and His Church. Of course, we all know and are aware of the difficulties we face when we try to step into eternity in any matter. Have you considered the origin of God lately?

In studying the book of Ephesians, one cannot help but be edified and challenged by the sentiments of Ephesians 2:1-10. In this short section of Scripture we see the Bad, the Good, and the Heavenly.

In Ephesians 2:1-3 we definitely see the **Bad**. Of course, this section of Scripture has at least two purposes for us today. First, if we are Christians we realize just how far we have come. Once we were lost in sin and now we are saved by God's grace and mercy! "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

Second, if you are not a child of God, you can see where you stand in view of

God's grace and mercy. Even though God's grace has been provided to all mankind (Tit. 2:11), you have not responded to it; therefore you stand in desperate need of it. You have absolutely no hope in that condition! In essence you are physically alive but spiritually dead. Paul stated, "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In this position you stand condemned before the eternal God of heaven (cf. Rom. 8:1; Col. 2:13).

In Ephesians 2:4-6, inspiration introduces us to the **Great**. Yes, God is rich in mercy because of His great love. God truly loves you! Never forget that. God is interested in you and particularly your eternal soul. He wants you to spend eternity with Him in Heaven (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Never forget some of these passages that highlight God's love for every individual. "For God so loved . . ." (Jn. 3:16); and "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8).

In addition, the Apostle Paul directs our attention to the Grace of God. We are saved by the Grace of God! If we ever enter into that "prepared place" (Jn. 14:2), it will be because of God's marvelous grace. Paul

bluntly says, ". . . by grace you have been saved"! However, one must respond to God's grace before he can be saved by God (Col. 2:11-13; Acts 2:38). The "free gift" has been offered but the individual must choose to accept it!

In Ephesians 2:7-10, we can clearly see the **Heavenly**. Paul says, ". . . that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). This is certainly a heavenly thought indeed! Do you remember Ephesians 2:1-3? Every single individual of accountable age has disobeyed God's will but still God is going to show unto His children "the exceeding riches of His grace." Why is God so good to us?

Dear friend, I hope this article has been encouraging to you! Where do you stand with God? Do you love Him? Have you obeyed Him? It seems only natural that we would respond with reciprocal love and adoration for Him. God's love, mercy, and grace should be an overwhelming motivation for our obedience to His will in all things. WOT

## THE HOLY SPIRIT "ILLUMINATION" THEORY: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

There is a doctrine, quite common in the denominational community, that is making its presence increasingly felt among the people of God. It is the notion that the Christian has the promise of a direct "illumination of the Holy Spirit" in interpreting the text of the Bible.

The theory suggests that the Scriptures, as they presently stand, are incapable of being thoroughly understood (and, by implication therefore, the divine message is incomplete; yet see: 2 Tim. 3:16-17). And so, in addition to the biblical record (as approached with correct methods of interpretation), it is alleged that there must be a direct working of the Spirit of God upon the heart of the Bible student, thus effecting an "illumination" that brings into sharper focus the meaning of the divine text.

### The History of the Doctrine

The "illumination" view is not new; actually, it is a part of the residue of the old concept of human hereditary depravity. This is the idea that man is so hopelessly

depraved by virtue of Adam's fall, that the Scriptures are incomprehensible to his blighted mind. This dogma was popularized most prominently by John Calvin (A.D. 1509-1564).

Some of the early "church fathers" introduced the idea that the guilt of Adam's sin was contracted by all of his descendants. Tertullian (A.D. 150-222) contended that a person inherits both his body and his spirit from his parents (*De Anima*, chs. 23-41). Later, Augustine (A.D. 354-430) taught a similar idea. Cyprian (A.D. 200-258) had alleged that newborn infants inherit "the infection of the old death" from Adam (*Epistle lviii*). Origen (c. A.D. 185-254) suggested that a child is polluted with sin "though [its] life be but the length of one day upon the earth" (*Homily in Luc. xiv*). On this account he argued that no Christian should celebrate the day of the birth (*Hom. in Leviticum*, viii.3).

And so, due to man's supposed "corrupted" nature, he cannot understand the Scriptures without direct divine

guidance. Calvin cited Paul's statement that "no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3) as proof of this dogma (see Calvin's *Institutes*, II,II,20-21).

But this Corinthian passage merely asserts that belief in Christ's lordship is dependent upon the revelatory mission of the Spirit. To suggest that it affirms that each individual must have a direct, personal enlightenment of the Spirit is to assume more than the text states. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Scriptures; apart from that body of information, no man can declare Christ's lordship. Hence, ultimately, this precious affirmation must be attributed to the Spirit. But this by no means establishes the "direct illumination" theory.

Calvin likely borrowed the "illumination" idea from Augustine, for, as Norman Geisler has noted, the north African theologian not only taught that the Holy Spirit is "the means by which we receive God-written revelation" (*Confessions* 7.21), He is necessary [also] for illuminating and confirming its truth" (*Homily VI*) (quoted in: *Baker*

*Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999, p. 331).

Other reformers, e.g., Luther and Zwingli, taught similar ideas respecting the need for some special power of the Holy Spirit in order that one might be empowered to comprehend the Scriptures. This notion has filtered down to many in the modern world of sectarianism.

Henry C. Thiessen, a Baptist writer, wrote:

[T]he illumination of the Holy Spirit . . . is vouchsafed to every believer . . . [which will] enable us to understand the revelation God has already made of Himself, especially that revelation of Him in the Scriptures (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949, p. 45).

Roy Zuck, a former Bible professor at Dallas Theological Seminary (whom this writer highly regards), has authored a book titled *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991). In this otherwise valuable volume, Zuck contended mightily for the idea that “[n]o one can fully comprehend the meaning of the Bible unless he is regenerate” (p. 22). He further affirmed that even the Christian “must also depend upon the Holy Spirit” for a correct view of the Scriptures. He quoted H.C.G. Moule who wrote: “The blessed Spirit is not only the true Author of the written Word but also its supreme and true Expositor” (p. 23; emp. WJ).

#### An Analysis

The doctrine of the “illumination of the Holy Spirit” is not defensible—either on a scriptural or logical basis. Consider the following points.

1. The passages that are appealed to as proof for the dogma are grounded either in unwarranted assumptions that are imposed upon them (see the reference to 1 Cor. 12:3 cited above), or else the alleged proof-passages are extracted from their original contexts and misapplied.

For example, John 16:13 frequently is employed to prove the idea of special “illumination” (see Zuck, p. 24). “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. . . .” But this text refers to the apostles (and, by implication, others who were to be endowed with miraculous teaching powers). Those so empowered would be proclaiming the gospel in that time-period preliminary to the completion of the New Testament canon. This promise from the Lord does not have a direct application to Christians today (see 14:16-17,26; 15:26-27; 16:12-16; cf. also Matt. 10:19-20; Lk. 21:14-15). It is a travesty to misuse these

contexts in such an irresponsible fashion.

2. If the Holy Spirit illuminates the mind of the Christian student, is He as infallible as an “expositor” as He was initially in His role of “author” of the sacred message? If not, why not? Furthermore, how would one know if, or when, he has been “illuminated”? If he affirms that he has been illuminated with reference to a particular passage, may he ever alter his view of that text? If so, did the Spirit misdirect him earlier?

If one has been illuminated regarding a passage, are all others who take a different view in error? If two people, both of whom claim illumination, differ on the interpretation of a passage, how could one know which of these is correct—or if either is? If the Holy Spirit could not make the Scriptures comprehensible the first time around (by the “revelation” process), how could one be confident that He could do so the second time around (by the “illumination” process)?

Note Zuck’s concession. He says that the Spirit’s role in illumination “does not mean that one’s interpretations are infallible” (p. 24). This is woefully inconsistent with the esteemed professor’s endorsement of Moule, namely that the Spirit is both Author and Expositor of the Scriptures for the believer. And why is it that many of these men, who accept this position, are at such variance with one another in their doctrinal positions? Common sense says that something is seriously wrong with this theory.

3. If the Holy Spirit provides illumination to men today, why do scholars, who subscribe to this ideology, write books instructing folks as to the proper methods of Bible interpretation (as professor Zuck has done)? Such efforts would not be of value to the unbeliever, who has “no spiritual capacity for welcoming and appropriating spiritual truths” (Zuck, p. 22). And they should not be needed by one who has the illuminating Spirit, the alleged “Expositor” of truth.

4. What if one proposed the following? Select two spiritual Christian people and put them in separate rooms. Provide them with a difficult biblical text, with which each person is equally unfamiliar. Let one of them have access to a good library of reference works, and provide the other with nothing but an empty room and the “illumination of the Spirit.” Allow each several hours of concentration. Then have each of them write his explanation of the obscure text. It can be guaranteed that the person with the library will have a better grasp of the passage than the one who has relied solely on the “presence” of the Spirit.

If someone should object to such a test, one need only appeal to the admonition of Christ’s apostle: “Beloved, believe not every spirit [i.e., every person making a religious claim], but prove [test – ESV] the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). Indeed, and some of them are teaching that the Spirit directly “illuminates” them!

5. The doctrine of special illumination contradicts the clear testimony of Scripture, namely the explicit affirmation that the devout student is able to understand the Word of God as given originally.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian brethren he affirmed that “when you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4). The apostle did not suggest that “reading”—plus a special intervention of the Spirit—would be required.

Later, he admonished these saints: “Wherefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). If the theory under review is true, and if the Christian does not understand the will of the Lord—even though he studies diligently—the responsibility must be laid at the feet of the Holy Spirit.

6. Finally, Paul’s testimony could not be clearer. The inspired Scriptures are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures alone are sufficient for man’s understanding of the divine will.

#### Conclusion

We have no doubt but that many of those who advocate the theory of “special illumination” are sincere. But sincerity does not guarantee accuracy (Acts 23:1; 26:9).

Moreover, it should be a matter of great concern to church leaders that so many of our people are beginning to use this sort of language, reflecting unsound beliefs that they have adopted regarding the Spirit’s operation.

The problem is this. We have numerous Christians these days who have a most superficial knowledge foundation in New Testament doctrine. Combine this fact with the reality that many constantly are feeding themselves (or are being fed by others) on sectarian literature that is rank with such ideas. There is an inevitable result in the wake of such a course.

Surely it is time for some serious teaching in the church of the Lord on matters pertaining to the Holy Spirit. WOT

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Question:** "How are we, as Christians, supposed to feel about the death penalty of a convicted person?"

**Answer:** If the accused died while still in rebellion to God, we should be sorry that he lost his soul—the same emotion we feel when any unbeliever dies. This sadness, however, is not to be equated with opposition to the death penalty. In fact, it is mitigated by our appreciation of the fact that God's charge to punish evildoers has been properly rendered.

God gave this "life for life" principle after the flood: "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man" (Gen. 9:6). The Mosaic covenant makes repeated references to capital crimes:

- Hitting one's parents (Ex. 21:15).
- Kidnaping (Ex. 21:16).
- Cursing your father and mother (Ex. 21:17).
- Killing an unborn child (Ex. 21:22-25).
- One who owns a violent animal that kills someone (Ex. 21:28-29).
- Witchcraft (Ex. 22:18).
- Worship of false gods/goddesses (Ex. 22:20).
- Working on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:2).
- Adultery (Lev. 20:10).
- Incest (Lev. 20:11-12,14).
- Sodomy (Lev. 20:13).
- Bestiality (Lev. 20:15-16).
- False prophesying (Deut. 13:1-10).

We are no longer bound by the Old Testament, of course, but the principle is reiterated in the New Testament by Paul, who recognized this God-given responsibility of governments: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. . . . For he [the ruler] is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger

to execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Rom. 13:1,4). One does not "slap wrists" with a sword—the implication is clear: governments are obligated to respond to capital crimes with appropriate measures.

Some, however, object to this principle by suggesting that the Old Testament command, "You shall not kill," forbids all killing. As Jason Jackson suggests, "The Sixth Commandment is no real objection to capital punishment. The commandment is a prohibition against murder. In the next chapter, the law of Moses authorized Israel to execute the murderer (Ex. 21:12). To use the Sixth Commandment as an objection to capital punishment is a misrepresentation of Scripture" ("Timothy McVeigh and Capital Punishment," *Christian Courier on the Web*, 28 May 2001, <<http://www.christiancourier.com/penpoints/timMcveigh.htm>>).

—Chuck Webster

**Question:** "I've heard members of the church of Christ say that a Christian can sin and fall from grace. Could you cite an example from the Scriptures of where this actually occurred?"

**Answer:** There are a number of examples which we might study. Here is one:

1. "Simon the sorcerer" met the conditions of salvation and became a Christian. Having heard the preaching of Philip concerning Christ as well as being an eye-witness to the miracles which he performed, Simon, like many of his fellow-Samaritans (Acts 8:12), believed and was baptized. "Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip . . ." (Acts 8:13) Jesus taught, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved . . ." (Mk. 16:16). Hence, Simon was a Christian.

2. However, being a new convert [and thus a spiritual babe], Simon fell from grace when he offered Peter and John money for the ability to perform miracles. "Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 8:18-19).

3. Peter in turn responded to Simon's fall by urging repentance and prayer. "But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with

you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity'" (Acts 8:20-23).

Consider:

- Who would perish with the money?
- Why would Peter urge repentance and prayer for forgiveness if Simon had not fallen?
- What did Peter say about Simon's heart?
- Why would Simon request prayer on his own behalf if he had not fallen?

Note the progression: a) Simon became a Christian (cf. Acts 2:38), he b) fell from grace (cf. Gal. 5:4; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 4:10), and was therefore told to c) repent and pray (cf. 1 Jn. 1:7-9).

"In order to account for the infamous proposal of Simon, we must remember his former mode of life and consider the mental habits which it generated. As a sorcerer, it had been his business to increase his stock in trade by purchasing from other sorcerers the secret of tricks which he could not himself perform, and watching for opportunities to make such purchases. When he saw the apostles impart to men the power to work real miracles, he at once perceived that here was a chance for profit far beyond that which he had abandoned. His overruling avarice, mingled with a passion for popular applause, a passion which his former habits had also cultivated, prompted him to make the offer; and the blinding effect of these passions prevented him from seeing the wickedness of either offering money for this power, or of intending to sell it to others" [J. W. McGarvey, "A Wicked Proposal by Simon," *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles*, p. 146].

—Mike Benson


  
**e-mail**  
 your questions to...

**sixthavenue@tds.net**

# “WILL YOU NOT TELL IT TODAY?”

*Adam Faughn, Haleyville, Alabama*

We sing the words quite often, usually at the conclusion of a worship service: “If the name of the Savior is precious to you; if His care has been constant and tender and true; if the light of His presence has brightened your way; O will you not tell of your gladness today?”

How do we approach that song? Do we sing it only to others? We might be thinking, “Look, that trained Bible class teacher over there needs to share the gospel with his neighbors.” We might be thinking, “Isn’t this the preachers’ or the elders’ responsibilities?” Both of those thoughts, of course, are true. The person sitting across from you needs to be sharing the gospel, as do the preachers and the elders. But so do you!

When Jesus gave the Great Commission He did not say, “Send out a few of you to tell people about Me.” He gave us marching orders to be followed. We are to go into “all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15-16). No single person can do that. It takes all of us.

Peter said that we are a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). In the Old Testament, the priests were the chosen caretakers of God’s commands. They were to see that things were done in the proper way. When done correctly, it was an honorable and exalted position.

What a wonderful thought! In the Christian age, we are *all* priests. God has entrusted you and me with the charge of making sure things are done in His ways. It is true that elders are to lead, or shepherd, each individual congregation. It is also true that evangelists are to proclaim publicly God’s Word. It is true that ~~deacons~~ deacons are to be special servants. But all of us (including elders, evangelists, and deacons) are takers of God’s Word—or we should be.

What are you doing with God’s saving message? Do your neighbors know where you attend worship? Do they know of God’s love for them? Do you show them your concern and love for them? We have been given marching orders. They are to be followed!

Let us not just sit back and wait for people to come to us. We must take the saving message with us “as we go” (Matt. 28:19). Do you know someone who needs to hear the gospel? Set up a Bible study. Invite him or her to worship. Make it a point to fulfill your role as a New Testament priest.

“If the light of His presence has brightened your way, O will you not tell it *today?*”  
WOT



**Send us your questions!** We have already received a number of good questions from our readers to be addressed on page seven. If you have biblical questions, please submit them (anonymously, if you wish) in any of the following ways:

- E-mail: [sixthavenue@tds.net](mailto:sixthavenue@tds.net) Mail: Editor, *The Words of Truth*, Sixth Avenue Church of Christ, 1501 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., Jasper, AL 35501
- Fax: 205-302-0595
- Phone: 205-384-6446

## 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.

Please send all correspondence to:

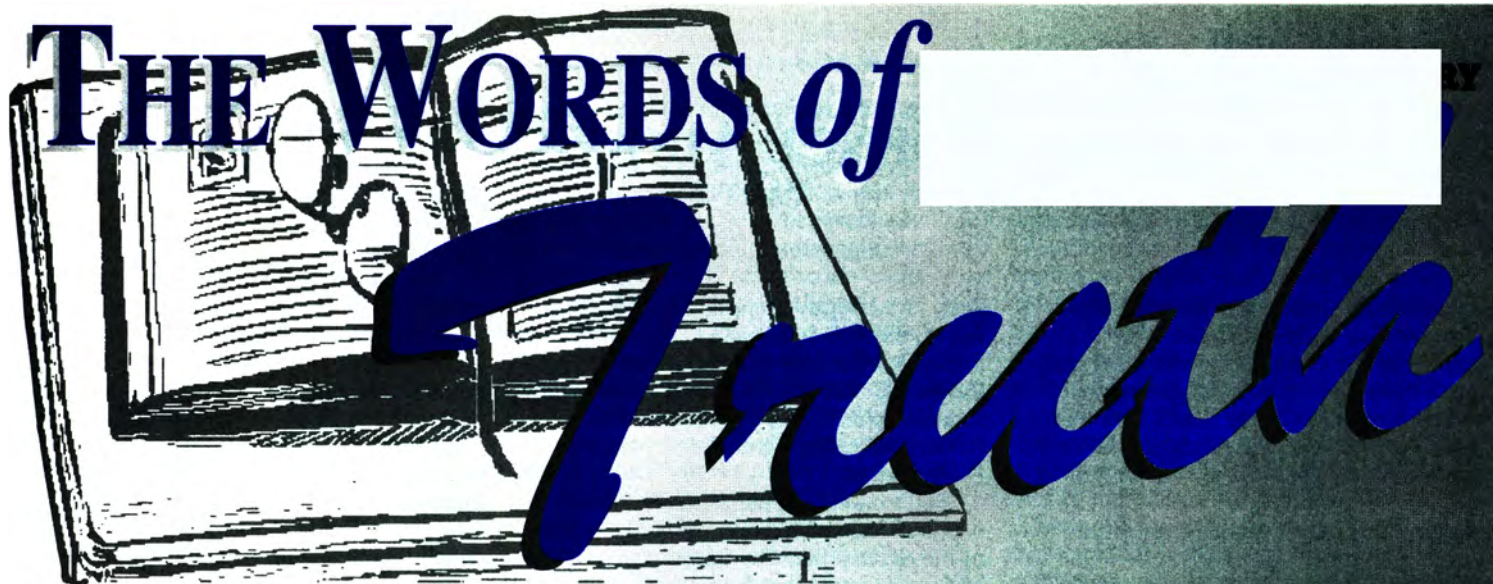
### The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: [sixthavenue@tds.net](mailto:sixthavenue@tds.net)

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411

Address Service Requested





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

## KING SOLOMON'S DEADLY MISTAKE

*Neal Pollard, Mechancsville, Virginia*

Laura Elliott, first grade Bible class teacher at the Cold Harbor Road congregation, was teaching my son Dale's class about King Solomon's three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines, about how not only was it wrong to have so many wives but how difficult it must have been for Solomon to keep up with all of their names. Laura tells me that Dale's solution was simple: "Couldn't he just call them all 'honey'?" If only keeping up with their names was Solomon's most serious task with regard to these women!

Reading 1 Kings 11, right off the heels of Solomon's hosting of the Queen of Sheba and the extremely opulent exchange of gifts between them, we are impressed with an incredible flaw in Solomon's character. Perhaps Ecclesiastes was written later enough in his life after 1 Kings 11 that he realized, with regret, the folly of such a lifestyle. Consider some things about Solomon's deadly mistake.

First, his mistake was in whom he had such great affection (1 Kgs. 11:1-2). They were foreign women from nations with whom God explicitly forbade such fraternization! God knew that such worldly yoking would lead men to fall away from Him (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14ff; 1 Cor. 15:33). Be careful as to who is the object of your affection—choosing wrong is a deadly mistake!

Second, his mistake was in how he held them in affection (1 Kgs. 11:1-2). These women of the world were

apparently beautiful and seductive. The word for "love" in these two verses speaks more to physical attraction and very little, if at all, to pure, spiritual love. It might be said that Solomon pursued these women from lust. From his own pen, he wrote of how dangerous such pursuit is (Prov. 5; 6:24-35; 7:5-27; etc.). To follow his example today is a deadly mistake!

Third, his mistake was in what his affection for them led him to do (1 Kgs. 11:3-10). It led him to worship the idols revered by these pagan women. It also led him to ignore God's commands and even outright rebel against them! The natural consequence of following in his footsteps is the same today—a choice must be made. Choosing the path of sensuality prevents one from obeying God. Obeying God makes it impossible to, at the same time, pursue such a sinful path. Choose like he did, and you make a deadly mistake!

Finally, his mistake was in what his affection for them cost him (1 Kgs. 11:11). His pursuit of these women cost him the kingdom! God took it from him through the rebellion of Jeroboam and the folly of Rehoboam, his son. Following Solomon's example is costly! It will often cost one dearly—financially, socially, and physically. Lacking repentance, it will surely cost one eternally! Yet, so many are imitating Solomon's deadly mistake!

May we take a page from inspiration and learn from Solomon's deadly mistake.

# CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT IMMERSION

## PART 2

Chuck Webster, Editorial

In last month's editorial I included a portion of my correspondence with a member of our community who disagreed with a newspaper article suggesting that biblical baptism is immersion. I continue the record of that correspondence in this issue.

### From a member of our community:

Dear Chuck:

Thank you for responding to my letter dated \_\_\_\_\_. I have written to others, especially those of the hyper-Calvinistic persuasion and have failed to get a written response.

Let me say that in all my conversing with you that I shall always act in a manner that is honorable and polite. I shall not resort to name-calling or cutting remarks. I want our discussions to be as though we were sitting in our living room with our family looking and listening to our conversation, and I'm sure that you feel the same.

At this time I shall not address your remarks concerning baptism as a burial; of course, you know I shall disagree. I will take up the "much water" and the eunuch at a later time also. These are three discussions themselves. I'm looking at Acts 2 and your answers to my questions concerning when, where, and how.

Your assumption of my believing that immersion of the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost would not be possible is correct, as it would not be answering Scripture with Scripture to say that they were immersed since the word "immersion" is not found in the King James Bible. I told you in my first letter that I would use my Bible for a commentary. I wish to be like your slogan, "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent."

I would like for you to address Luke 3:16: "I indeed **baptize** you **with** water—but he shall **baptize** you **with** the Holy Ghost" and also Acts 2:17: "and it shall come to pass in the last days saith God, I will **pour out** of my Spirit" (all emp. in original letter, unless otherwise noted—cw). John calls this, that which the 120 received, a **baptizing**. Peter and Joel call it a **pouring out**.

Anytime there is a baptizing, whether it be with water or with the Holy Ghost, the substance is applied to the candidate and not the candidate to the substance. See Acts 8:16 and Acts 11:15, where Peter

said, "As I began to speak the Holy Ghost **fell** on them as on us in the beginning." See Acts 19:6. Not one time will you find the phrase "baptized in water" in the King James Bible. Again, I speak where the Bible speaks, and I am silent where the Bible is silent.

You said that perhaps one who was baptized began baptizing others. Now I am of the opinion that there were ladies in that 3,000. We know that there were in the 120. Did they administer baptism? Did the 3,000 come with additional clothing?

I attended the Church of Christ as a teenaged boy, and it seems that I can recall something about their saying baptism must be administered by a proper minister to a proper candidate in a proper manner. I can remember a question and answers before placing one under the water—would you please refresh my recollection in your reply?

You said that there were pools in Jerusalem that were suitable for the task of baptism by immersion. I will ask you to please give me the names of those pools.

To summarize, please address the words "pouring out," the applying of the substance to the candidate, those that helped in the baptizing, the dressing rooms, etc., the questions and answers of those baptizing and being baptized, also the names of the pools, fountains, and other places that are compatible for immersing 3,000 in one day in the city of Jerusalem.

None of the emphases found in this letter are found in the King James Bible—they belong to the writer.

Thanks again, Chuck. You may call me \_\_\_\_\_ if you please. I have certainly been called worse in times past. I will be watching for your reply.

Your friend,

### My response:

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

I thank you for your kind demeanor in this fruitful exchange; discussions such as this one are profitable to people who are seeking truth. Like you, I pledge never to resort to cutting remarks or distasteful comments.

I agree wholeheartedly with your emphasis on "speaking where the Bible

speaks, and being silent where the Bible is silent." Using a lexicon, however, does not violate that principle, when we use it to define the words that the Holy Spirit chose to use. For example, if you or I wanted to discover the meaning of the word "prevent" used in the King James Version of 1 Thessalonians 4:15, it would be helpful to look at the Greek word translated "prevent." Obviously, the word does not carry the same meaning that it does in modern-day English (to deflect, deter, preclude, etc.), but rather means "to precede" or "go before." I believe you would agree that using a lexicon in that way would not violate the above-stated principle. In the same way, it is perfectly reasonable to consult lexicons to define the words that God chose to use, knowing that He communicated His will to us in the language of the people. That was the reason I quoted a lexicon before: to determine what God meant when He used the word *baptizo*.

I will now respond to your argument from Luke 3:16 and Acts 2:17. The Bible teaches only the twelve apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 (instead of the entire 120), but that does not influence our present discussion. Was this baptism an immersion or a "pouring out" (Acts 2:17)? I agree that, when Jesus spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, what He was predicting there did in fact take place on the day of Pentecost following His ascension back to the Father. And in that text, the apostles were "baptized with the Holy Spirit." Furthermore, as you suggested, the text affirms that the Holy Spirit was "poured forth" in fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:17). But, notice carefully, that is not called the baptism. That is the means by which the Holy Spirit arrived on that situation. He was "poured forth," but the fact is that these people were later said then to have been **baptized** in the Holy Spirit. The result of the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit was that these people were immersed or overwhelmed in Him. The Holy Spirit was not just lightly touched upon those men. They were **overwhelmed by the Spirit**. Jesus had earlier said that they would be! He said, "You will be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). I can say that the heavens **pour forth** their rain, and that the heavens having poured forth their rain into a lake,—or a river or an ocean or some gathered and put into a baptistry—that one is **immersed in** that element. And that is precisely what happened here. The Holy Spirit was

"poured forth"; but notice the **object** of the verb "to pour." **The Holy Spirit is poured.** "Baptize" also takes an object. **Who is baptized?** The apostles. The apostles are not "poured"; the Holy Spirit is poured. The apostles are **baptized**. Both verbs take an object and they do not have the same object in this text. Do you believe that the apostles, when they were baptized, were influenced mildly by the Holy Spirit, or overwhelmed (clothed with)? The Scriptures have no objection to pouring water, as long as the water is poured out sufficiently to overwhelm (immerse) the individual being baptized. In fact, that is how the water came to be in our baptistries—it was poured there. But the result is that people are immersed, just as in the case of the apostles: the Holy Spirit was poured out; the apostles were immersed in Him.

You asked a question about the presence of ladies and another about additional clothing. I agree with you that ladies must have been present. The Bible does not say whether they assisted in the baptisms or not. I know of no biblical passage that would prohibit their doing so, unless one were to believe that the application of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 would preclude such. Certainly, since spiritual leadership roles are reserved for men, it would be wise to use men if enough were available. It also seems apparent in this case that, like I stated in the first letter, the twelve apostles could easily have done all of the immersing in less than four hours, so it certainly would not have been necessary.

Concerning the question of additional clothing, the Bible does not say. As you know, people from all over the ancient world were present in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11), so it

would seem likely that they had brought changes of clothing with them on their journey. But regardless, whether they had changes of clothing or not, it would not have been an obstacle to believers who desired to obey God's command and reenact the burial and resurrection of the Lord in whom they now believed.

I know of no Scripture or principle that requires that baptism be administered by a "proper minister," and thus I am unaware of any church of Christ that requires such. Likewise, there is no question and answer period before baptism, other than perhaps one similar to the dialogue Philip and the eunuch engaged in, resulting in the eunuch's confessing Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

Concerning the pools in Jerusalem, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states: "A major determining factor in the location of cities in antiquity was the available water supply. For Jerusalem there was only one spring. To meet the needs of the growing city, water had to be collected during the rainy season or brought in by aqueducts and stored in pools and underground cisterns" (Vol. 2, p. 1002). The article goes on to discuss the Spring Gihon, the En-rogel, and Jackal's Well. In another article in the same encyclopedia, the writer discusses the "upper pool," the "lower pool," the "old pool," the "King's pool," and the "Pool of Shelah" (Vol. 3, p. 904). Furthermore, the writer says, "Excavations at the south wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem have uncovered a number of mikvot (pools, cw). According to one interpreter, persons who wished to go into the temple enclosure were required to purify themselves at these mikvot. Another has suggested that these mikvot were where

the three thousand were baptized on the day of Pentecost. Both suggestions need further confirmation" (p. 904). J.W. McGarvey writes: "As to the quantity of available water, Dr. J.T. Barclay, in his work entitled *The City of the Great King*, written during a residence of three years and a half in Jerusalem, as a missionary, shows that Jerusalem was anciently better supplied with water than any other city known to history not permeated by living streams. Even to the present day, though most of the public reservoirs are now dry, such as the supposed pool of Bethesda, 365 feet long by 131 in breadth, and the lower pool of Gihon, 600 feet long by 260 in breadth, there are still in existence bodies of water, such as the pool of Siloam, and the pool of Hezekiah, affording most ample facilities for immersing any number of persons" (*Original Commentary on Acts*, p. 45).

If you would, I would like for you to address the meaning of the word *baptizo*. After all, that is the word that God chose to use, so we ought to find out what it means. Remember that the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to speak and write in the common language of the people in the way they would have understood the words of their native language. Please address baptism as a burial (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12). Please address the language the inspired historian Luke used when recording the baptism of the eunuch (Acts 8:38-39).

I am enjoying our discussion; may God bless our pursuit of truth.

In Christ,  
Chuck Webster

The record of this exchange will conclude in next month's editorial. WOT

## HOW TO KILL A CHURCH

*Chad Dollahite, Ariton, Alabama*

One of the more familiar aspects of the book of Revelation is the set of letters written to the seven churches of Asia. John was told to write a specific letter to each church. One of these churches was the church in Sardis, and the contents of this letter are found in Revelation 3:1-6. One of the most distinguishing (and often most remembered) features of this letter is the statement made to the church at Sardis, "thou livest, and art dead" (v. 1). Here is presented an interesting paradox—a church that is alive, yet dead. We use the terms "alive" and "dead" many times in discussing various congregations, sometimes using the terms very loosely, sometimes using the terms quite accurately.

Nevertheless, Revelation 3:1-6 teaches us that a church can, in fact, become "dead" in the eyes of the Lord. Surely, no congregation desires to hear from the Lord, "thou livest, and art dead," but the sad fact is that a church can become dead in the eyes of its Founder and Head, Jesus Christ. What exactly is it, then, that kills a church? There could be any number of reasons given from Scripture, but we will here note five specific things that kill a church.

**1. Unlived truth kills a church.** Paul begins Colossians 3 by saying, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection

on things above, not on things on the earth" (vv. 1-2). He then goes on to instruct those brethren to make sure they do not live as they did before they became Christians. A great deal of New Testament writing is devoted to the task of getting the first-century brethren to understand that, in baptism, the old man of sin is put to death and, thus, that old man cannot and must not be allowed to live any longer. As Paul himself put it, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2). One of the fastest ways to kill a church is for the members to fail to live the truth of God. Unlived truth is like a cancer that spreads throughout the rest of the congregation, ultimately killing that

church. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9). If the cancer of unlive truth is in a congregation, then it is time to go to the Great Physician for immediate surgery (cf. Lk. 5:31)!

**2. An uncommitted majority kills a church.** Notice that our text says, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments" (Rev. 3:4). Yet, the church was still referred to as being dead. The text goes on to say of those who had not defiled their garments, "they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (vv. 4b-5). The righteous members of a church will not be lumped in with the lost at judgment, but if there is an uncommitted majority in any church, it will only affect the church negatively, eventually killing the church in that location. Each church member ought to be committed to the Lord: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). A church where the majority of its members are committed to God and doing His will is a living church!

**3. Unholy unions kill a church.** The word "union" is defined as: "(1a) The act of uniting. (1b) A combination thus formed, esp. a confederation of persons, parties, or political entities for mutual interest. (2a) A partnership in marriage. (2b) Sexual intercourse" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Sadly, one does not need to look very far to find unholy "unions" that fit under every definition of the word "union." We ought to remember first of all that Jesus told us, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other . . ." (Matt. 6:24). Our most important union as Christians is to God, and any union that would conflict with that should be avoided (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). Unholy unions will kill a congregation.

*Unholy unions with sinners will kill a church.* "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). Jesus certainly associated with publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:10), but He never made an unholy union with them. His admonition was always something similar to His statement to the adulterous woman: "go, and sin no more" (Jn. 8:11).

*Unholy marital/sexual unions will kill a church.* Both immoral sexual activity and adulterous marriages are classified

scripturally as unholy unions. Fornication is listed as one of the sins of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21), and Christians are told to flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18). To avoid fornication, every man is to have his own wife and every woman her own husband (1 Cor. 7:2). Any sexual union outside of marriage or with someone other than a scriptural spouse is an unholy union. Having entered into that holy union of marriage, a man and woman are to remain married until death parts them. Vows are made in marriage to be faithful to one another and to be joined to no other. Our world today has taken this holy union with a grain of salt. We see the holy union of marriage parted with hardly a second thought, and we see multiple marriages taking place. Jesus said, however, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matt. 19:9). There is only one scriptural reason for remarriage after a divorce, and that is the situation in which the innocent spouse puts his or her spouse away for fornication and then remarries. Yet, so often, men and women are deceived in order to make them "feel better" and told that they are perfectly acceptable in the sight of God in their adulterous marriage. Unholy unions will kill a church! If a couple can remain in an unholy union and be right with God, then why cannot the young teens engage in immoral sexual activity (unholy unions) and be right with God, too? Furthermore, why cannot the rest of the membership enter into and remain in an unholy union with sinners/the world? Why? Because unholy unions are sinful, they kill the church, and they must be abandoned in order to be right in God's sight.

*Unholy religious unions will kill a church.* Ours is a world filled with various denominations, and even the Lord's church in some places is departing from the truth. What, then, is to be the policy of the Lord's church toward these people? Paul speaks very plainly in Ephesians 5:11: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Notice he uses the word "no." That is absolute. Not a little bit, not in moderation, but no fellowship. Do we believe Paul wrote by inspiration (read 1 Cor. 14:37)? Then why do we so often fail to obey his command in this regard? John also makes it very clear in 2 John 9-11 that even bidding God-speed to those who pervert the gospel is wrong. If we do so little as to encourage the efforts of a false teacher, John says we become partaker of his evil deeds. Should we then be rude and unkind to these people? Absolutely not! Our Lord gave us the perfect example for

how to deal with any kind of person, and He never once acted in a way that was rude or unkind. He did not allow false teachers to trap Him or trick Him, but He never wavered in His desire for them to come to accept Him and obey His will (cf. Matt. 23:37). We should display a similar attitude toward any who are not following the Bible—we should strive to teach them the truth, yet never allow them to dictate how we worship, live, or serve God. As Christians, we are married to Christ (Rom. 7:1-4). Any other religious union constitutes nothing less than spiritual adultery. It could not be any clearer from Scripture that, as Christians, to fellowship or in any way support any type of false teaching, whether it is that of a denominationalist or a false teacher among the Lord's body, is an unholy union of the basest sort.

**4. Unconcerned members will kill a church.** Far too often in the Lord's church, apathy abounds. It is my opinion that there are few ways to kill a church quicker than to place unconcerned members within its numbers. Paul compares the church to the human body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-20. Each member of the church is a part of the body of Christ. For the physical body to be its healthiest and most productive, each part must be working and functioning properly. Likewise each member of the church must be working and functioning properly if the Lord's church is to be healthy and productive. What a sad time it is when members simply become unconcerned and care nothing about working for and being productive in the local congregation! What about each of us? Are we working and being productive, or are we plagued with indifference?

*Unconcerned leadership will kill a church.* We see elders in the Lord's church that are also beset with apathy. Elders sometimes seem unconcerned about the work and purity of the church that they invite false teachers to preach to the congregation. Furthermore, we see elders themselves initiating unscriptural activities and then becoming participants. Brethren, this is nothing less than sheer indifference and disregard for what God would have elders to do and be. A concerned eldership guards the flock (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17), especially when it comes to unscriptural devices that would creep into a local congregation (cf. Eph. 5:11; 2 Jn. 9-11).

A concerned eldership will likewise be zealous in feeding the flock of God with sound Bible teaching and preaching (Acts 20:28). Furthermore, concerned leaders in a church will do everything in their power to ensure the spiritual well-being of the members of that church. When members are absent, the leadership will find out why

and work to bring them to repentance if need be (Gal. 6:1). A concerned leadership will be concerned enough not to allow anything contrary to the will of God to go on in the congregation that they oversee. Finally, concerned leaders will be so concerned about the church that they will plan for the future. The wise man said (by inspiration), "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). The word used for vision indicates teaching, instruction, and also planning. A church leadership that makes no future plans (short-term and long-term goals, etc.) is an unconcerned leadership. And, as the saying goes, "When we fail to plan, then we plan to fail!"

*Unconcerned evangelists will kill a church.* Preachers of all church members, ought to be the most concerned of all; yet, there are a number of so-called preachers with severe apathy toward the Lord's church. Again, such would be denied vehemently were these people asked outright, but their actions tell the truth. The work of a preacher could not be any plainer than what Paul stated in 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word." Even so, we look all around today and see so-called preachers preaching what they think, what they feel, humorous stories, and so on. As one preacher put it, "If you don't fill your sermon with Bible, then you're not letting God get His say in." How true! But, so many preachers are not concerned about what "God's say" is because they are just plain not concerned at all. If something

will make people laugh, play on their emotions, make them feel good, or just get more people to show up, then many preachers are for it. Is such God's idea of a preacher? As the apostle Paul put it, "God forbid." God's idea of a preacher is a man like Micaiah, who said, "As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak" (1 Kgs. 22:14). Now, that is God's idea of a preacher, one who is concerned about his own spiritual well being, as well as that of those who hear him. The simple fact is, one cannot speak "what the Lord saith unto me" unless he is preaching from God's Word; that is what is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and that is what gives us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). Nothing else can do what God's Word can do (Jn. 8:32; cf. Jn. 17:17; Jam. 1:21; Acts 20:32; et al). Why, then, would anyone with any shred of concern for the Lord's church preach anything other than God's all-sufficient, inerrant, perfect Word?

**5. Unconfessed sin will kill a church.** God is a merciful God (Deut. 4:31; 2 Chr. 30:9; Neh. 9:17; et al), and He is anxious to forgive (2 Pet. 3:9; Neh. 9:17; Isa. 55:7). There can be no doubt that God wants to forgive, but there are certain prerequisites to obtaining His forgiveness. For the non-Christian, there must be belief in Jesus as the Christ (Jn. 8:24), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession of Christ's name (Rom. 10:10), and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38;

22:16). But, what about Christians who sin? God will not pardon the guilty (Nah. 1:3), but in 1 John 1:9, John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Unconfessed sin means unforgiven sin and, if such is allowed to continue, it will kill a church. The church has a responsibility to do something about those who refuse to confess sin, and that is eventually to withdraw fellowship (1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Thess. 3:6). Withdrawal of fellowship is a last resort, but it is done to keep the Lord's church pure, productive, and faithful. To do otherwise is to allow a deadly cancer to eat away at the church.

Yes, a church can become "dead," even while it is still alive in appearance. Unlived truth, an uncommitted majority, unholy unions, unconcerned members, and unconfessed sin will all kill a church outright. The Bible says that Christ will present the church to Himself "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). The only way this can happen is if the church is "alive" and productive. Lest we become like the church at Sardis, remember the words of Christ: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. 3:3). WOT

## MENTAL ILLNESS AND THE CHURCH

*Brad Harrub, Ph.D., Apologetics Press*

She sat across my desk and desperately longed for an answer. Should she respond to the invitation and repent of sins—such as missing the worship assembly (cf. Heb. 10:25) and using bad language (Col. 3:8)—or should she just not worry about it? This was not the first time I had been asked this question during a counseling session. But it was the first time that I did not immediately say, "Yes, you should repent."

The young lady who was sitting across from me was suffering from a mental illness—something our society handles very poorly. Yet according to recent statistics, this woman is far from being alone. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates 22.1 percent of Americans ages eighteen and older—about one in five adults—suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year. When applied to the 1998 U.S.

Census residential population estimate, this figure translates to 44.3 million people. Of this 44 million, a fraction develops conditions that require major treatment and medication. Today four of the ten leading causes of disability in the U.S. are mental disorders—major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Many of these individuals possess unstable neural chemistry—to the degree that they are unable to function in society or distinguish right from wrong.

### **What is Their Condition In God's Eyes?**

The woman's question was valid. She knew that after she stopped taking her medication she had lapsed into a condition in which she was "not herself." She had said things she normally would

not say. She had treated people in a way that she normally would not treat them. Yet, she also was smart enough to realize that this was not the first time she had been through this cycle, and that it likely was not going to be the last. So where do these individuals find themselves in light of God's Word? Are they walking "in the light," or has their lack of obedience to the gospel caused them to place their immortal souls in danger? Should I have answered her question with an immediate, "Yes, you must repent"? In evaluating the eternal salvation of these special individuals, we must assess what ability they possess to obey God's law. If, in doing so, we deem that they are unable to discern right from wrong, how, then, can we hold them accountable? In this particular case, the individual had been without medication for over six weeks, and consequently her brain

chemistry was nowhere near normal.

Mental illness often is brought about by an imbalance of chemicals (neurotransmitters) that are commonly used by the brain (i.e., serotonin, GABA). Some of these chemicals, like serotonin, are responsible for making us feel good and happy—and yet many Americans are unable to produce adequate quantities of these chemicals. You can imagine the exasperating consequences in patients who are unable to adequately regulate several of these important neurotransmitters. If the neuronal chemicals responsible for moral conscientiousness are physiologically unstable, then it is beyond the individual's capability to observe the edicts found in the New Testament. We commonly hear the phrase "age of accountability" within the church in reference to young people who have traversed from a "safe/innocent" state into a position of being responsible to God for their actions. Aside from age and physical maturity, is someone who is mentally handicapped any different from a young child? Neither has the capability of knowing and carrying out the commands of God. Does that change God's expectations? No, it does not. God does not change. But does this mental handicap change their **status** in God's eyes? Most assuredly! The mentally ill possess a "safe" status when it comes to their salvation, just as young children do.

Who would ever argue that infants and young children have sinned, and thus have need for repentance? They often are of such a young age that believing and confessing the name of Christ is impossible. Thus, as the examples in the New Testament demonstrate, children are not candidates to be buried with Jesus Christ in baptism for the remission of sins. While children do not come into contact with the blood of Jesus Christ, their very nature and innocence affords them safety in the eyes of the Lord. In fact, Christ Himself used children as an example when the disciples asked Him who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven: "And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Verily I say unto you, except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt. 18:2-3). David, following the death of his son by Bathsheba, informed us that the righteous one day would meet up with their children. After learning of the child's death, David stated: "But now he

is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23, emp. added). David **knew** that one day he would see his son again—a son that had been afforded a safe condition in the eyes of the Lord. The mentally ill are no different from this young baby. They, too, are unable to comprehend and follow the instructions found in the New Testament. However, this does not mean that the mentally ill will spend an eternity in torment. They, like children, have been granted safety in the eyes of God.

### **What Should A Christian's Response Be?**

While these numbers are staggering, the church remains eerily silent on how we should treat those who are suffering. As Christians, we need to realize that we have a role to play in caring for the mentally ill, just as we have for the physically ill. Christ never avoided individuals who exhibited signs or symptoms of mental illness. Rather, He showed compassion for them, and in many occasions healed them. Why is it, then, that we remain uneasy when people with these types of disorders suddenly affect our local congregation? As Christians, we must realize the great need for caring for the mentally ill (and their families), and we must support them as they struggle to get their condition stabilized.

What should a Christian's response be toward those who are suffering from a chemical imbalance in their brain? First and foremost, we must see it for what it is—an illness. Thus, mental illnesses should not be regarded as a weakness in the person's character. As many can attest, mental illness is not a respecter of persons. It affects the young, old, rich, and poor—no family is immune from illness and disease. Fortunately, major progress has been made in developing drugs that can help correct these imbalances. As such, Christians should acknowledge and understand that individuals suffering from mental illness may be on a whole host of medications, as physicians try to "tweak" the brain chemistry back to a normal state. Often, this is a tightrope-balancing act of trying to find just the right amounts of a particular drug, and not having the patient's life affected in a negative way, or having him or her suffer from unpleasant side-effects. Christians also should be aware that patients must

routinely have their medications "regulated" (often in a hospital environment) as their bodies change. This is nothing for patients to be ashamed of; rather, it is simply a common fact of life for individuals suffering from this condition.

Knowing that it is, in fact, an illness, we must stop avoiding individuals who suffer from mental illness. By becoming familiar with their moods, we can better identify periods in which additional treatment may be needed. We should also educate ourselves about the mentally ill and their plight. If we are properly informed, then many of our fears, misconceptions, and prejudices will vanish. As Christians, we also must seek ways to use the talents of those struck by mental illness. Additionally, we must start praying for these individuals—that if it be God's will, they are returned to a normal state. While every congregation cannot afford full-time counselors, every congregation should be able to help someone find competent help from caring Christians. Elders and preachers cannot (and should not) be expected to resolve all of the problems the mentally ill may face. But they should be prepared to provide names of qualified Christians who can.

Since many mentally ill individuals already suffer from profound guilt, we as Christians must not add to their guilt by questioning their faith, or judging their attendance. When Christ came upon the man with the unclean spirit, He did not admonish him for his behavior. He first healed the man. It was only afterwards that Jesus instructed the man, saying "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee and how he had compassion on thee" (Mk. 5:19). Consider the utter frustration you would feel, knowing you had involuntarily acted in a way contrary to God's Word during a recent episode (i.e., missing services from excessive sleep brought about by your disease), but knowing if you go forward and repent that you may be acting that same way in five to ten months. And yet, you know the behavior is brought about because of imbalanced brain chemistry. Our goal as Christians must be to help restore these individuals to a normal state, and care for them as they are struggling to reach that state. Jesus Christ did not avoid persons with these types of disorders, and neither should we. Our hearts should burn with compassion as we seek to serve. *WOT*

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



The first two questions—both dealing with songs—were submitted together:

**Question:** Could you give me some insight into these songs? In “O Why Not Tonight?” does “Believe, obey, the work is done” imply that there is nothing for us to do—“the work is done”?

**Answer:** Some songs have a Calvinistic slant, stressing the contention that we must do nothing in order to be saved (“Just believe and accept the gift”). We must be careful with the songs we sing, making certain that we are not singing error. This song, however, appears to be teaching a true principle. The most logical interpretation is the meaning that Christ’s work is done (at Calvary), and in order to appropriate that gift we must respond in obedience to the gospel (cf. Heb. 5:8-9). We must “believe” and “obey,” recognizing that the source of our salvation—the “work” of Christ—was completed at the cross. The belief that the song somehow implies that *all* work has been completed, and thus no human response is required, is unnecessary.

**Question:** In the song, “O Sacred Head,” what does the expression “How does that visage languish” mean?

**Answer:** “Visage” means “the face or facial expression of a person; countenance; appearance” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). “Languish” means “to become weak or feeble; lose strength or vigor; to exist or continue in miserable or disheartening conditions” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). The song contains words addressed to Christ, apparently as He hangs on the cross. Thus, His “sacred head” is “wounded” and “weighed down” with “grief and shame.” He is “pale with anguish” and His countenance (“visage”) has become weak (“languish”) because of the extreme duress. It is a song that expresses poignantly the horror of our Lord’s crucifixion.

**Question:** In Matthew 15:26, the New King James Version of the Bible says, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” The King James Version says, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs.” Is the word “little” an addition to God’s Word?

**Answer:** The Greek word for “dog” is *kunarium*, which means “a little dog, a puppy” (*Vine’s, Strong’s, Thayer’s*). Most of the major translations render it “dog,” but the NKJV’s choice of “little dog” is linguistically accurate.

**Question:** What happened to Satan during the flood?

**Answer:** Satan is of the demonic realm, so he would not have been destroyed by the physical flood, which destroyed all living flesh. Evidently, he temporarily inhabited the serpent in the garden of Eden for the purpose of tempting the human race, but there is no indication that he continued to inhabit any sort of living thing.

**Question:** If Adam and Eve were white, how did the black race get into the world?

**Answer:** As the brief discussion below will suggest, Adam and Eve were most likely *not* white, as the querist seems to believe. I lean heavily on an article by Bert Thompson for the following thoughts (“The Origin of ‘Races,’” *Essays in Apologetics*, Apologetics Press, vol. 5; the article is also available online at <http://www.apologeticspress.org/defdocs/rr1990/r&r9008a.htm>) and encourage our readers to consult his material for a fuller treatment. In that article brother Thompson writes:

Humans come in a rainbow of colors: sandy yellows, reddish-tans, creamy whites, pale pinks. And who among us is not curious about the skin colors, hair textures, bodily structures, and facial features associated with racial background. Why do many Africans have deep black skin, while that of most Europeans is pale pink? Why do the eyes of most “white” people and “black” people look pretty much alike but differ so much from the eyes of Orientals? Why do some races grow to over seven feet tall (e.g., African Watusis), while others are less than five feet (e.g., African Pygmies)? The answers to some of these questions, and others, may often be found in a study of the origin of various races (p. 177).

Brother Thompson explains that Adam and Eve most likely each had two dominant and

two recessive genes for skin color, resulting in their skin’s being middle-brown in color. However, the potential for all skin colors seen today would have been present in this combination. For example, the study of genetics teaches us that if they had sixteen children, statistically speaking, one would have been dark black, four would have been dark brown, six would have been middle-brown, four would have been light brown, and one would have been very white. Inter-marriage of all the races would have produced the various colors we see today.

**Question:** Please explain 1 Peter 5:3, especially regarding elders not being “lords.”

**Answer:** The phrase “being lords over” comes from one Greek word—*katakuriueuo*—which is translated in various ways: “exercise dominion over,” “overcome,” “exercise lordship over,” etc. It means “1) to bring under one’s power, to subject one’s self, to subdue, master; 2) to hold in subjection, to be master of, exercise lordship over” (*Strong’s*). In 1 Peter 5:3, other translations render it “lording it over” (NASB; ASV; NIV) and “domineering over” (RSV).

The meaning of the passage appears to be a contrast between leadership styles. Peter sets forth a stark contrast between elders who domineer and those who shepherd. Notice the latter part of the verse: “. . . but being *ensamples* to the flock.” The word “ensamples” suggests a pattern that can be followed. In other words, elders, instead of leading solely by “issuing orders,” should be showing the flock (the church) how to live. As Robert Taylor suggests, “These elders were to oversee but not overrule with a dictatorial hand or in highhanded fashion. They are shepherds—not heartless tyrants who enjoy being able to domineer all others. The flock they shepherd is styled God’s heritage. Hence, the flock is God’s—not the elders’ possession” (*Studies in 1 and 2 Peter*, p. 52).  
—Chuck Webster



sixthavenue@tds.net

# WHAT DID YOU BRING TO CHURCH?

*Kevin D. Beard, Fayette, Alabama*

When people come to the worship services, they often bring a number of different things with them. Parents of small children make sure that they have a diaper bag with plenty of clean diapers and supplies. Most people make sure that they have brought their Bibles and their lesson books for class. But of all the things that you bring with you to the worship on Sundays, did you make sure to bring the most important things?

**1. Did you bring a reverent attitude?** Worship is the expression of reverence, devotion, and praise to God. He is the most holy One (Isa. 6:3). Therefore, because of the nature of worship and the nature of the One to be worshiped, the attitude demonstrated therein will be different from the attitude expressed at a football game. Yet many times one could not notice much difference in the two. Some cause a commotion by continually getting up and leaving the auditorium, by talking, by passing notes, and by other common actions that often take place. God cannot be pleased with those who have so little respect and reverence for His divinity and power that they behave in such a way as this.

**2. Did you bring an active mind?** Worship is also something that must be done from the heart . . . which involves an active mind. God has always detested worship done simply from ritual (Isa. 1:10-17; Mic. 6:6-8). Worship is an active process, not a passive one. Singing is to "teach and admonish . . . with grace in your hearts" (Col. 3:16). Giving is to be cheerful, according to how one has purposed in his heart (2 Cor. 9:7). The Lord's Supper is to be observed in memory of Jesus' death, anticipating His return (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Prayer is also an active process that each must do (Jam. 5:16b). And, of course, the teaching and learning of God's Word take an active mind (Acts 2:42; 17:11).

**3. Did you bring a pure life?** One of the biggest reasons that God rejected Judah's worship was that their acts of worship were not done out of pure lives (Mic. 6:6-8). Such hypocrisy has always been wrong. Jesus even went so far as to say that if one comes to worship and realizes that his brother has something against him, he should first go and reconcile with his brother, then come and worship (Matt. 5:23-24).

Of all the things that we may bring with us to worship, let us always make sure that we bring those things that are most important. Otherwise our worship is vain.

*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.



### The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

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

Please send all correspondence to:

### The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





## THE OLD PATHS

*J.C. Choate, Winona, Mississippi*

In the long ago, God's prophet said, "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16). During those times, as has been true in all times, even up to this day, there were literal paths or roads that were treaded out—used and worn—that people in general traveled in getting from one point to the other. These were known, accepted, and they were safe. Likewise, on the spiritual side there were paths that God had given His people and He expected them to follow them. They were old and plainly marked. They were good and safe. It was not only wise to follow them but God asked His people to do so. Another prophet of God said, "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isa. 35:8). But instead of heeding God's wishes, they said, "We will not walk therein." How unwise this was, but again it is not unlike our own times.

Jesus Christ is the way for us today (Jn. 14:6), and He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). Again, He has set before us the broad and narrow ways, leaving it to each of us to choose the way we will travel (Matt. 7:13-14). One is broad, with many traveling upon it, and it leads to destruction. The other is narrow, strait, few are upon it, and it leads to eternal life. On which road are you traveling?

Let's further identify the Lord's way for those of our time. It is a way that is clearly revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Any and all who will take the time to read and study God's Word will know exactly what He requires. He wants us to know His will so that we may believe it and obey it. For instance, as we read and study His Word we will find that Christ not only died for us that we might be saved (Rom. 5:8), but He has given certain conditions or commands that we must comply with if we are to be saved. Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk. 16:16). Now that's the path we must take if we are to be saved. It's an old path, but it's the Lord's path, and there can be no other way.

As we continue to read and study the Scriptures we are told that on obeying the gospel of Christ, and being saved, that the Lord adds

us to the church (Acts 2:47). This is His church (Matt. 16:18), the one church that belongs to Christ (Eph. 4:4), the one He died for (Eph. 5:25), the one He is Savior of (Eph. 5:23), and the one that wears His name (Rom. 16:16). When we follow the Lord's path, His way, then we will be members of this church and no other.

When we follow the Lord's way we will worship Him each first day of the week (Acts 20:7), by assembling with other Christians to study (2 Tim. 2:15), to pray (Acts 2:42), to sing (Eph. 5:19), to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-25), and to give of our means (1 Cor. 16:2). Not only that, but the Word of God reveals the true path concerning all we should do and say in the name of religion (1 Pet. 4:11). This makes it possible for us not only to know God's will on these matters but also to do the things that would be acceptable to Him (Jam. 1:25).

Sad, but true, but all do not love the truth. There are any number of people who are satisfied to remain ignorant. They don't want to be bothered. They are what they are religiously and they want to remain where they are. As a result of their indifference and unconcern, they will be lost.

We ought always to keep an open mind and ever desire to know the Lord's will on all things that pertain to life and godliness. We should never be satisfied with anything less than the truth. It is only by knowing God's way that we can obey His will and travel upon that road that leads to that heavenly city, the New Jerusalem.

We invite you to join us as we return to the old paths that are set forth in God's Word. In so doing, you will not be following us and neither will we be following you, but together we will be following the Lord. We will be walking in His ways, doing those things that He wants us to do, what He would have us to be. Let us ask for the Lord's way, for His will in all things, being satisfied with nothing less. Why follow anyone, why be religious, unless we are going to follow Christ, unless we are going to be right? There is a way that is right and cannot be wrong, but remember also, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). Keep in mind that the right way is the Lord's way, the one and only way to heaven. Only those who travel on that path or way can go to heaven.

WOT

# CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT IMMERSION

## PART 3 OF 4

Chuck Webster, Editorial

In the last two editorials I have included a portion of my correspondence with a member of our community who disagreed with a newspaper article suggesting that biblical baptism is immersion. I include the third of four parts of that correspondence in this issue.

Dear Chuck:

This is an answer to part of the paragraph where you asked me to address the meaning of the word *baptizo*. I shall address Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12 as a burial later. I haven't forgotten, and there is so much in your previous letter that I must address, but I will deal with the burial next, and then come back to the remainder of your correspondence dated \_\_\_\_\_.

I strongly disagree with your statement that *baptizo* was the word that God chose to use, as well as that it was the Holy Ghost inspired apostles' words of their native language.

The King James translation was made by forty-seven scholarly members of the Anglican Church who had been baptized by the mode of immersion; therefore they favored that particular mode and used the word *baptizo*. I do not say that immersion is not one mode of baptism; however, I do contend that it is not the only mode of baptism. That would be like saying that rain is the only form of precipitation.

I do believe that the Greek scholars were a bit more honest than Dr. Billy Graham who published a soul winners' New Testament, and used the word "immersion" each time the word "baptize," etc., was used. I certainly would not want to be as brazen as Dr. Graham.

*Baptizo* is the strongest point of argument that the immersionists have. As you so well know, they use the words "burial," "much water," "down into," "come up out of," "straightway up out of," and *baptizo*. Every one of these is a piece of circumstantial evidence, and not one of them proves beyond any doubt the mode of immersion. This being true they must rely upon the Greek Lexicons that lean toward their line of thinking. Luther, Zwingli, and their contemporaries had no lexicons nor dictionaries. In fact, they had

not been made. These came later from the pens of noble scholars by the study of the classical writings who used pagan meanings which are not what an honest Bible student wants. Since they were heathens and though very learned in Greek philosophy and literature, they were utterly ignorant of the Bible and not acquainted by experience with the God of the Bible. For that reason, we should not be so much concerned about how Plato, Socrates, and Xenophon used the words, but how Jesus, John, Mark, and the people of that day used them.

The New Testament is not written in classical Greek, from whence comes the word *baptizo*, but it is written in what is known as Koine, or the language of the common people.

I will give you a number of instances in the New Testament where the use of the word *baptizo* clearly proves that the word does not mean immersion. In fact these passages prove that in many cases it either means pour or sprinkle.

Matthew 3:11: "I indeed baptize you **with** water unto repentance . . . he shall baptize you **with** the Holy Ghost." Mark 1:8 is the same as Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16, and John 1:33: ". . . but he sent me to baptize **with** water . . . the same is he which baptizeth **with** the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (emp. in letter).

You said "the apostles were the only ones that received the baptism," and then in the same paragraph said that these people—I'm assuming the 120—were immersed or overwhelmed in him.

I'm sure you are familiar with *Strong's Concordance*, and he points out concerning the word *baptizo* (#907): "to make whelmed, fully wet, or ceremonial ablution (which means to wash, **cleanse**, **purification**, **wash**)" (emp. in letter). These 120 received a pure heart by the baptism with the Holy Ghost.

I took notice how you quoted Luke 24:49. Jesus did not say you will be clothed, but he said, "you shall be endued with power from on high." This power is a different power than that of Matthew 10. This power is power to be rather than to do. This power is the cleansing power of the Holy Ghost.

What was the spiritual condition of the 120 before Pentecost? Were they born

again?

Please explain the difference between the birth of the Spirit and the baptism of the Spirit. Are they one and the same thing?

Thanks for exchanging thoughts. I'm enjoying our discussions. Someone much smarter than I said, "Controversy sharpens the wit," and I surely do need a sharper wit.

Your friend,

p.s. Here are three pictures of water supplies for Jerusalem.

[Note: The gentleman included two pictures of the pool of Siloam, located inside the ancient city of Jerusalem, and one picture of the pools of Solomon, situated about eight miles south of Jerusalem, with the handwritten inscription at the top of one page: "Pictures speak louder than words. I need not comment." Since the water supplies pictured are fairly narrow but extremely deep, he appears to be suggesting that it would have been impossible to have used them as baptistries because of their depth—cw.]

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am also enjoying our discussion and pray God blesses us as we seek His Word.

You wrote: "I strongly disagree with your statement that *baptizo* was the word that God chose to use, as well as that it was the Holy Ghost inspired apostles words of their native language." I first thought that you must believe the New Testament was not written in Greek, but then later you wrote: "The New Testament is not written in classical Greek. . . but it is written in what is known as Koine, or the language of the common people." It seems these two statements are contradictions. The Bible was, as you say, written in Koine (which was the common form of the Greek language), and the New Testament writers *did* use the Greek word *baptizo*. Though we do not have the original autographs, we are confident that the Greek manuscripts upon which we base our translations are

extremely accurate (i.e., they represent very well the books written by Paul, Peter, etc.). In these New Testament books the writers used the word *baptizo*. Since you disagree with my statement that *baptizo* was the word God chose to use, are you saying that God did not inspire the New Testament writers in their word choice? If so, and you do not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, then we have another entirely different set of disagreements which we need to address. If you *do* believe that the Bible is inspired of God, then how could you say that God did not choose the word *baptizo*?

Your contention that the translators of the King James Version were biased does not seem to be consistent. If they were biased toward immersion, why didn't they simply translate the word *baptizo* as "immerse"? What they did was transliterate the Greek word *baptizo* into the English word "baptize" (i.e., they simply changed the Greek letters into English letters and created a new word). Their transliteration (instead of translation) would seem to be a better argument for their being biased toward its not being immersion.

You stated: "Baptizo is the strongest point of argument that we have. I would tend to agree with you, because the very argument centers around the meaning of the word *baptizo*! The only way we can translate the Bible today is by going back and studying the way the words were used, which is what the lexicographers did. These men did not lean toward our "line of thinking"; instead, they studied the language to find out what the words meant and concluded that the word *baptizo* meant to dip, submerge, or immerse. You said that we should be concerned about "how Jesus, John, Mark, and the people of that day used" the words, which is right, and that is exactly what the lexicographers did; they studied the language to find out how the words were used and came to conclusions.

You referenced Matthew 3:11, "I indeed baptize you **with** water . . .",

implying that the preposition "with" implies sprinkling or pouring. But the Greek word (*en*) there translated "with" is used 2,782 times in the New Testament, and is translated "in" 1,874 times and "with" only 134 times. The use of this preposition doesn't prove anything one way or the other. It could just as well have been translated, "I indeed baptize you in water . . ." The same is true of Mark 1:8 and John 1:33 (the same preposition is used). No preposition is used in the Greek in the first part of Luke 3:16, and *en* is used in the latter part (" . . . he shall baptize you **with** the Holy Ghost . . .").

*Strong's Hebrew and Greek Lexicon* defines *baptizo* (907) as "1) to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk); 2) to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self, bathe; 3) to overwhelm."

Concerning Luke 24:49, the English word "endued" means to "put on" or "be clothed" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Likewise, the Greek word translated "endued" in the King James Version means "1) to sink into (clothing), put on, clothe one's self" (*Strong's*) and is translated in the King James Version in the following ways: "put on" (18 times), "clothed with" (2 times), "clothed in" (2 times), "have on" (2 times), "clothe with" (1 time), "be endued" (1 time), "arrayed in" (1 time), and "be clothed" (1 time), for a total of 29 times. I quoted the verse using the word "clothed" because the word "endued" is somewhat outdated, and the word "clothed" adequately communicates the meaning. Incidentally, it's translated "clothed" in most modern translations. These words were spoken to the eleven apostles in reference to the Holy Spirit's coming on them on the Day of Pentecost and their being baptized in Him. My point was that when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 they were "endued" or "clothed" with Him. They didn't just have the Spirit

sprinkled or poured on them; they were immersed in Him. If you'll follow the pronouns carefully in Acts 1 and 2, you'll notice that only the twelve apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This outpouring did not save the apostles, but rather it gave them the ability to do what they did in that chapter and in the early days of the church when they were communicating God's truth to the world (speaking in languages they had not studied, working miracles, etc.).

All must be born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3ff.), which is synonymous with accepting Jesus by being baptized in water for the remission of one's sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:21; et al.). The baptism of the Spirit was given to the apostles to ensure the accuracy of their preaching of the Word (Jn. 16:13) and to confirm that their Word was from God (Mk. 16:20). It was also given to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) to prove to the Jews that Gentiles could also become Christians. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was never commanded; it was a promise.

Thanks for the photographs. Archaeologists have confirmed that there were myriad water sources in Jerusalem (as previously shown), but for argument's sake, let's say there was only one suitable place in Jerusalem for immersing individuals in water, and that this place was wide enough for twelve men to baptize simultaneously. Three thousand people could be immersed by twelve men in a little over four hours. Do you not believe that there was such a place? Or that there were not several places of smaller width but adequate depth? Or that there were, in a city as big as Jerusalem, twelve places where a person could be immersed?

I am likewise enjoying our discussion.

In Christ,

Chuck Webster

[To be concluded next month]

WOT

## GIFTS "FROM ABOVE"

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (Jam. 1:17). Some of His gifts are absolutely free, while others in His wisdom await human obedience.

### 1. Unconditional gifts:

The first of the Father's gifts, freely bestowed, is our marvelous physical universe. "The heavens tell of God's glory, and the skies proclaim the works of his hands" (Psa. 19:1). Joseph Addison

(1672-1719) wrote a meaningful poem, "The Creation," which closes with the words "all the stars" are "forever singing as they shine, 'The hand that made us is divine.'" Mr. Haydn set his poem to music, and grateful human beings love to sing

“The Spacious Firmament of High”:

In reason's ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice,  
Forever singing as they shine,  
The hand that made us is divine.

Mr. Conrad Kocher was moved to write:

For the beauty of the earth,  
For the beauty of the skies,  
For the love which from our birth  
Over and around us lies,  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise  
This our sacrifice of praise.

Long before Addison or Haydn or Kocher the prophet Isaiah (759-690 B.C.) exclaimed: “Lift your eyes and look to the heavens; who created these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls each by name; because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing” (40:26).

A second free gift was the result of God's saying, “Let us make man” (Gen. 1:26). Adam and Eve were not only physical (as were the animals), but also spiritual, yes, made in the image of God, who is a spirit being (Gen. 1:27; Jn. 4:24). The “Father of spirits” formed “the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1; Heb. 12:9).

“He made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Psa. 100:3). We did not even know that we would exist, and so we thank Him for the gift of life. And since the Creator “is not the God of the dead but of the living,” we are now as eternal as God Himself (Matt. 22:32).

A third unconditional gift “from above, coming down from the Father,” good and perfect and “indescribable,” was Immanuel (Isa. 7:14; 2 Cor. 9:15). Happy are they who “have tasted of the heavenly gift” (Heb. 6:4).

Out of the ivory palaces  
Into a world of woe,  
Only His great eternal love  
Made my Savior go  
 (“Ivory Palaces,” Henry Barraclough).

A fourth free gift is a guide-book, for it is not “in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). And what a book! “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,” sang the psalmist, “and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). His “perfect” law is so comprehensive “the man of God” is “furnished completely unto every good work” (Psa. 19:7; 2 Tim. 3:17; Jam. 1:25).

There's a book which surpasses the  
ages,  
A volume of wisdom sublime;

And the glory that gleams from its pages  
No splendor of earth can outshine.  
 (“There's a Book,” Tom C. Neal)

## II. Conditional gifts

God's plans are “for our good always” (Deut. 6:24). In his wisdom He does not think that it is “for our good” that all of His gifts should be free. Some valuable presents from Him are held back dependent on our obedience. Often He has inserted the little word “if” in His Book of instructions (Gal. 6:9; Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:6,14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9). “If” we “do” what He says certain gifts come down “from above” (Jam. 3:17).

**1. Bread:** We ask God to “give us this day our daily bread,” and He does it if we “maintain good works for necessary uses” (Matt. 6:11; Tit. 3:14). “If” (another “if”) any will not work, neither let him eat” (2 Thess. 3:10).

**2. Wisdom:** The dictionary defines wisdom as the ability or faculty to make “the best use of knowledge” and “experience.” It is “applied knowledge;” it is “good judgment” (cf. Eccl. 7:12). Its parallel word in Scripture is “understanding” (Prov. 1:2,5; 3:13,19; 4:5; 14:6; 21:30), the ability to separate, to distinguish, to discern, to discriminate, to consider (*bin* and *sophidzo*).

Solomon as a young man prayed for wisdom, which “pleased the Lord” (1 Kn. 3:10). By a direct, miraculous implantation God gave him “a wise and an understanding heart” (1 Kn. 3:12). Some first century Christians, by the laying on of the hands of an apostle, were given miraculous wisdom (Acts 8:18; 19:6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Cor. 12:8). But the need for such a miraculous gift passed away when the “perfect” (complete, *teleion*) revelation came in A.D. 96 (1 Cor. 13:10; Rev. 1:1-3).

Now we are to pray for wisdom (Jam. 1:5) as we pray for our daily bread (Matt. 6:11), but the non-miraculous laws of God in bestowing both wisdom and bread are in operation. Wisdom is withheld until we obey His law of listening to teachers: “Hear, my son, and be wise, and guide your heart in the way” (Prov. 23:19). “The sayings of the wise are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails” (Eccl. 12:11).

“Reverence for Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10), and also its continuity: “Behold, reverence for Yahweh, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). Children are not born with reverence for Yahweh nor respect for parents, which things they are to “learn first” (1 Tim. 5:4).

Jesus, like other children, was not born

with wisdom. In that virtue He “grew” (Lk. 2:52, *prokopto*, increased, advanced). Moreover, even though He was the Son of God, He, like the rest of us, had to learn “obedience” (Heb. 5:8). As we grow and mature, a “multitude of years should teach wisdom” (Job 12:7). A meaningful prayer is: “Teach us to number our days that we might gain a wise heart,” or, more literally, “that we might enter the heart of wisdom” (Psa. 90:12).

Daily prayer for wisdom “from above” (Jam. 3:17) is all the more important since there is an “earthly, sensual, devilish” wisdom “of this world,” with victims “wise to do evil” (Jer. 4:22; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2 Cor. 1:12; Jam. 3:15). But the wisdom that is “from above” is all that matters: it is “the principal thing” (Prov. 4:7). So Solomon advised, “Get wisdom, yes, and with all your getting, get understanding” (Prov. 4:7).

**3. Salvation:** “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16). From one viewpoint, you “save” yourself when you believe, repent, and are baptized (Acts 2:40), but from another viewpoint, no one can save himself. Jesus would never have gone through the ordeal of the cross if a sinner could save himself. Salvation is “not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” dependent on a sinner's “faith,” a faith that leads him to repent and be baptized (Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 2:38).

**4. The Holy Spirit:** The “gift” of Christ is universal and unconditional, yes, “for the whole world” (Jn. 4:10; 1 Jn. 2:2). But no one in “the world” can receive the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:17). The Spirit is a “gift,” but only to those who have been baptized (Acts 2:36-38; 5:32).

Oh! What a difference before baptism and after! Before, a physical body; after a physical body with a plus: “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). After baptism, a being created a “little lower than the angels” (Psa. 8:5; Heb. 2:7) ascends to a status higher than the angels, becoming a host for a guest “from above”! After baptism, a physical body is “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19), a secular body instantly made sacred! Jesus claims as “his own possession” the person in whom the Spirit lives, but “if” (another “if”) any man has not the Spirit “that man is none of his” (Tit. 2:14; Rom. 8:9).

As the coming of the Holy Spirit into a person is conditional on his having believed, repented, and having been baptized, so the continued indwelling of the Spirit in that person is conditional on his living a clean life: “flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18). If he does not cleanse himself “from all defilement of the flesh and spirit,” he grieves (vexes, insults, *lupeo*,

Eph. 4:30) the “Holy Spirit of God.” He will leave that person, as He left the Laodicean Christians (Rev. 3:14-22).

And not only does the new Christian, while he is still wet from his baptism, become a host for the Holy Spirit, but also of the other two beings in the Godhead! Jesus promised, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my message, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will dwell with him” (Jn. 14:23).

**5. A continuous cleansing:** What about sins after baptism? The Father has overlooked nothing. If the newly-created Christians walk “in the light” and “continue to confess” their sins, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son keeps on cleansing” them “from every sin” (1 Jn. 1:7-9). For the rest of their lives they are living in the spiritual shower bath of “the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2), and so are ready at any moment, day or night, in a car wreck or in bed, to meet their Maker.

**6. Spiritual strength:** The Holy Spirit (who lives in a Christian’s heart, Gal. 4:6) does not by His indwelling strengthen the Christian, else all Christians would be strong. Those whom the Spirit indwells can be “weak and sickly” (1 Cor. 6:19; 11:30).

But they do not have to be weak and sickly, for the Spirit through His words, not through His indwelling, teaches them how to be strong (Eph. 6:10-18). “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says” (Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). But if he pays no attention to the Spirit’s words, Christ’s strength will never be his (cf. Phil. 4:13). He has deprived himself of a gift “from above.” The command *krataiousthe* (1 Cor. 16:13) usually is translated “Be strong,” but (being in the Greek middle voice) would be better translated “Strengthen yourselves.”

**7. The fruit of the Spirit:** Just as the Spirit’s words teach a Christian to strengthen himself, so the Spirit’s words teach about nine excellent virtues: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Those virtues are gifts “from above,” but no Christian has them because of the Spirit’s indwelling. They are “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22), the result of human cultivation. Just as our “daily bread” (a gift “from above”) is ours only through human farming, so “the fruit of the Spirit” is ours only through human farming.

Christians are “God’s garden” (*georgion*, cultivated land, farm, field that is worked, 1 Cor. 3:9), but it is Christians who must do the gardening. The garden of

Eden belonged to God, but it was up to Adam “to till and keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

**8. Contentment:** One of the most elusive gifts “from above” is to “have no anxiety (worry, *merimnao*, Phil. 4:6) about anything.” But such a happy frame of mind God does not give directly. His ground rules are “prayer and supplication with thanksgiving” (Phil. 4:6).

The ability to accept, to be “contented with one’s lot, with one’s means, though the slenderest” is Thayer’s definition of *autarkes* (Phil. 4:11). That blessed gift “from above” is not injected into a Christian, but something he personally must learn: “I have learned,” said Paul, “regardless of my circumstances to be content” (Phil. 4:11). That inward “it is well” feeling is not enjoyed by everybody, but all Christians (with their resources in Scripture) can learn the Lord’s law of contentment and then enjoy it evermore (Phil. 4:12).

**9. A providential shield:** The Lord’s general providence (sunlight “on the evil and the good,” the “rain on the just and the unjust,” Matt. 5:45) is for all mankind, but a special provision is reserved for “them who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10).

For them who love God, He makes “all things to work together for their good” (Rom. 8:28, NAS, NIV). Some translations (KJV, ASV) state an impossibility, saying that “all things work together for good” to them who love God. “Things” are inanimate and mindless, and good happening to Christians by “things” is accidental.

But God Almighty, who particularly loves his people, His “own possession,” and whose eyes “are in every place,” is able to overrule all of life’s circumstances to make good come out of them (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 4:8; Prov. 15:3). We with limited vision cannot see how any good could come from a Christian’s tragedies, but the God who sees “the end from the beginning” is not near-sighted (Isa. 46:10).

Therefore, Christians, knowing that the Father can see farther down the road than they, learn to trust Him, walking “by faith, not by sight,” and they respect His warning “Be not faithless but believing” (2 Cor. 5:7; Jn. 20:27).

By human sight Christians now cannot know that heavenly angels even exist, but by faith Christians know that angels not only exist but also that they are God’s helpers in special providence. “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Heb. 1:14). Thus angelic help is another of the gifts “from above.”

The Father’s providential shield is

custom made for each individual Christian according to his strength to resist Satan’s temptations. “God is faithful, for he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

#### 10. Hope:

If no hope comes down “from above,”  
The boast of heraldry, the pomp of  
power,  
And all the beauty, all that wealth e’er  
gave,  
Await alike the inevitable hour,  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave  
 (“Elegy in a Country Church Yard,”  
Thomas Gray).

With only this world as a sphere of hope  
. . . , man is a prisoner, even though in a  
palace. . . . For with all that science and  
art can do for him, he is still a pilgrim  
and a stranger on the earth. He is the  
sport of accidents! victim of disease; the  
plaything of the elements . . . What an  
enigma, then, is man! . . . Judge of all  
things—feeble earth worm! Depository  
of truth—mass of uncertainty! (G.  
Frederick Wright).

On the other hand,

If the Father . . . stoops to give to the  
rosebush, whose withering blossoms  
float upon the autumn breeze, the sweet  
assurance of another spingtime, will He  
refuse the words of hope to the sons of  
men when the frosts of winter come?  
(William Jennings Bryan).

. . . in the night of death hope sees a star  
and listening love can hear the rustle of  
a wing (Robert G. Ingersoll).

Only one has had the courage and the  
credentials to say:

I am the resurrection and the life. He  
who believes in me, though he dies,  
shall never die. . . . I will come again  
and receive you to myself. . . . I am the  
way, the truth, and the life; no one  
comes to the Father except through me  
(Jn. 11:25-26; 14:3,6).

That One is “the author of eternal  
salvation” to all who “obey him” (Heb.  
5:9). “Blessed is the God and Father of our  
Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his  
plentiful mercy has begotten us again to a  
living hope,” a gift “from above” (1 Pet.  
1:3). “The salary of sin is death, but the  
free gift of God is eternal life” (Rom.  
6:23).

WOT

# SUPPORT THE SPONSOR

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

Last fall, ESPN and B.A.S.S. [i.e., Bass Angler's Sportsman's Society] mailed out an information packet to all of the BassMaster fishing pros *requiring* them to wear a patch endorsing Anheuser-Busch beer.

When pros initially learned of the new mandate, many were angered and contacted ESPN/B.A.S.S. to voice their opposition. At first the partner companies assured fisherman that they would not have to wear the patch after all. But following a discussion with Busch, the pros were told that they must exhibit the patch on their clothing or forfeit their points in pursuit of the "Angler of the Year" [AOY] award as well as the \$100,000 prize money.

The ramifications of this new policy were profound. No Busch patch meant no points, no AOY award, no participation in the BassMaster classic, and therefore no requalifying for the following year's fishing tour. In other words, no patch—no bass fishing career.

Oddly enough, the information packet mailed out to pros also stated, **"B.A.S.S. does not expect any angler to endorse a B.A.S.S. sponsor . . .** Participating in the NASCAR Winston Cup, Busch, or Craftsman truck series does not obligate or imply that one uses or endorses those series sponsors' products. **It is, however, expected and logical that one would be appreciative of and supportive of their involvement in the sport"** [emphasis mine—mb]. A number of anglers saw the obvious inconsistency. They asked, "How do you *not* endorse alcohol, but then simultaneously display the toxic brew on the sleeve of your shirt?"

Lendell Martin Jr., a popular fishing professional, dropped out of the BassMaster tour late last fall when the new rule went into effect. He noted, "[B.A.S.S.] took a whole new direction . . . To me it's a family sport, and we have programs like 'Get hooked on Fishing, Not Drugs.'" Martin refused to wear the AOY patch because he had experienced a problem with alcohol

earlier in life.

Observations:

1. I applaud Mr. Martin for his high moral stance. He was willing to sacrifice his career with BassMaster because of the principle involved. Money was secondary to his influence and character [Prov. 22:1]. Family was more important than finance.

2. How will BassMaster fishing pros encourage teens that are grappling with a drinking problem to abstain from beverage alcohol? How can you tell a kid to avoid drugs with a colorful patch depicting the most popular drug in America on the side of your shirt? One pro, Ish Monroe, commented, "I'm [fishing] to make money... You can't even see the beer on the patch it's so small." [Actually, the AOY patch measures 2 7/8" x 2 1/2" and must also be displayed in larger sticker-form *in a visible position* on the side of the angler's boat]. Dear reader, whether the patch is no larger than a postage stamp or is the size of the Grand Canyon is irrelevant. It is **impossible** to tell a youngster to abstain from drugs and then advocate their consumption on your attire [Mk. 8:15; Lk. 12:1].

3. I can't help but wonder if these fisherman fully appreciate the devastating effects of drinking on the youth of our nation [Matt. 18:6]. Consider the following statistics:

- Drunk driving is the leading single cause of death among 15-24 year-olds.
- **The most popular drink among teenagers is beer.**
- 14 teenagers die every day and another 360 are injured in crashes involving drunk driving.
- Of 330 children born today in the U.S., one will die and four will sustain serious or crippling injuries in an alcohol-related crash before they reach the age of 24.

- Fetal exposure to alcohol is a leading cause of mental retardation.
- Alcohol is a major cause of divorce, wife abuse, and child molesting.
- Alcohol is involved in 60 percent of child abuse cases, 75 percent of all broken homes, and 50 percent of all homicides.
- Alcohol is a major contributor to teen suicide attempts; a third of all suicides are alcohol-related.
- Youth who drink before age fifteen are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21.
- An early age of drinking onset is associated with alcohol-related violence not only among persons under age 21 but among adults as well.
- The total cost attributable to the consequences of underage drinking was more than \$58 billion per year in 1998 dollars.
- More than 40 percent of individuals who start drinking before the age of thirteen will develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some point in their lives.
- 26 percent of young male drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2000 had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with thirteen percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.
- Findings from a 1994 study suggest that alcohol advertising may predispose young people to drinking. In 1999, \$764.2 million was spent on beer ads.
- **The median age at which children begin drinking is 13.** [See <http://www.madd.org> for further information].

Money is important [1 Tim. 5:8], but not to such a degree that it ruins our influence, harms our bodies, and destroys our lives. One day, those in corporate America—including ESPN, B.A.S.S., and Busch—will learn this lesson in a very painful way [1 Thess. 1:6ff].

WOT

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Question:** My question is about the word "corn" in the Old Testament. In Genesis 41:47 and 42:1,2,3,5, the word is used. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* corn was brought to Europe by Columbus and other explorers, and it was indigenous to North America. I was wondering if the Bible is referring to another type of crop other than corn.

**Answer:** Words are funny things. Sounds or letters are used to represent a thought or thing. It's an amazing way to communicate. There are difficulties, however, and in this question we see one of those difficulties brought to light. Words change meaning. They carry new connotations, thoughts, or implications depending upon the time and situation in which they are used. In regard to this question the word translated "corn" has taken on a different meaning than was intended when it was used in 1611 by the translators of the King James Version of the Bible. When we think of "corn" today the word brings up the image of a stalk of corn with many yellow ears, but such has not always been the image invoked. Consider these definitions of "corn": "A word used for cereals generally... and may be taken to include (1) barley, (2) wheat, (3) fitches (vetches), (4) lentils, (5) beans, (6) millet, (7) rye—the wrong translation for vetches, (8) pulse—for all these see separate articles"(from *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). In previous generations the word "corn" was used much as we use Kleenex to describe all forms of facial tissue, and Xerox to describe all forms of photocopying.

Also, it is interesting to note that the scientific world is not united in the belief that the Old World was without Maize Corn. Bonafous, the director of the Royal Garden of Agriculture at Turin in 1836, "has shown that maize is figured in a Chinese botanical work as old as the middle of the sixteenth century—a time when the discoveries of Columbus could scarcely have penetrated to" China. Also, and "more conclusively, in 1819 M. Rifaud discovered under the head of a mummy at Thebes not only grains, but leaves of Indian corn." So, in summary, 1)

the word "corn" is often used in a biblical context to refer to all types of grain, and 2) the idea that corn was unknown to biblical characters might not be the case.

—Brandon Jackson (Jasper, Alabama)

**Question:** To what extent, if any, should Christians participate in inter-denominational prayer or other religious services?

**Answer:** Examining the question itself will help us answer it. First, the question pertains to the liberty of a Christian. Second, the activities under consideration are 1) inter-denominational prayer services, or 2) services that are religious in nature.

In connection with the question, there have been local, public observances of the National Day of Prayer. Generally, a meeting is held near the courthouse or city hall, and area preachers representing a multitude of denominational bodies are asked to participate by leading the assembly in prayer. Some men associated with the Lord's church have not only participated, but have served as the organizers and coordinators in these events. What does the Bible say about this matter?

A reexamination of the query and the use of the word "Christian" will help us answer the question. A Christian is one who belongs to, or is a follower of Christ. As Christians, we are members of the Lord's church. "Church" is translated from the Greek *ekklesia*, which literally means "called out." Accordingly, God commands His children to "come out" and "be separate" from the world (2 Cor. 6:17). This would include separation from denominational bodies, as such are not of God. Denominationalism is the work and fruit of the devil. Christians are also forbidden to have fellowship with "the unfruitful works of darkness," but are rather to "reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). In the immediate context of Ephesians 5, we are commanded to shun the "children of disobedience" (vv. 6-7), "walk as children of light" (v. 8), and "prove what is well-pleasing to the Lord" (v. 10). Thus, denominationalism and fellowship with the same must be rejected in all forms.

Furthermore, the right of prayer is reserved exclusively for the Christian. Those who have not submitted to the gospel by being baptized for the remission of sins are not in Christ (Mk. 16:16; Gal. 3:27). Having failed to obey God's will, they are neither disciples (Matt. 28:19) nor Christians (Acts 11:26). All spiritual blessings are found in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Prayer is most certainly a spiritual blessing, for the Spirit makes intercession only for the saints (Rom. 8:26-27). God rejects the worship prayers of those who refuse to submit to His will: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is

his delight" (Prov. 15:8). The word "sacrifice" has reference to one's worship. Note how the worship of the wicked is contrasted with the prayer of the righteous. The author notes similarly in 28:9: "He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Understanding these truths, the man whom Jesus had healed of his blindness correctly noted, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth" (Jn. 9:31).

Consider also our influence. What message does the Christian's participation give to non-Christians present in an "inter-denominational prayer service"? Does it not at the very least imply that the Christian believes all those present are in equal standing before God? And by encouraging non-Christians to pray through Christ, does he not encourage them to engage in an activity God identifies as an abomination? Utilizing the words of the chief priests in Matthew 21:23, we ask those who practice such, "By what authority do ye do these things? And who gave you this authority?"

Some might ask, "What's the difference in this situation and a gospel preacher's taking part in a funeral with a denominational preacher?" This is a fair question. One difference is the purpose of the gathering. A funeral is not a worship service, but a prayer service is. While one may read from the Bible, and even preach the gospel during a funeral, this still does not make it the equivalent of a worship service. In Acts 17:16-31, Paul preached the gospel to the philosophers of Athens. He did not, however, worship with or in any way engage in fellowship with these people. Rather, he "practiced what he preached" to the Ephesians in Ephesians 5:11—he reprovved their unfruitful works of darkness. The purpose of a funeral is not to worship God; it is to comfort the bereaved. The purpose of an interdenominational prayer service is for those present to temporarily ignore the barriers separating the various religious bodies and with one voice to raise their petition in prayer to God. This is not scriptural, and no Christian should ever be a part of such a service.

—Todd Clippard (Hamilton, Alabama)

  
e?mail  
your questions to...  
sixthavenue@tds.net

# THE SECOND RELIGION OF AMERICA

Lynn Parker, Spring, Texas

Sporting activities have been called the “second religion of America.” Whether it is the fast-break, jump-shooting, and three-point shots, or the 55-yard pass for the winning touchdown on the last play of the game, we love sports. It can be ice hockey, hockey with horses (smart horses), or air hockey, but it still has its appeal. Hunting moose, elk, deer, quail, doves, and varmints (the four-legged kind) attracts a following. Fishing holes are sometimes marked by nearly as many fishers as fish! They can be the “boys of summer” that win it in the last inning or the sprinter who wins by a nose, but it makes no difference. Football, fishing, baseball, hunting, basketball, track—our society loves it all.

But may we call a “time out” to consider a fairly common problem in light of the Bible? Sporting activities are not the “second religion” of some—the collective sporting activities are the first. Some view sports as of the utmost value and concern in life. Sadly, even some professing to be children of the Heavenly Father implicitly tell the God of heaven to “take a number (other than one) and we’ll be right with you after the last quarter.” Sports can be wholesome and good for all that participate and all that watch, but Christians are careful to keep such activities in their proper place.

The Bible still teaches, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33) and, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

One brother, speaking to a preachers’ workshop, “justified” his son’s missing Wednesday evening services to play ball by asking the teen if he would be willing next week to attend both the regular Wednesday evening services and an area gospel meeting on Thursday night. Of course, if it is right for a Christian to miss worship assemblies and Bible classes to participate in sports, does it not follow that all the brethren can miss the assemblies and classes to watch the ball game or other sporting activity? And if we can “make up” forsaken assemblies like a student makes up a missed test, then surely we can justify shutting down the church building during the hottest part of summer and do “make-up” work every night for a few weeks this autumn.

Bible classes and worship assemblies in some places take a tremendous nosedive in attendance because some brethren worship at the idol of sporting activities. We cannot help but wonder, though, how important our sporting achievements will seem when we stand before God in judgment. Suddenly, the “one that got away” will be insignificant, and the state championship trophy will provide as much comfort as a crash helmet to a kamikaze pilot.

I like sporting activities. I have played in organized sports. I try to instruct my children in sports. But when the church is working, meeting in assemblies, or studying in the Bible classes, my family needs to be present—learning the Bible, promoting the work, exhorting the brethren, and receiving exhortation. “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (2 Tim. 4:8). WOT

## The Words of Truth

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

Address Service Requested

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) in electronic form (e-mail or on disk or CD).

Please send all correspondence to:

## The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





## PROVING IT . . . TO WHOM?

*Brandon Jackson, Jasper, Alabama*

"It's impossible!" "A four minute mile, no one can do it." "It just can't be done." "We all know about its mystique, the four-minute mile barrier—how people thought it was impossible to break, until Roger Bannister proved them wrong. On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister ran the first sub-four-minute mile in recorded history. The 25-year-old native of Harrow on the Hill, England, completed the distance in 3:59.4 at Oxford. At the end of the year, Bannister retired from running to pursue his medical studies full-time. He later became a neurologist. When he was asked to explain that first four-minute mile—and the art of record breaking—he answered with original directness: 'It's the ability to take more out of yourself than you've got'" (<http://www.emc2.com/emc2/html/fourminute.htm>).

Roger Bannister had something to prove. Yet if you look closely at the quoted article, the only one to whom he was concerned with proving that the four minute barrier could be broken was himself. It was a personal achievement. His pride in the accomplishment came from believing in himself, proving it to himself, and fulfilling his goal.

James 1:3 says, "Knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience" (ASV). The epistle of James ("the New Testament Proverbs") is filled with thoughts and advice for Christians. The "proverb" that James gives in the first chapter is that trials will come . . . they are inevitable (v. 2). And, though none of us enjoy the trials we endure, we can "count them all joy" by having the knowledge that they prove our faith.

As servants of Christ we have something to prove (to ourselves). "It's impossible." "There is no confidence to be had in things hoped for." "No one can believe in that which is unseen." Oh, really!

With every trial, with every advance, with every victory, there is *proof* for your faith. Every time Satan approaches with a lust of the flesh or eyes, or the pride of life, and you take a stand, resisting him with the Word of God hid in your heart, he will flee from you (Psa. 119:11; Jam. 4:7). You will have won a victory. You will have "proven" your faith. As young Christians we want to be assured that we have faith. We want to *know* that we have been converted. What proof do we have? Victory over temptation. There may be times when we are weary pilgrims wondering if we have strayed from the path. How can we check the path? What proof do we have? Victory over temptation. As life's sun begins to set, we recall the past and contemplate our life's work considering heaven as our home. What assurance can we find? What proof do we have? Victory over temptation.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul writes, "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?" As servants of

Christ we have something to prove (to others).

"Ladies and gentlemen, here is the result of event 9, the one-mile: 1st, No. 41, R.G. Bannister, Amateur Athletic Association and formerly of Exeter and Merton Colleges, Oxford, with a time which is a new meeting and track record, and which—subject to ratification—will be a new English Native, British National, All-Corners, European, British Empire, and World Record. The time was 3. . . ." [following unclear due to applause] (Quoted from Track & Field News, February, 1998).

Roger Bannister proved it could be done. He proved it for himself, and at the same time he proved it to others. In fact, "On February 20, 1994, at Harvard's Albert J. Gordon indoor track, Eamonn Coghlan became the first man over forty years old to run a four-minute mile (Coghlan was actually 41 years old at the time!)" (<http://faculty.rnwc.edu/tmichalik/4min.htm>).

In breaking the four-minute mile Roger Bannister made others believe that they too could accomplish the same. People are watching us. They notice our failures and our triumphs. We will fail (Rom. 3:23). The key is to succeed more than we fail. "And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain" (1 Cor. 9:23-24). Live a life characterized by victories; it will make others take note. You may be the only proof they have that the Christian life works. You may be the proof they need to give it their best.

Paul encourages us: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

As servants of Christ we have something to prove (for our Lord). Bannister concluded his racing career and went on to become a neurologist. He had the desire to accomplish his goals, and he did so. He did not rest upon the victory he had attained but strove toward the ones that remained. We will reach times in our lives as Christians where we have overcome certain temptations. What joy, what victory, what achievement! However, there is more to life than overcoming temptation. There is work to be done. Bannister won this victory then put it behind him so that he could finish his work. We have work to do as Christians. We must win our victories and prove that we can, then work toward the goal. In fact, within the same chapter of James we find this "proverb": "be ye doers of the word"(v. 22). The Christian life is one of victory and accomplishments set before us because: We have a Loving God. We have a perfect Savior. We have a wonderful gift. One day our Lord will return to call His own . . . Are you one of His? Do you prove it to yourself, to others, and for the Lord?

# CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT IMMERSION

## PART 4 OF 4

*Chuck Webster, Editorial*

In the last three editorials I have included a portion of my correspondence with a member of our community who disagreed with a newspaper article suggesting that biblical baptism is immersion. I include the last (as of the present date) of that correspondence in this issue.

Dear Chuck:

As promised I shall answer your question concerning baptism as being a burial in reference to Romans 6 and Colossians 2.

Many people when they read these two passages where it speaks of being baptized and buried immediately they jump to the conclusion that Paul was speaking of being baptized with water, and then they say, "There—that proves it. We must go down under the water." I call your attention to the word "into"—it is used three times in Romans 6:3-4, and it is the key to this passage. Water baptism is not what puts a person into Christ. One can be baptized with water a dozen times and still not be in Christ. This baptism that Paul was speaking of in these passages puts one into Christ. This is not figurative language. It brings one into touch with the power of his resurrection. Does water baptism do that? Is there a baptism that really does what Paul is speaking of here? There is, and Paul tells us about it in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body."

Water baptism has absolutely nothing to do with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I find there is not one Scripture passage that says this. Water baptism could just as easily be a symbol of the sprinkling of Christ's blood upon our hearts, or the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

These two passages of scriptures are relative to the suffering and death as well as relating to the sanctification of the believer by death of the old man and putting away the flesh or carnal nature. In Mark 10:38 Jesus says to James and John: "Can you drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" That cer-

tainly does not mean the Lord's Supper and water baptism. You will note that this is in the future tense. Jesus, James, and John had already been baptized.

If it meant the Lord's Supper and water baptism then the question is absurd. Anyone could do that.

Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane says, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me." Was this not the cup he was to drink of and the baptism he was to be baptized with?"

Suppose it does mean water baptism—it will not prove immersion. Do you bury anything by thrusting it into the ground and jerking it out immediately, or by sprinkling or pouring dirt on it?

Looking at Colossians 2:11 we find Paul tells us that this operation is made without hands, and it is a putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. Then he tells us as John the Baptist that Christ is the One who does the baptizing or the circumcising. Then in verse 12 Paul says it is an operation of God. This cannot be water baptism because the thing buried in this transaction is not your physical body which is buried in water and baptized by immersion, but that old body of sin, which is invisible and spiritual, having been crucified by the Holy Ghost in sanctification and now buried into death, the atonement of Christ and left there; because if Satan raises him up, "The last state of that man is worse than the first." The old man, the son of the devil, is the subject of the interment, and the new man, the son of God, the subject of the resurrection.

Romans 6:6: "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." Paul is continually using metaphors such as new man, inner man, hidden man . . . here he alludes to the "old man," the fallen nature, the corrupt tendency transmitted to us and hereditary from the Fall. This old man does not mean our personal sins which are not as old as we are, but original sin, which is as old as Adam's transgression; and therefore called the old man. You see here that

this old man is crucified. The burial here described is the counterpart carrying out the metaphor that the dead is buried. Then if you want to know what is buried in this transaction, you only have to ascertain what is dead. You see it is the old crucified man, now a loathsome dead corpse, and must be buried out of sight forever.

The apostle is not speaking of the physical man at all, but the spiritual, through the entire argument. There is a rattlesnake on your premises, much to your danger. That venomous monster is not only killed, but taken away and buried deep in the earth. Of course you are now free from its presence, alarm, and peril. This monster is inbred sin. Jesus wants to kill him and put him away, thus making you free from sin, and alive unto righteousness, giving you singleness of heart, mind, and soul.

I trust that this shall clearly give you what the Bible is saying to us in these two passages. I realize that I have just scratched the surface on this great Bible truth; however I am prepared to go to an in-depth lesson if you so desire.

I am enjoying our discussions. Some day we must meet and have dinner if we can find time.

Your friend,

\_\_\_\_\_

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

I hope you're doing well . . . I am enjoying our present discussion of the truth of God.

I'd like to respond to your statements about Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12. You begin by suggesting that "Many people . . . read these two passages where it speaks of being baptized and buried [and] immediately they jump to the conclusion that Paul was speaking of being baptized with water, and say, 'There that proves it. We must go down under the water.'" I tend to agree with your assessment, because that is actually what God expects us to do. When we study His

Word, one of the basic rules of interpretation is to take words in their normal sense unless there is something in the context that demands we do otherwise. Paul's words are easily understood: "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" (Rom. 6:3-4). What are we supposed to think when we read this clear language? The meaning of the word "baptism" is immersion, usually in water, and there's absolutely nothing in the context that would suggest Paul means anything else. Even commentators such as the Methodist scholar Adam Clarke, who did not believe in immersion as the only mode of baptism, conceded: "It is probable that the apostle here alludes to the mode of administering baptism by immersion, the whole body being put under the water, which seemed to say, the man is drowned, is dead; and, when he came up out of the water, he seemed to have a resurrection to life; the man is risen again; he is alive!" The noted Presbyterian commentator, Albert Barnes, also a non-immersionist, agreed: "It is altogether probable that the apostle in this place had allusion to the custom of baptizing by immersion." Of course, the number of scholars who take a certain position doesn't validate (or invalidate) a position, but it seems interesting that these men, who certainly might have been tempted to be biased toward your view, understood Paul to be writing of water baptism.

You suggest that "water baptism is not what puts a person into Christ." But when Peter urged his hearers at Pentecost to "repent and be baptized," which in previous correspondence you agreed was water baptism in some "mode," they were added by God to the church (Acts 2:38,41,47), which is equivalent to being put "in Christ" (Eph. 1:22-23). If baptism is the act of faith at which God's grace bestows salvation (and it is—Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21), and salvation is found only in Christ (and it is—Eph. 5:23), then water baptism *does* put a person into Christ. Furthermore, Paul clearly states that "as many of you as have been baptized *into* Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27; emp. added). Was this bap-

tism also *not* water baptism? It is extremely dangerous to take a clear concept such as baptism and *reinterpret* it in every section of Scripture where it apparently disagrees with a previously held doctrine. God says water baptism *does* put a person into Christ. Explaining away these passages is faulty reasoning and inconsistent hermeneutics.

You further state that Romans 6:3-4 "is not figurative language." I agree wholeheartedly. The reference to baptism is to be taken literally, which means that Paul is using "baptism" in its normal usage—i.e., immersion in water. You ask, "Does water baptism . . . bring one into touch with the power of His resurrection?" This passage and Colossians 2:12 aside, 1 Peter 3:20-21 makes the connection explicit and undeniable: "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved *by water*. 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*" (emp. added). The link between water baptism, salvation, and the resurrection of Christ is unquestionable.

You also suggest that "water baptism could just as easily be a symbol of the sprinkling of Christ's blood upon our hearts, or the outpouring of the Holy Ghost." The problem with that is the fact that the Bible does not set forth baptism as a parallel of any sort of "sprinkling," while Paul *does* clearly signify baptism as the act wherein we reenact the death, *burial*, and resurrection of Christ. The example you mention—that of Jesus' asking James and John if they were willing to drink His cup and be baptized with the same baptism—is a good example of the figurative usage of baptism, but it says nothing concerning the usage in Romans 6 or Colossians 2:12. The context of Mark 10:38 clearly indicates a figurative interpretation. Paul's usage of baptism in Romans 6 and Colossians 2 has no such qualifying context. He meant for his words to be taken literally.

You suggest that even if water baptism is under discussion, "it will not prove immersion. Do you bury anything by thrusting it into the ground and jerk-

ing it out immediately, or by sprinkling or pouring dirt on it?" I am at a loss to conceive of any way Paul could have described immersion more vividly than by using terms such as "buried" and "raised up," besides the fact that the word he used means to "dip" or "plunge" an object beneath the surface of water. How could Paul have been clearer?

Your discussion of Colossians 2:11-12 is interesting but tremendously flawed. A simple reading of this text shows that Paul is drawing an analogy between circumcision, in which a *physical* "putting off" (of the foreskin) occurred, and baptism, in which a *spiritual* "putting off" (of "the body of the sins of the flesh" took place. He connects the act of baptism with the resurrection of Christ (v. 12), as well as spiritual life ("quicken," v. 13) and forgiveness of sins (v. 13). Other texts also show this interdependent relationship (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20-21; Acts 2:38). Your discussion of what you refer to as man's "fallen nature" indicates that you believe in hereditary depravity ("original sin"), the teaching that we somehow inherit the sin of Adam. Though a complete discussion is somewhat beyond the scope of our present concern, I must note that this Calvinistic notion is unbiblical. Scripture plainly indicates that sin is not inherited (Ezek. 18:20), and that every person is responsible for his own conduct (Rom. 14:12). [For a more complete analysis, consult <http://www.christiancourier.com/archives/originalSin.htm>.] Your attempt at removing water baptism from Colossians 2 based on Paul's focus on the spiritual, not the physical, however, is fanciful and unconvincing. The guilt of sins we commit *are* spiritual, but the Bible teaches here and elsewhere that the point at which God's grace forgives our sins is at baptism. No amount of creative interpretation can remove that fact.

I thank you for engaging in this study of God's Word with me, and I hope that it will continue. We will all stand before God in judgment, and His Word will judge us. Whatever effort we expend in rightly dividing it will be well worth our time. May God bless us both as we study the Bible.

Sincerely,  
Chuck Webster

WOT

# ATHEISM AND LIBERAL, MISSOURI

*Eric Lyons, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama*

In the summer of 1880, George H. Walser founded the town of Liberal in southwest Missouri. Named after the Liberal League in Lamar, Missouri (to which the town's organizer belonged), Walser's objective was "to found a town without a church, [w]here unbelievers could bring up their children without religious training," and where Christians were not allowed (Thompson, 1895; Becker, 1895). "His idea was to build up a town that should exclusively be the home of infidels . . . a town that should have neither God, Hell, Church, or Saloon" (Brand, 1895). Some of the early inhabitants of Liberal even encouraged other infidels to move to their town by publishing an advertisement which boasted that Liberal "is the only town of its size in the United States without a priest, preacher, church, saloon, God, Jesus, hell, or devil" (Keller, 1885, p. 5). Walser and his "freethinking" associates were optimistic about their new town. Excitement was in the air, and atheism was at its core. They believed that their godless town of "sober, trustworthy, and industrious" people would thrive for years on end. But, as one young resident of that town, Bessie Thompson, wrote about Liberal in 1895, ". . . like all other unworthy causes, it had its day and passed away." Bessie did not mean that the actual town of Liberal ceased to exist, but that the idea of having a "good, godless" city is a contradiction in terms. A town built upon "trustworthy" atheistic ideals eventually will reek of the rotten, immoral fruits of infidelity. Such fruits were seen and reported firsthand by Clark Braden in 1885.

Braden was an experienced preacher, debater, and author. In his lifetime, he delivered more than 3,000 lectures and held more than 130 regular debates—eighteen of which were with the Mormons (Carpenter, 1909, pp. 324-325). In 1872, Braden even challenged the renowned agnostic Robert Ingersoll

to debate, to which Ingersoll reportedly responded, "I am not such a fool as to debate. He would wear me out" (Haynes, 1915, pp. 481-482). Although Braden was despised by many, his skills in writing and public speaking were widely known and acknowledged. In February 1885, Clark Braden introduced himself to the townspeople of Liberal (Keller, 1885, p. 5; Moore, 1963, p. 38), and soon thereafter he wrote about what he had witnessed.

In an article that appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on May 2, 1885, titled "An Infidel Experiment," Braden reported the following.

The boast about the sobriety of the town is false. But few of the infidels are total abstainers. Liquor can be obtained at three different places in this town of 300 inhabitants. More drunken infidels can be seen in a year in Liberal than drunken Christians among one hundred times as many church members during the same time. Swearing is the common form of speech in Liberal, and nearly every inhabitant, old and young, swears habitually. Girls and boys swear on the streets, playground, and at home. Fully half of the females will swear, and a large number swear habitually. . . . Lack of reverence for parents and of obedience to them is the rule. There are more grass widows, grass widowers and people living together, who have former companions living, than in any other town of ten times the population. . . . A good portion of the few books that are read are of the class that decency keeps under lock and key . . .

These infidels . . . can spend for dances and shows ten times as much as they spend for their liberalism. These dances are corrupting the youth of the surrounding country with infidelity and immorality. There is no lack of loose women at these dances . . .

Since Liberal was started there has not been an average of one birth per year of infidel parents. Feticide is universal. The physicians of the place say that a large portion of their practice has been trying to save females from consequences of feticide. In no town is slander more prevalent, or the charges more vile. If one were to accept what the inhabitants say of each other, he would conclude that there is a hell, including all Liberal, and that its inhabitants are the devils (Keller, 1885, p. 5).

According to Braden, "[s]uch are the facts concerning this infidel paradise . . . Everyone who has visited Liberal, and knows the facts, knows that such is the case" (p. 5).

As one can imagine, Braden's comments did not sit well with some of the townspeople of Liberal. In fact, a few days after Braden's observations appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, he was arrested for criminal libel and tried on May 18, 1885. According to Braden, "After the prosecution had presented their evidence, the case was submitted to the jury without any rebutting evidence by the defence (sic), and the jury speedily brought in a verdict of 'No cause for action'" (as quoted in Mouton, n.d., pp. 36-37). Unfortunately for Braden, however, the controversy was not over. On the following day (May 19, 1885), a civil suit was filed by one of the townsmen—S.C. Thayer, a hotel operator in Liberal. The petition for damages of \$25,000 alleged that Clark Braden and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* published an article where they made false, malicious, and libelous statements against the National Hotel in Liberal, managed by Mr. Thayer. He claimed that Braden's remarks, published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on May 2, 1885, "greatly and irreparably injured and ruined" his business (Thayer v. Braden). However, when the prosecution learned that the defense was thoroughly prepared to prove that

Liberal was a den of infamy, and its hotels were little more than prostitution houses, the suit was dismissed on September 17, 1886, by the plaintiff **at his own cost** (Thayer v. Braden). Braden was exonerated of everything he had written. Indeed, the details Braden originally reported about Liberal, Missouri, on May 2, 1885, were found to be factual.

It took only a few short years for Liberal's unattractiveness and inconsistency to be exposed: People cannot exclude God from the equation and expect to remain a "sober, trustworthy" town. Godlessness equals unruliness, which in turn makes a repugnant, immoral people. The town of Liberal was a failure. Only five years after its establishment, Braden indicated that "[n]ine-tenths of those now in town would leave if they could sell their property. More property has been lost by locating in the town than has been made in it. . . . Hundreds have been deceived and injured and ruined financially" (Keller, 1895, p. 5). Obviously, doing business with "the devil" did not pay the kind of dividends George Walser (the town's founder) and the early inhabitants of Liberal desired. It appears that even committed atheists found living in Liberal in the early days intolerable. Truly, as has been observed in the past, "An infidel surrounded by Christians may spout his infidelity and be able to endure it, but a whole town of atheists is too horrible to contemplate." It is one thing to espouse a desire to live in a place where there is no God, but it is an entirely different thing for such a place actually to exist. For it to become a reality is more than the atheist can handle. Adolf Hitler took atheism to its logical conclusion in Nazi Germany, and created a world that even most atheists detested. Although atheists want no part of living according to the standards set out by Jesus and His apostles in the New Testament, the real fruits of evolutionary atheism are also too horrible for them to contemplate.

Although the town of Liberal still exists today (with a population of about

800 people), it is not the same town it was in 1895. At present, at least seven religious groups associated with Christianity exist within this city that once banned Christianity and all that it represents. Numerous other churches meet in the surrounding areas. According to one of the religious leaders in the town, "a survey of Liberal recently indicated that 50% of the people are actively involved with some church" (Abbott, 2003)—a far cry from where Liberal began.

There is no doubt that the moral, legal, and educational systems of Liberal, Missouri, in the twenty-first century are the fruits of biblical teaching, not atheism. When Christianity and all of the ideals that the New Testament teaches are put into action, people will value human life, honor their parents, respect their neighbors, and live within the moral guidelines given by God in the Bible. A city comprised of faithful Christians would be mostly void of such things as sexually transmitted diseases, murder, drunken fathers who beat their wives and children, drunk drivers who turn automobiles into lethal weapons, and heartache caused by such things as divorce, adultery, and covetousness. (Only those who broke God's commandments intended for man's benefit would cause undesirable fruit to be reaped.)

On the other hand, when atheism and all of its tenets are taken to their logical conclusion, people will reap some of the same miserable fruit once harvested by the early citizens of Liberal, Missouri (and sadly, some of the same fruit being reaped by many cities in the world today). Men and women will attempt to cover up sexual sins by aborting babies, children will disrespect their parents, students will "run wild" at home and in school because of the lack of discipline, and "sexual freedom" (which leads to sexually transmitted diseases) will be valued, whereas human life will be devalued. Such are the fruits of atheism: a society in which everyone does that which is right in his own eyes (Jud.

17:6)—a society in which no sensible person wants to live.

#### REFERENCES

Abbott, Phil (2003), Christian Church, Liberal, MO, Phone conversation, April 7.

Barnes, Pamela (2003), *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Phone conversation, March 12.

Becker, Hathe (1895), "Liberal," *Liberal Enterprise*, December 5, 12, [On-line], URL:<http://lyndonirwin.com/libhist1.htm>.

Brand, Ida (1895), "Liberal," *Liberal Enterprise*, December 5, 12, [On-line], URL:<http://lyndonirwin.com/libhist1.htm>.

Carpenter, L.L. (1909), "The President's Address," in *Centennial Convention Report*, ed. W.R. Warren, (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Company), pp. 317-332. [On-line], URL: <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wwarren/ccr/CCR15B.htm>.

Haynes, Nathaniel S. (1915), *History of the Disciples of Christ in Illinois 1819-1914* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Company), [On-line], URL: <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/nhaynes/hdcib/braden01.htm>, 1996.

Keller, Samuel (1885), "An Infidel Experiment," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Special Correspondence with Clark Braden, May 2, p. 5.

Moore, J.P. (1963), *This Strange Town—Liberal, Missouri* (Liberal, MO: The Liberal News).

Mouton, Boyce (no date), *George H. Walser and Liberal, Missouri: An Historical Overview*.

Thayer, S.C. v. Clark Braden, et. al. Filed on May 19, 1885, in Barton County Missouri. Dismissed September 10, 1886.

Thompson, Bessie (1895), "Liberal," *Liberal Enterprise*, December 5, 12, [On-line], URL:<http://lyndonirwin.com/libhist1.htm>.

WOT

# HOW TO FAIL WITH VISITORS

*Mel Futrell, Birmingham, Alabama*

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26).

I suspect all of us at one time or another, while traveling for work or on vacation, have visited the Lord’s Day or Wednesday night services of God’s people at another location. Because of the nature of some brethren’s work or perhaps due to retirement this occurs quite frequently for some folks. **However, how we were received, greeted, treated, and what we heard while there often has a real impact on us for good or bad.** If the truth be told some of these visits many of us make become negative situations. Therefore, the next time we have the opportunity to be in that same area we are reluctant to attend worship services at the same place. And who can blame us?

None of what I have to say here is a direct indictment of any particular congregation. Yet, it is still the case that a number of congregations apparently have failed to realize the great opportunity for good afforded them when they have visitors. Are these brethren “afraid” of visitors? One might draw that conclusion by the way some brethren scatter like kicked up quail when visitors enter the building. What I propose to do in the following lines is list some things/actions that are done that result in failure toward the visitors to our assemblies—whether these visitors are Christians or not.

First, there is the **failure to be on time.** Over the years it has been my unfortunate experience to attend worship services at places [usually in vacation-type areas] where we waited and waited and waited even to be let into the building. Fairly recently my family and I visited a congregation where we— along with about 35 others, most of whom were visitors also—had this very experience. It was literally time for services to begin yet no one was present to even unlock the doors. And this is a congregation that throughout much of the year enjoys numerous visitors. It would seem to me that at bare minimum brethren at any locale should have the physical plant where they regularly assemble open at least fifteen minutes before the posted times for services. And let me quickly add that this is not necessarily the preacher’s

job. I’m inclined to believe that this might be more in line with work/duties assigned to deacons. Of course the shepherds of the church couldn’t go wrong by being the first ones there to greet the flock.

Second, there is the **failure to speak to visitors.** There is hardly anything more disturbing than to be ignored by members of the body of Christ when I and my family have at times gone out of our way to worship with a certain congregation. Solomon said in the long ago, “A man that hath friends must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). There is absolutely no excuse for brethren to avoid greeting visitors of all sorts to our assemblies. I’m not naïve. I know that there will always be those who just won’t speak to anyone first whether they are visitors or regular members. However, such conduct is shameful at best. I’ve heard brethren say, “When I come to services it isn’t to visit, it’s to worship God.” One need only look at Acts 2:42-47 to see that right after the establishment of the church that brethren in Jerusalem were immediately involved in both religious and social fellowship. And the same is true for the assembly detailed in Acts 20:7-12. Evidently, many brethren are afraid to reach out and get to know others—and I have a pretty good idea why. If they do they may find out that there is a legitimate need that could and should be met which may cost them both time and possibly money. New Testament Christians should be the friendliest people on Earth.

Third, there is the **failure to assist visitors in finding a Bible class.** How many times can you recall visiting a congregation where not only were you not greeted but you were given no aid in locating Bible classes for your family? From personal experience and the testimony of others I have no doubt that this problem occurs weekly all over the brotherhood. Really now, how much trouble would it be to have individuals or families from the local congregation posted at the entrance of the building to provide needed assistance to visitors in getting to Bible classes or the nursery and restrooms? Sometimes it is the “little” things like this that make all the difference. When Saul left Damascus and arrived in Jerusalem to “join himself to the disciples” at that location (Acts 9:26), it took the

intervention of Barnabas to see that he got squared away. The scenarios don’t have to be identical for one to see the valid principle here of service intervention. And this service is provided by the local members.

Fourth there is the **failure to be prepared to teach and preach.** Tragically, too many Bible class teachers and gospel preachers are simply unprepared to fulfill the requirements of the obligation they have assumed. And the fault lies with them and those who have assigned them this duty. My father-in-law has often spoken of those who it seemed had just scratched out their sermon or class material on a napkin moments before getting up to present it. And like him, I and many others have seen this again and again. Brethren, **teaching and preaching the gospel is serious business** that demands much time, study, and effort. James said: “Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment” (Jam. 3:1, ASV).

James’ point, of course, is not to discourage teachers but rather to awaken them to the seriousness and responsibility of teaching the Word of God. He also emphasized the fact that negative consequences follow those who abuse this.

Consider that Ezra of old “had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). However, the order is important—he sought and did before he taught. The Hebrew writer spoke of those who by that time should have been teachers, and thus meat-eaters, but were neither (Heb. 5:12-14). Sadly, some today who haven’t qualified themselves to teach are teaching! There is enough unpreparedness among the general membership of the local church without those who have assumed the teaching role joining hands with them in this sad state.

It is evident then that failure in these areas and others is something to be avoided and that can be corrected. All of us at times are visitors. And knowing how we expect to be treated and what we expect to hear should motivate us to offer that same treatment when the positions are reversed. Oh, what responsibilities we have to both visitors and regular members alike! May we never fail.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Question:** Does not the case of Cornelius, the Roman soldier (Acts 10), prove that God hears the prayers of those who have not been baptized? The angel told Cornelius, “your prayer has been heard” (Acts 10:31), and yet the centurion was not baptized until later. Can you explain the apparent conflict between this case and the idea that God does not hear the sinner’s prayer?

**Answer:** There are several important facts that need to be established in responding to your question—for which we are grateful. Reason with me, please.

1. One of the fundamental Bible truths relative to God is that of His omniscience. This is a term that signifies “all-knowing.” Jehovah knows everything there is to know past, present, and future. He is “a God of knowledge” (1 Sam. 2:3), who “knows all things” (1 Jn. 3:20). The Lord’s “understanding is infinite” (Psa. 147:5). All things are “naked and laid open before the eyes” of the Almighty (Heb. 4:13).

It is quite clear, therefore, that God is *aware* of the sinner’s prayer.

The key question, however, is this. Does God respond to the alien sinner’s prayer, in *granting forgiveness of sins*, separate from the plan He Himself initiated within the New Covenant? [Note: By the expression “alien sinner,” we mean the sinful person who has never surrendered to the conditions of the gospel system, and thus who stands outside of a Father-child relationship with the Creator.]

2. The New Testament is unequivocal in its instruction as to what it takes to access a praying relationship with God, whereby the Heavenly Father bestows pardon for sins committed. The Father-child connection in the spiritual family of God is accessed (as in a physical relationship) by means of a “birth” process.

This was precisely the message of Christ in His instructive conversation with Nicodemus (Jn. 3:3-5). This process, in principle, consists of:

- a. the implantation of the seed (gospel preaching—1 Cor. 4:15);
- b. a conception (the production of “faith”—1 Jn. 5:1 ASV; 1 Pet. 1:23); and,

- c. the birth process (deliverance out of the water of immersion—Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5).

This new union with God grants the Christian the privilege to pray, “My Father in heaven . . .”

There is not one case of conversion in the book of Acts in which the outside-of-Christ sinner prayed for (and received) pardon from his past sins. Saul of Tarsus, in fact, is a demonstrable case to the contrary. Indeed, Cornelius himself is another example.

Saul prayed for three days and yet was instructed: “. . . [A]rise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins” (Acts 9:18; 22:16). Similarly, though there was *a sense* in which the prayer of Cornelius was “heard” (Acts 10:31), clearly it was not “heard” in the granting of pardon. This is evidenced by the fact that the prayer was “heard” before the centurion ever met Peter, and yet it was by the apostle’s mouth that he was to hear “words” (the gospel) whereby he *might be saved* (Acts 11:14). That settles the Cornelius-prayer issue.

Having argued our case upon the basis of biblical evidence, we feel that we must add one dimension yet that warrants exploration. We would urge the reader to consider the following facts.

### Heaven’s Desire

There is ample inspired testimony that our loving God is not desirous of seeing any person die in a mode of rebellion (1 Jn. 4:8; Eph. 2:4; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9). He is moved by the honest person who is of a contrite disposition (Psa. 34:18). He wants those who hunger and thirst after righteousness to be filled (Matt. 5:6). His compassionate interest in lost humanity is so intense that He was willing to sacrifice His beloved Son as an atonement for human iniquity (Jn. 3:16), even though man was the sinful enemy of his Creator (Rom. 5:6ff). File this concept away for the moment.

### The Honest Response

The most terrifying thought that a person will ever entertain is the reality that he is lost—that there is the potential that he could be separated eternally from the “Father of all mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3).

What will be the attitude of an *honest* person when he comes face-to-face with this stark reality, and yet he *does not know* what to do in order to access divine forgiveness? Most likely he will pray instinctively—just as Saul of Tarsus did (Acts 9:11). The venerable David Lipscomb once noted that “when a man believes in God and realizes that he is lost, he cannot help praying” (Queries and Answers, Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1963, p. 341).

Does this imply that the Lord will set aside the plan that He has implemented across the centuries, and save that person *independent of obedience* to the terms of sacred law (Heb. 5:8-9)? It does not. It might well be suggested, however, that God could, and would, respond to the honest sinner’s prayer by setting in motion such providential actions as would allow the searching person an exposure to the

gospel plan. This is a marvelous thought to contemplate.

### The Macedonian Man: Begging for the Gospel

Let us consider a case in the book of Acts that strongly points toward the concept suggested above. When Paul (together with Silas) began his third missionary journey, he traveled westward across Asia Minor (Acts 16:1ff). After stops at Derbe and Lystra (where Timothy joined them), they proceeded through that region known as Phrygia/Galatia.

Even though they labored under the great commission, with the obligation to preach the gospel to every creature in all the nations (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16), for some curious reason the Holy Spirit forbade them to preach in the Roman province of Asia. Accordingly, they skirted the border of Mysia and started to enter Bithynia.

Again, though, the Spirit of Jesus (i.e., the Holy Spirit) did not permit them to proceed. The New Testament student cannot determine whether these two “road-blocks” were effected miraculously, or by providential means. Clearly, however, these men were being guided by divine influence (Acts 16:6-7).

Presently they arrived in Troas. Here, in a vision at night, Paul saw the image of a Macedonian man, pleading, “Come and help us.” Concluding, then, that it was Heaven’s will that they evangelize in Europe, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke (who joins the group here in Troas—see “we” v. 10) sail across the Aegean Sea and ultimately make their way to Macedonia. The conversion of Lydia and her household, together with that of the jailor and his family, in Philippi, are perhaps tokens of the “ripeness” of this area for gospel teaching.

Now here is the point toward which we’ve been progressing. The man in Paul’s vision, who “kept on begging” for help (so the force of the imperfect verb in v. 9), quite obviously represented *the longing of honest hearts* who were searching for the truth. Clearly, God “heard” their cries and responded by dispatching His men to that region.

It is important to note, however, that the Lord did not circumvent His own plan of salvation by issuing pardon to these folks independent of the law of conversion. He did see to it, though, that they had access to the sacred message. Might he not likewise operate today in some providential, indirect fashion?

—Wayne Jackson

[from “Questions,” www.christiancourier.com]

  
 e-mail  
 your questions to...  
 sixthavenue@tds.net

# ROOTING FOR THE OTHER TEAM

*Caleb Colley, Jacksonville, Alabama*

Scott Williams was a forward for the NBA champion Chicago Bulls for three of their title-winning seasons in the early nineties, making some valuable contributions to that team. In fact, during the 1993 playoffs, the young Williams averaged 5.5 points and 5.8 rebounds per game, and became only the eighth player in NBA history to win the world championship during each of his first three seasons.

In June of 1993, Scott Williams was a Bull through and through—he loved his team and he wanted the Bulls to triumph over every other team, but *especially* the Phoenix Suns. The Suns were the Bulls' opponent in the 1993 Finals. Williams' (and Michael Jordan's) Bulls did eventually win the series in six games, so Scott enjoyed celebrating the sweet victory over Phoenix.

Fast forward ten years. Now it is 2003, and Williams has moved on with his career. Of all places, where do you think he is? You guessed it—Phoenix. As the Suns recall the 1993 Finals (only their second trip ever to the championship round), Scott Williams, now Phoenix's veteran forward, says something shocking: not only does he live and play basketball in Phoenix, he now loves the *Suns* and wants the Suns to *win!* He said, "I think this is a tremendous city to play for. We have such good fans . . . everyone's excited about Suns basketball again . . . I'm very, very happy."

Really, it is no surprise to hear Williams say such things, because in professional sports, players get traded regularly, and we understand that often players' loyalties have to be changed or even completely reversed.

Do people do that spiritually? They must. Jesus said that whoever is not with Him is against Him (Matt. 12:30). It's one or the other. Everyone living his life outside of the Lord's body is sending a message to the world that he is not on the Lord's side, and thus encourages others to live away from the Lord. He's telling people through his influence, "I think living my life on the devil's side is great!" He's saying, "I think the devil is tremendous to work for, and I have such good friends who support me." Get the picture? He's playing and rooting for the *other* side.

What that lost person needs to do is completely turn around spiritually and give his life to Jesus through obedience to His message. That 180-degree turnaround is the concept of repentance as presented clearly in passages like Luke 13:3-5 and Acts 3:19.

Turning a life around isn't as easy as simply trading a good forward for a rookie guard and a draft pick, because a person's soul cannot be won for the Lord with money or prestige. It can *only* be purchased by the blood of Christ. What can you do this week to help bring someone closer to turning his life around and playing on the Lord's team?

*WOT*

## **The Words of Truth**

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

***Address Service Requested***

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) in electronic form (e-mail or disk or CD).

Please send all correspondence to:

### **The Words of Truth**

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





## WHEN THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

*Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana*

My mind reels every time I read this story . . .

The day had finally arrived for Jacob. For seven years he had looked forward to making Rachel his wife (Gen. 29:18). He had served the better part of a decade for his bride-to-be, and it had seemed but a few days to him (v. 20).

Following the “wedding reception” (v. 22), Jacob’s father-in-law, Laban, brought his new bride to him in the evening. The newly-married couple then spent their first intimate night alone (vv. 21, 23):

It was the custom to have a great festive week after a wedding, beginning with a banquet on the nuptial night, with many male guests invited. At the proper time, when the wedding formalities had been observed, Laban presented his daughter to Jacob as his wife.

Although Leah was veiled, Jacob never questioned that it was really Rachel. The two sisters were no doubt sufficiently alike in stature and general mien, probably even in tone of voice, that the deception was fairly easy to accomplish on the unsuspecting Jacob. When he took her into his chambers and into his bed, it was dark, and no doubt much of the conversation that night was in whispers and in brief words of love. Probably also Leah had been arrayed in Rachel’s clothing and perfumes. It was not until the morning that Jacob actually saw he had been grievously deceived [Henry Morris, “Jacob and Laban,” *The Genesis Record*, Baker, 461].

Amazing, isn’t it? Rather than sleeping with Rachel, Jacob had spent the first night of his honeymoon alone with Leah (v. 17)—and he didn’t even know it!

We can only imagine the anger and shock that he felt at the moment of discovery. The Bible says, “*So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?’*” (v. 25). Jacob’s kinfolk had conspired against him, and he found himself in bed not with the beautiful daughter of Laban, but with the tender-eyed<sup>1</sup> daughter of Laban (v.17).<sup>2</sup> He must have been hurt.

May I suggest that **Jacob is not the only person to have experienced this kind of “morning revelation”?** Every day, newlyweds around the world awaken to the realization that **they’ve married the wrong person. Like Jacob, they discover**

**that they’ve joined themselves to someone far below their expectations:**

- “I never knew he had a drinking problem . . .”
- “I always assumed she would attend worship with me . . .”
- “I never realized he had such a temper . . .”
- “I never imagined she could be so careless with money . . .”
- “I never noticed when we were dating that he could be so possessive and controlling . . .”

The truth is, we ALL eventually “wake up” and find ourselves in this kind of circumstance (cf. Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8,10). Imperfections that were once hidden [or overlooked] inevitably come to light and the honeymoon draws to an end. But what happens at this juncture is critical because when we experience real disappointment in our mates, the relationship then takes one of two directions. Either the union begins to dissolve and divorce ensues, or else we commit ourselves to making the marriage succeed (Matt. 19:6; cf. Rom. 7:3). Jacob decided to take the latter approach. Despite his frustration, he was able to “work through” (vv. 26-30) his unique marital problems and find an acceptable solution. Granted, the Patriarch lived under a different law and dispensation than we do today (cf. Gal. 6:2), but **the principle remains the same. We can bemoan the fact we didn’t marry a “Prince Charming” or “Cinderella,” or we can make adjustments and bring real substance to our vows.**

Dear reader, what will you do when you experience disappointment in your marriage? How will you respond when you realize that you’ve married “the wrong person”? Will you work like Jacob (cf. Lk. 9:23; cf. Eph. 5:25, 28-29; Tit. 2:4), or will you run?

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I find it noteworthy that Jacob earlier in life had deceived his father (Gen. 27:1ff), Isaac, about his own identity. Now the tables have been turned on him in return (cf. Gal. 6:7).

<sup>2</sup>The description “tender-eyed” in Hebrew means *weak-eyed, a turning eye, or cross-eyed*. Evidently, Leah had a problem with her sight and the disfigurement made her face unappealing. HOT

# ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

Gus Nichols, 1892-1975

The church of Christ had not been established during the personal ministry of Christ, or during the period of the limited commission before the death of Christ. It was during that time that Christ said, "Upon this rock **I will build my church**" (Matt. 16:18). "Will build" is future tense. Christ had already sent the apostles out to preach under the limited commission (Matt. 10). But the church had not yet been built or established.

## Church and kingdom

There is no difference in the church of Christ and the kingdom of Christ. When Christ said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18), He immediately said, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (v. 19). The Lord's table is in His kingdom (Lk. 22:29-30). But the Lord's table is in the church (1 Cor. 11:23-34; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16,21). Therefore, the church and the kingdom are one and the same thing. Of course, the church is a spiritual kingdom, and not a literal one. Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36).

## Kingdom had not come in the Old Testament

The kingdom of the Lord had not come in the Old Testament. Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, Daniel said, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44). This referred to the days of the Roman Caesars, or to the fourth kingdom then under consideration (Dan. 2:26-44).

## To be for all nations

Daniel also said, "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14).

## To be established in last days

Isaiah said, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it" (Isa. 2:2). Joel said the Spirit would be poured out in the last days (Joel 2:28-32). Peter quoted

this as fulfilled beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21).

## "At hand" before the cross

John the Baptist preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is **at hand**" (Matt. 3:2). "At hand" meant it had not come but its coming was nigh (See Joel 1:15; 2 Tim. 4:6). Later, "Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is **at hand**" (Matt. 4:17). If the kingdom was still future when John said it was "at hand" then it was still future when Jesus said it was "at hand." As recorded by Mark, Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15). Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). In giving the limited commission Jesus said, "And as ye go, preach, saying, 'the kingdom of heaven is **at hand**'" (Matt. 10:7). Later Jesus sent out seventy more teachers and said to them, "Say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Lk. 10:9). Again, "Be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is **come nigh unto you**" (Lk. 10:11). Here are John, Jesus, the twelve, and the seventy, making eighty-four preachers out preaching before the cross the good news that the "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God" was "at hand" or had "come nigh." All of this meant the church was about to be established. It was during this time that Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18).

## Had not come at the crucifixion

Just before His death, Jesus said unto His disciples, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure **to give you** the kingdom" (Lk. 12:32). The kingdom had not come, but was to come in the lifetime of some then living and present.

At the last supper, the night before the crucifixion, Jesus said, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I **appoint unto you a kingdom**, as my Father **hath appointed unto me**; that ye may eat and drink **at my table in my kingdom**, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:28-30).

That same night, when He instituted the Lord's supper, Jesus said, "For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, **until the kingdom of God shall come**" (Lk. 22:18).

One of the thieves became penitent at the crucifixion and said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Lk.

23:42). After the crucifixion was over, "Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable counselor, **which also waited for the kingdom of God**, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus" (Mk. 15:43).

## Had not come near the ascension

Near the ascension of Jesus the kingdom had not come, for the apostles said, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power, but ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8). The next verses tell about His ascension.

## Had to ascend first

Daniel said, "And I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man, came with the clouds of heaven (the ascension, Acts 1:9-11), and came to the Ancient of days (to God), and they brought him (Christ) near before him (God). **And there was given him dominion, and glory**, and a kingdom, that all people (as in the Commission), nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14).

## The parable of the nobleman

On one occasion the disciples thought the kingdom would come upon their arrival in the city, and Jesus "spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman (Jesus) went into a far country (heaven) to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return" (Lk. 19:11-14). Yes, Christ had to go into heaven before He could receive His kingdom. He is now ruling over His kingdom **from His throne at God's right hand**. And when He comes He will condemn those who would not have Him rule over them.

## His throne is in heaven

Christ had to ascend to heaven to sit on His throne and to receive His kingdom, and to rule over men on earth. Like Melchizedek, Christ is both king and priest at the same time (Heb. 7:1; Gen. 14:18). He could not be a priest and rule as a king until He ascended to

heaven and sat down on His throne. The prophet said, “behold the man whose name is the **Branch**; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord (the church, 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Matt. 16:18), even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and **shall sit and rule upon his throne**; and he shall be a **priest upon his throne**: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zech. 6:12-13).

The Lord’s throne is in heaven. God said, “Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and **his throne as the sun before me**. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven” (Psa. 89:35-37). Yes, Christ’s throne is in heaven (See also 2 Sam. 7:12-13). Peter quoted these passages on Pentecost as fulfilled in Christ: “The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne” (Psa. 132:11). The angel promised Jesus the throne of David (Lk. 1:32-33).

#### Raised to sit on David’s throne

Peter commented on these Scriptures on Pentecost and said of David, “Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. He seeing

this before spake of the **resurrection of Christ**, that his soul was not left in hades, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:30-31). Yes, Christ was raised up from the dead to sit on David’s throne in heaven. “Therefore, being by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost (the throne of David promised by the Holy Spirit), he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens, but he saith himself, The Lord (God the Father) said unto my Lord (Christ), Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool” (Acts 2:33-35, quoted from Psa. 110:1). Then he later says, “The Lord **at thy right hand** shall strike through kings in the days of his wrath” (Psa. 110:5).

#### But when did the kingdom come?

Christ having ascended to be seated on David’s throne, and to receive His kingdom from God the Father, **sent His kingdom, His reign, upon earth** on Pentecost. Jesus had said the kingdom would come when the power of the Holy Spirit should come. “And he 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**” (Mk. 9:1). But the power was to come when the Spirit (promised in

commission) should come (Lk. 24:46-49). Again, Christ said, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

#### Kingdom came on Pentecost

This power and the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost (Acts 2). They were then filled with the Holy Spirit and could preach the gospel with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven (Acts 2:4; 1 Pet. 1:12). The coming of the Spirit on Pentecost is called “the beginning” (Acts 11:15). The New Testament was then ready to go in force (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 24:46-49; Jn. 20:20-23; Acts 2:1-4). The kingdom had now come, been set up, established. The gospel was preached that day, and about three thousand obeyed it and were added to the church, which Christ had promised to build (Acts 2:36-47; Matt. 16:18).

The establishment of the kingdom is now a matter of history. The church has been established. Those who obey the gospel of the commission are added to the church, or translated into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13; Acts 2:41,47). When Jesus comes again He will present this kingdom unto God the Father, and then the faithful will be forever with Him in heaven (1 Cor. 15:22-26; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). Heaven will be the glorified state of the kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18-20). WOT

## HOMOSEXUALITY: THIS IS WHERE WE PART WAYS

*Brad Harrub, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama*

The phone call was like many we receive at our offices. Someone had come across an article on our web site and wanted to talk to someone about it. In the course of our conversation, the young man spoke passionately about his beliefs, defending what he felt was right. About fifteen minutes into the conversation, he made the following comment: “Yes, I feel like I must speak up and be heard, similar to the homosexuals today who desire equal rights.” Up until that moment, we were having a healthy conversation and were both able to communicate various views and ideas. But with those words, our conversation took an abrupt turn. I told this young man that this is where he and I “were definitely going to part ways.” (Obviously, this individual was not familiar with Apologetics Press and our stance to defend New Testament Christianity).

Having struck a nerve, the caller asked me if I was kidding. In amazement, he went on to comment that he could not believe I did not want all people to “share equal rights.” I

assured him that all people were created in the “image and likeness” of God (Gen. 1:26-27), but that did not stop people from committing acts that God would not endorse (e.g., rape, murder, stealing). He then questioned my love for others, and asked, “how can someone who professes Christianity treat others with such disdain?” Sadly, the world has done an excellent job of teaching this young man that anyone who does not accept homosexuality is guilty of the worst type of sin—the sin of intolerance. I reassured him that I tried very hard to treat all humans in a loving manner, but that did not mean I (or, more important, God) approved of their actions. Our conversation continued for another fifteen minutes, as I continued reminding him that no matter how you slice it, the Bible—God’s Word—viewed homosexual practices as **sin** (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 1:26-32; Lev. 18:22). I kept reiterating the point that sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2), and as such, those who continued to practice such acts without repenting would spend eternity

in torment.

Over and over this young man kept questioning why I would not want to give equal marriage rights to other “fellow human beings.” And over and over I stated very simply that what I wanted did not really matter. Rather, God had set forth a plan, and we as obedient Christians are to follow that plan. The gentleman noted that legislation likely would be passed in my lifetime recognizing homosexual marriages as true unions. I conceded that, unfortunately, he probably was right, but I continued to stress that laws would not change this abomination in the eyes of the Lord (think—abortion). Changing tactics, he tried to discredit the Bible, but quickly realized that was not going to be possible, given the resources I had at my fingertips. Looking for any means to put a chink in my argument, he stressed that the “majority” of Americans were now accepting homosexual couples. He pointed to the numerous examples that are clearly evident in our media. I told him that, yes, I was aware that most sitcoms felt obligated to

have a token “homosexual” couple in order to be politically correct. But I noted that I have just as much of an obligation to keep such material out of my household. Just because Hollywood embraces it does not give it credence. I patiently reminded him that just because the majority accepted something (e.g., abortion, divorce), that did not make it right. I quoted Matthew 7:13-14, and mentioned that Christians were never going to be in the majority. We are to be transformed, not conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). He laughed, and asked how I could believe in a God who would send the majority of people to hell. I responded by asking him how many people he knew who were willing to be **obedient to and serve** an all-powerful God. After his silence, I told him that God is not only a just God, but He also is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. I pointed out that, sadly, society has mischaracterized God as so “loving” that He will accept everyone and all of their actions. I reassured him that while society might continue to bow up their backs against God’s divine edicts, that did not change the **fact** that one day, **every** knee would bow (Phil. 2:10).

He pointed out that Americans were becoming more compliant; I repeated that made no difference—look at how our society now views marriage and divorce. Multiple marriages are common. In fact, some time ago, I was walking through airport security and a man in front of me laughed aloud and said to his two male friends, “who doesn’t

have an ex-wife these days?” What a tragic commentary on our society! I told the young man on the phone that if someone were homosexual, he or she did have the ability to remain celibate—just like someone who has been divorced for unscriptural reasons. This young man could not have expressed more incredulity. He asked me if I really thought that men and women should remain celibate just because they were homosexual or happened to get out of a “bad” marriage. He said, “you can’t be serious.” I reminded him that the rewards in eternity far exceeded any earthly pleasures.

This young man then pointed out that he found it ironic that God had allowed homosexuals to be “born like that.” Again, not realizing my background (anatomy and neurobiology), I quickly reminded him that scientists have completed the human genome this year, and no “homosexual” gene has ever been found—which is interesting, given all the time and money that has been focused on finding just such a genetic causative agent. Certainly, society wants the vast majority to believe that these individuals “cannot help themselves,” yet according to science, there are **no data** that support his “born with it” view. We ended our conversation with his asking me if I really thought that God would send people to hell simply because they acted on the “feelings” they had for members of the same sex. He could not fathom my simple response. I told him, “Yes, because the Bible says that is exactly **what He will do!**”

Friends, the vocal homosexual **minority** has had their fifteen minutes in the spotlight—their time is up! It’s high time Christians remind the world of the definition of sin. How long will we sit by idly and allow legislation to be passed that destroys God’s original plan for families? How long are we going to continue to support news and media networks that openly endorse gay relationships? Are we so intimidated that we have completely forgotten what God’s Word says on the matter? Has the homosexual agenda **succeeded** in characterizing everyone who does not accept their movement as tantamount to committing “hate crimes?” We shake our heads as denominations openly install a homosexual “bishop,” but what happens when a homosexual wants to work with the youth in a local congregation? Will we continue to remain passive? If homosexual marriages are acceptable, then why not go ahead and legalize bestiality, pedophilia, and polygamy—after all, these are simply individuals wanting their “equal rights.” How far are we going to let this go before we finally speak up and inform the world that homosexual acts are sin that bring about spiritual death (Rom. 6:23; Jam. 1:13-15)? This young man labeled me as a fundamentalist. If “fundamentalist” means that I am striving diligently to follow the directives set forth in the Bible, then I thank him for that compliment. WOT

## GOD IS “NUMBER CONSCIOUS”

*Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia*

Occasionally the accusation, “you are just number conscious,” flies. If we speak in terms of attendance and emphasize its importance, we may justify mentioning it by saying that numbers represent souls. That is true, but there is no need to be ashamed of “number consciousness.” After all, the Holy Spirit must have been.

The Holy Spirit chose the wording of the Bible (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13—“combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”). Did you know He chose the noun *arithmos* (from whence comes “arithmetic”) eighteen times in the New Testament, with five occurring in Acts? Each time the word is used, God has been counting. In Acts, God is keeping track of the numbers being converted and the numbers making up the community of the converted—the church. *Arithmos*, in the literal sense, means “to count” or “to reckon,” and “sum” or “number” (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 461). In these passages

from Acts, *arithmos* is used literally and specifically—“the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (4:4), “a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves [to Theudas]” (5:36), “the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly . . .” (6:7), “a large number . . . believed” (11:21), and “the churches . . . were increasing in number daily” (16:5). Aside from Gamaliel’s Acts 5 speech, the Acts passages report numerical growth in the early church.

Gearing our programs and preaching at all costs (and compromise) to optimize our attendance figures is not what is prompted here. Truth offends and turns away many. That primitive church had a large share of enemies and detractors. While many submitted to immersion, some resorted to throwing stones (Acts 7:58; 14:19). The early Christians were tarred, run over, beaten, imprisoned, burned alive, fed to

lions, exiled, and otherwise mistreated. While this was sporadic, it was often intense. That is an obvious indication they had a number of enemies. Yet, through living hope (1 Pet. 1:3), they worked at their mission and God gave the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). All the while, Heaven kept count.

Long before the cross, God had said, “Behold, all souls are Mine” (Ezek. 18:4). He’s been in every delivery room. He’s heard every baby’s cry, watched every skinned knee, been privy to every child’s fear, and seen every sinful word and action develop. He was there at the moment every individual crossed the line from “safe” to “separated” (cf. Isa. 59:2). As Creator and Redeemer, God rightly marks down every instance where a person goes from “separated” to “saved.” So, let’s think like God, pursue evangelistic opportunities, teach the truth, and the number of disciples will increase. Be “number conscious”! WOT

## “THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINETH US”

*Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington*

The love of Christ—who can describe it? It supersedes sexual love (*eros*), and family love (*storge*), and friendship love (*philia*). It is what God is: *agape* (1 Jn. 4:8). It is selfless service, undying concern, and unending commitment. It is unconditional, impartial, and never failing. It has been called the “in spite of” love.

When the love of Christ takes hold of a sinner’s heart, he confers “not with flesh and blood,” but immediately he rushes, even at midnight, to the water of baptism (Acts 16:25-34).

On arising from the water, he is never the same again! From that moment he lives “no longer” for himself, but only for Him who died for him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). He has “crucified” and “buried” his “old” self, and is “renewed in the spirit of his mind” (Gal. 5:24; Rom. 6:4; Eph. 4:22-23). He is a “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Everlastingly grateful, he describes to all who will hear “the excellencies of him who called” him “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). He exclaims that Jesus “loved me, and gave himself for me,” yet not for him alone, “but for the whole world” (Gal. 2:20; 1 Jn. 2:2).

He may be criticized or even spurned by his blood-kin, but what Jesus has done for him means everything. He is grieved, because of mother love, if he has to turn away from mother’s religion, but his decision has been made, and he will not turn back. One man, some 24 years after the love of Christ mastered him, was still grieving about his kinfolks: “I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brothers’ sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:2-3).

Oh! How much he wanted his kinfolks to be taken over by Christ’s love! He wrote, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved” (Rom. 10:1).

All the rest of his life, after Christ’s love took over, for some 34 years, he suffered prisons, lashings, and even stoning. But the constraint of Christ’s love, “an urge with irresistible force,”

made him say, about all the threats against him, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

The word “constraineth” is variously defined as taking hold, ruling, controlling, compelling, urging, seizing, inciting, and driving. But something more meaningful than all dictionary definitions is to see sinner in action after the love of Christ has captured him. For example, spend some time with a man named Epaphroditus.

The parents of Epaphroditus, apparently residents of Philippi in Macedonia, named their son in honor of Aphrodite (Venus), the Grecian goddess of love. In the Lord’s providence, Paul and Silas preached Christ’s love in Philippi in the 50s. Lydia and a jailor and others yielded to that love and obeyed the gospel (Acts 16:11-34). Epaphroditus did also, turning from his parents’ pagan religion (Phil. 2:25-30).

We hope that the parents of Epaphroditus became Christians also, but we are certain that Christ’s love captured the heart of Epaphroditus, moving him to live for Jesus who had died for him (Phil. 2:25-30).

In the spring of A.D. 61, Paul arrived in Rome, a prisoner in chains, but, instead of being imprisoned, he was allowed to rent a house and live there (Acts 28:30). However, rent had to be paid, and food had to be bought. Paul’s money ran out. He could not follow his trade of tent making, for the authorities kept Paul chained to a soldier (Acts 28:16, 20). Even when he had company and made a speech to visitors, the chain was visible (Acts 28:20).

Over at Philippi, Christians had not forgotten the man who introduced them to Jesus. Somehow they heard that Paul was a prisoner in Rome and needed money badly. Those loving Christians, constrained by the love of Christ, took a collection of money for Paul, and they asked Epaphroditus to carry it to Rome. He was to be their messenger (literally, their apostle, *apostolos*, Phil. 2:25).

What a trip! Over 400 miles! By land and by water. And after he had arrived, a disappointment! The money was not enough! What to do? Christ’s love constrained Epaphroditus to get a job in Rome to earn money to assist Paul. Very likely he held down two jobs, for he became ill, very ill.

Paul insisted that he go home, and he wrote a letter to the Philippian Christians, asking them to receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold such people in honor. He was near death for Christ’s work, risking his life, that he might make up your lack of service to me (Phil. 2:25-30).

Paul esteemed Epaphroditus highly. He wrote to the Philippians what that man meant to him personally, saying he “is my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier” and “servant of my need.” And he let the Philippians know how greatly he was relieved when Epaphroditus had recovered: “God had mercy on him, and not only him, but also on me, so that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil. 2:27).

We hope that Epaphroditus was able to make the arduous trip back home. However, we will not know until we talk with him in heaven.

Besides Epaphroditus, many early Christians, constrained by Christ’s love, made themselves “living” sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). Some became dead sacrifices, as Antipas of Pergamus, not loving life “so much as to refuse to die” (Rev. 12:11). Jesus looked down from heaven and saw Antipas “slain,” and sent word to John on the isle of Patmos that Antipas was “my faithful martyr” (Rev. 2:13).

Before John died, he went to Smyrna and appointed Polycarp as an elder of the church there. He is another wholly motivated by Christ’s love, but living in a time when Christianity was both unpopular and illegal. Both the Jews and the Roman government tried to stamp out Christianity.

The Roman consul gave Polycarp a choice: “Swear, and I will release you: curse Christ!” Polycarp replied, “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me. How then shall I blaspheme my King, who has saved

me?" The old man was ordered to be burned at the stake. The Jews helped gather logs for the fire. Today at Smyrna (present day Izmar), on the slope of Mr. Pagus, are the ruins of a theater and a stadium close by the spot where Polycarp died in flames on Saturday, February 23, A.D. 155.

Many centuries later, on a farm out from Dickson, Tennessee, a mother told her children about the work of J.M. McCaleb, who left comfortable America in 1892 to live in pagan Japan, being constrained by Christ's love. One of her daughters, Sarah Andrews, was baptized at age fourteen, and told her parents she wanted to do what J.M. McCaleb had done. What? A female missionary! In a foreign language? Thousands of miles from Tennessee! Alone! What nerve!

That was 1904, and she would not

change her mind! At age twenty-five, sponsored by no congregation, supported only by her parents, on Christmas Day, 1915, she left alone for Japan. There she served unrelentingly for forty-six years, teaching neighborhood women, boys, and girls. Mack Wayne Craig, her nephew, wrote,

Because she was a single woman, much of her work was devoted to teaching girls and women. She used her house to teach them to cook and sew, as well as to help them learn of the Savior. . . . When war broke out, she was interned as an enemy alien, and confined to her house. Wounded soldiers were brought to her house for her to be a nurse for them. "I did my best," but "because of a lack of food, I broke down." My body began swelling, which is one sign of starvation. . . . I weighed only 75 pounds. . . . There was a duration of almost three years that I had no word from the homeland whatsoever.

Today there are three congregations in Japan that she helped to establish. The church in Dickson, Tennessee, supported her for the last twenty-five years of her life. When she was asked to retire and to move back to Tennessee, she replied, "It is just as near to heaven from Japan as it is from America.

An orphan girl, Oiha San, mothered by Sarah in her home, grew up and loved Sarah deeply. At Sarah's grave in Shizuoka, Oiha and others erected a monument in her memory. Ten years later, at the Sunday morning service in Shizuoka, December 26, 1971, Hugo and Lois McCord met and hugged and reminisced with the gray-haired Oiha San. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," all being constrained by Christ's love (Rev. 14:13). *WOT*

## YOU DID SOMETHING TODAY THAT YOU'LL NEVER DO IN HEAVEN

*Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama*

You did not realize it, but you have been involved today in activities that would be completely inappropriate in heaven. No, not sinful things (hopefully), but little things that serve to remind us that we are not at home in this world. Most likely today, you have done more than one of these things.

**YOU DROVE BY A CEMETERY.** There are no hillsides dotted with the markers of loved ones "across Jordan." You won't find silent cities of the dead in heaven, for no one ever dies there! John wrote, ". . . there shall be no more death . . ." (Rev. 21:4).

**YOU TURNED ON A LIGHT SWITCH.** There is no darkness there . . . "for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). "There shall be no night there" (Rev. 21:25b), so there will be no street lamps, no night lights, no candles, and no light switches.

**YOU FACED A TEMPTATION.** We face temptations daily in this life, because the devil and his workers are ever busy (1 Pet. 5:8). Oh how we wish we could lay our armor aside and just rest from the constant battle of faith (Eph. 6:13-18). That day is coming! In the land where we are staking our claim, the devil has

no passport! In fact, he will have been cast down into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10). His helpers, too, who are personified as the beast and the false prophet by John, will be cast into that lake (19:20).

**YOU VISITED A SICK PERSON.** Each week, we try to get by to see the sick in hospitals or shut-in at home, but we'll never do so in heaven. Sickness is a result of the fall, and all those ill effects are reversed in heaven. John said, ". . . the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

**YOU LOCKED YOUR DOORS.** We live in a wicked society. Every night the news tells us about those who were robbed, beaten, and killed the night before. We rush to fasten our windows, bolt our doors, and secure our homes. But, did you know that there will be no bad news in heaven?! The doors on those mansions have no dead bolts, the windows have no locks, and there are no burglar alarms. "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). The wedding feast is by "invitation only" and nobody crashes that party!

**YOU SAW AN OLD PERSON.** We daily see the aging process in ourselves and our loved ones. Our skin wrinkles, our vision dims, our strength fails, our hearing goes, our energy wanes (cf. Eccl. 12:3-7). But in that land there are no retirement homes and no nursing facilities because there are no old people! (Well, we'll all be old, but no one will show it.) There we receive new, incorruptible bodies (2 Cor. 5:1-6). **YOU SHED A TEAR.** Hardly a week goes by in which there is not some sadness mixed with our blessings. We face heartaches, and sometimes heartbreaks, far more frequently than would be our choice. But did you know that the Bible says, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying. . . .?"

**YOU TOOK AN ASPIRIN.** Here we have to deal with headaches, arthritis, and a million other pains. There are no drug stores in heaven! Because nobody has any sicknesses. John wrote, ". . . neither shall there be any more pain . . ." (Rev. 21:4).

*Don't you want to go home? WOT*

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Question: Does a person need to go before the congregation to repent of a public sin? Could he just go to an elder and it not be made known publicly?**

**Answer:** For further reading, we encourage you to consult volume one of Guy N. Woods' *Questions and Answers* (pp. 211-213).

The principles involved are these:

- (1) Every known sin must be confessed to God (1 Jn. 1:9).
- (2) Some sins, however, should also be confessed to our brothers and sisters in Christ. James writes, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (Jam. 5:16, ESV).
- (3) Which sins, then, should be confessed to God, and which sins should be confessed both to God and our brethren? The implication is that private sins should be confessed to God, while sins committed against (or known by) others should be confessed to those individuals (see, for example, Simon's request for intercessory prayer in Acts 8:24: "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me").

Brother Woods has an excellent summary:

The verbs of James 5:16 are present imperatives, and thus signify: 'Keep on confessing your sins one to another, and keep on praying one for another . . .' The passage does not deal primarily with confession to God (though this is implied in James 5:15, immediately preceding), nor to the elders or preacher (!) but to one another—the brethren generally. Sins known only to God should be confessed only to God; sins known to one or a few should be confessed only to the one or the few, as the case may be; public sin, sin known to all, should be confessed publicly and before the church. It is a practical rule . . . that the confession should be as public as the sin—but not more so (p. 212).

To answer the question directly, confession to an elder of a sin committed against (and/or known by) others would contradict the above-mentioned biblical principles. Inasmuch as is possible, the one who sinned should ask the

forgiveness of all those against whom he sinned and who know of his transgression. We should also note that it is not necessary to state the *specific* sin committed—those against whom one has sinned already know what he or she has done, and those who do not know do not necessarily need to know.

—Chuck Webster



**Question: Is it wrong for brothers and sisters in Christ to argue? Are there principles that should guide us when we disagree?**

**Answer:** This question addresses an area with which I have struggled over the years. I once wondered, "Can you believe that those brethren are fussing . . . ?" "How in the world can two Christian people debate like that . . . ?" "Children of God should never disagree . . ."

This question is also relevant because it addresses something with which most of us *personally* dealt. Have you ever had a disagreement with a fellow saint? Be honest. Yes? For most of my life I held the conviction that God's people didn't fuss. Period. Not under any circumstances. Never. And to do so was ungodly, unscriptural, and unloving.

But as I read through the New Testament, I kept stumbling over certain verses . . .

- "And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brothers" (Matt. 20:24). Indignation? The word in the Greek is *aganakteo* and means *to feel violent irritation* (cf. Matt. 21:15; 26:8; Mk. 10:14; Lk. 13:14).
- "But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest" (Mk. 9:34). Dispute? The word in the Greek is *dialegomai* and means *to contend, to dispute, to discuss*.
- "Then an argument arose among them as to who should be the greatest" (Lk. 9:46, Phillips). Argument? The KJV translates the word as "reasoning." The word in the Greek is *dialogismos* and refers to a *debate*.
- "But there was also rivalry among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest" (Lk. 22:24). Rivalry? The word in the Greek is *philoneikia* [found only here in the NT] and refers to a *love of strife*.

Do a little contextual reading and you'll discover that the men who experienced indignation, disputing, arguments, and rivalry were *the disciples of the Lord*—future apostles in the church! That's right! **The very twelve men whom Jesus selected, taught, and trained to lead and guide the church of the first century were the very same men who often "fussed" among themselves.**

That realization has been especially helpful

to me in my daily life. I no longer feel guilty now when I don't see "eye-to-eye" with a brother over a matter of expediency. I no longer shoulder a burden of remorse when I feel passionate about a church issue, and another Christian feels just as passionate about the other side of the issue. Disagreement is natural and normal. The disciples fussed. If they did, [and I can't find where Jesus ever rebuked them for such], then why is it wrong when we do so today?

Having said that, there are times when we should feel guilty and need to repent during a fuss or feud:

- We should feel guilty when we talk about people behind their backs (Prov. 11:13; 16:28; 20:19).
- We should feel guilty when we are rude, harsh, and unloving (Eph. 4:31).
- We should feel guilty when we use bad language (Eph. 4:29; Col. 3:8).
- We should feel guilty when we don't control our tempers (Prov. 29:22; 37:8; Eph. 4:26-27).
- We should feel guilty when we try to get people on our side of an issue against somebody else at church (Prov. 16:28; 17:9).
- We should feel guilty when we try to build a case against a brother by covertly passing along damaging information [i.e., slander] about him to our peers (Eccl. 10:20; Ezek. 22:9; Ex. 20:16; Jer. 6:28; 9:4; Prov. 21:8; Psa. 101:5; Col. 3:9; 2 Tim. 3:3; Jam. 4:11-1).
- We should feel guilty when we refuse to go and talk with a brother in private about a problem we are experiencing (Matt. 18:15-17; 5:23-24).

But we should not feel guilty simply because we are in disagreement with another child of God.

Conflict and disagreement fed hungry widows in the church (Acts 6:1ff). Conflict and disagreement built the early church (Acts 6:7). Conflict and disagreement corrected a doctrinal error pertaining to Gentiles (Acts 15:1ff). Conflict and disagreement doubled missionary efforts (Acts 15:36-41) and strengthened additional congregations.

I used to think, "Don't fuss at all." Now I think, "Fuss fair—fuss right" (Prov. 12:18; 27:5-6; Eph. 4:26).

—Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana


  
**email**  
 your questions to...  
 sixthavenue@tds.net

# DOES BAPTISM SANCTIFY AN UNSCRIPTURAL RELATIONSHIP?

Neil Richey, Lynchburg, Virginia

The scenario is this—a man and a woman marry (both having never been married before). Neither is a Christian. After several years, the same man and woman decide to divorce (fornication is not the cause). They have clearly violated Matthew 5:32. Now suppose that the man marries again, and he is now out of ignorance living in adultery (cf. Matt. 19:9). While in this relationship he is taught how to become a Christian. He is therefore baptized for the forgiveness of his sins (Acts 2:38). Question, did his baptism sanctify (make right) his relationship with his *new wife*?

**1. Baptism never makes a sinful act a righteous act.** If it was adultery before he became a Christian, it remains adultery after he becomes a Christian. I read about a preacher and elder who went to talk to the husband of one of the members about becoming a Christian. After sitting down and studying the Bible together, the man asked the elder and preacher to follow him into the woods. They came upon a moonshine still. The man asked, “Can I continue to operate this still and be a Christian?” When he was told that he could not, he began chopping the still into pieces. He then said, “I am ready to become a Christian.” We know that one cannot be a Christian and continue to operate a moonshine still. But, do we also know that one cannot be a Christian and continue to live in adultery?

**2. Baptism never sanctifies an unscriptural relationship.** Suppose that two men are living together in a homosexual relationship. They hear the gospel and desire to become Christians. Would baptism make their relationship right? Would they then have the right to continue to live in that relationship after being baptized for the forgiveness of sin? We understand that baptism does not sanctify the unscriptural relationship of a homosexual couple (1 Cor. 6:9), but do we also know that baptism does not sanctify a *marriage relationship* that is adulterous?

In a study such as this, the question arises, “Can one who is in an unscriptural marriage not obtain forgiveness for his sins?” Without question, he can. Anyone who chooses to submit his will to God’s may have God’s pardon. But, without meeting God’s terms there is never pardon, and one of those terms is repentance (Lk. 13:3). To repent means “to change one’s mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins” (Thayer). In other words, when one repents, he decides that he will not continue in sin. For instance, he who was making moonshine will no longer make it. He who committed sins of a homosexual nature will not do that anymore. Likewise, he that is living in adultery will not live in adultery any longer.

WOT

## The Words of Truth

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

Address Service Requested

The words of

Truth

## 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) in electronic form (e-mail or on disk or CD).

Please send all correspondence to:

## The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





## WHEN TRUTH IS GONE

*J. Bryant Evans, Daphne, Alabama*

Recent events within the Episcopal church should sound warning bells throughout the religious world, because they show just how far a religious body can fall away from truth. Many were stunned to learn that the Episcopal church was actively considering naming an avowed, practicing homosexual to become a bishop within their church. The shock gave way to amazement as the church's leadership body in the U.S. actually confirmed him to that position. And all of this happened despite what the Bible says about homosexuality.

In an interview with the Associated Press published September 30, 2003, Episcopal Bishop Frank T. Griswold, the leader of the U.S. Episcopal church, actually offered the following quotation in defense of the homosexual bishop: "Homosexuality, as we understand it as an orientation, is not mentioned in the Bible." It becomes much easier to understand the Episcopal position when one first comes to understand their low view of the truth of the Scriptures. But we would hasten to add that the Episcopal church is not the first, nor will they be the last, to depart from sound doctrine. All around the religious world men are teaching to the "itching ears" of the lost (2 Tim. 4:3). Even within the one true church of Christ, some have cheapened the Word of God to the point that it is devoid of any power. This article is offered to show what happens when one no longer holds to the absolute truth of Scripture—when one dilutes, ignores, and attempts to change clear Bible teaching.

God's Word is truth (Psa. 33:4; Jn. 17:17; 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jam. 1:18) and as such must be held in the highest regard. We must never judge the truthfulness of Scripture by our own perception of life. Rather, let us judge our own lives against the truth of God's Word (Jam. 1:21-25)

Paul warned of those who would tamper with God's truth. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1). In his own defense he declared that he had not handled the Word of God "deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2) which certainly suggests that it is possible to handle the Word dishonestly. Interestingly, in the same context he spoke of those "whom the god of this world hath blinded." God's Word is powerful (Rom. 1:16) and able to destroy sin (2 Cor. 10:4; Heb. 4:12), but it must first come into contact with the sinner. When Satan is able to blind a man to the truth he renders the Word useless to that man. If a man is so foolish as to allow himself to be blinded, God will allow him to believe untruth (2 Thess. 2:3-12). Only God's pure Word can save, not a conglomeration of fleshly thoughts and ideas.

In the case of the Episcopal leadership, they have so crafted and mishandled the Word that, in their view, homosexuality is no longer a sin. But is it? God's Word is clear. Recall that marriage is God-created

and God-honoring. It was the Creator Himself who performed the first marriage in the Garden of Eden between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:21-25). There is not a single case in all of Scripture where God blessed a so-called "same-sex union." Genesis 19 records God's judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were given over to unrighteousness and illicit conduct.

Now let's observe the contrast here between what Griswold alleges and what the Bible says. Episcopal Griswold affirms that there was no such thing as a homosexual orientation in the Bible. But in Genesis 19:8, in the midst of an assault by the men of the city of Sodom, Lot offers his virgin daughters to the men. But they rejected his offer and continued instead to pursue after the men visiting Lot. These men chose homosexual over heterosexual conduct, and that certainly declares their orientation.

Griswold further charges that homosexual conduct was only prohibited in cases where it was purely lustful in nature. Paul speaks of both gay and lesbian behavior when he writes "For this cause (love of man over God—JBE), God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature" (Rom. 1:26). Lust is only a peripheral issue in this verse. Paul declares, by inspiration, that homosexuality is "against nature."

He continues: "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 . . ." (Rom. 1:27). Notice that the last phrase singles out the conduct of homosexuality as being unseemly. "Unseemly" is also translated "shameless" (NKJV) and "indecent" (NIV). Make no mistake—lust is wrong, but Paul has clearly and unmistakably singled out homosexuality as deserving of judgment.

One final quote from Griswold on the decision to install a homosexual bishop: "I think the confirmation of the bishop of New Hampshire is acknowledging what is already a reality in the life of the church and the larger society of which we are a part." In other words, society and the church set truth and the Bible is conformed to fit. Sadly, the Episcopal church and Bishop Griswold have simply "changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). God's Word does not conform to us; rather we are changed by it (Rom. 12:2).

Dear brethren, do we see what happens when we fail to honor Scripture as truth? Slowly but surely we will drift farther and farther into a sea of sin. One only wonders what will come next for the religious world. We call upon the Episcopalians and all men to cease tampering with truth, come out of their denominations, and stand with us upon the only rock of truth—the Bible.

WOT

# DREAM BIG

Chuck Webster, Editorial

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

## Believe.

Do church leaders believe in the Lord's church? For the most part, congregations are going to model the attitude and work ethic of their leaders. Because inspiration begins at the top, church leaders must model for the congregation a strong conviction in the efficacy of the local church. Sometimes it seems, however, that we have become so caught up in the day-to-day activities of the church that we have forgotten that the reason we're here is to save the world (Lk. 19:10; Eph. 1:22-23). Too often we preachers concern ourselves with meeting certain demands—lectureship manuscripts, preachers' breakfasts, phone calls, web site management, etc.—that we have little time to take care of our primary work: preaching the gospel and evangelizing the lost. When this happens, church work has become a *job* instead of a passion. Many elderships spend so much time discussing building maintenance, handling financial matters, and having "business meetings" that they have little time for their primary work: shepherding souls and leading the church toward what it ought to be.

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

When we hold hands with God, pattern

ourselves after His Word, and trust in Him, the Lord's church can again transform the world. But it begins with faith in the heart of every church leader!

## Dream.

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

Many of the Bible's great characters were visionaries. Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). Joshua and Caleb said "We can take this land" (Num. 13:30). Caleb, when eighty years old, said "Give me this mountain" (Josh. 14:12). Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). Jesus, with the greatest vision of all, dreamed of a mustard seed kingdom that would bless the world (Mt. 13:31-32).

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

- ▶ The vision of involving every member in service to Christ with his/her talents in addition to faithful worship.
- ▶ The vision of a glorious Bible school program where all members are so excited they can't wait to get there.
- ▶ The vision of a youth ministry which seeks to build our youth into the image of Christ and involve every young Christian in service to the Lord.
- ▶ The vision of an outreach ministry that will carry the message of Christ to every lost soul of our community.
- ▶ The vision of a world mission program with the addition of missionaries each year.
- ▶ The vision of a great heart of compassion for the poor, widows, orphans, and hurting people.
- ▶ The vision of a great hand of outreach to those with special needs such as the aged, singles, etc.
- ▶ The vision of a great ministry for building

good homes and good marriages, helping parents in their purpose of rearing good Christian children.

- ▶ The vision of fellowship that gives every Christian a sense of belonging and friendship (*How to Build a Great Church*, p. 107).

## Challenge.

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

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

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

Sometimes the reason people are inactive

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

The following story is told in *Chicken Soup For the Soul*:

A man named Monty Roberts owns a horse ranch in San Ysidro. In telling about his life, he tells a story about a young man who was the son of an itinerant horse trainer who would go from stable to stable, race track to race track, farm to farm and ranch to ranch, training horses. As a result, the boy's high school career was continually interrupted. When he was a senior, he was asked to write a paper about what he wanted to be and do when he grew up. That night he wrote a seven-page paper describing his goal of someday owning a horse ranch. He wrote about his dream in great detail and he

even drew a diagram of a 200-acre ranch, showing the location of all the buildings, the stables and the track. Then he drew a detailed floor plan for a 4,000-square-foot house that would sit on a 200-acre dream ranch.

He put a great deal of his heart into the project and the next day he handed it in to his teacher. Two days later he received his paper back. On the front page was a large red "F" with a note that read, "See me after class."

The boy with the dream went to see the teacher after class and asked, "Why did I receive an F?"

The teacher said, "This is an unrealistic dream for a young boy like you. You have no money. You come from an itinerant family. You have no resources. Owning a horse ranch requires a lot of money. You have to buy the land. You have to pay for the original breeding stock and later you'll have to pay large stud fees. There's no way you could ever do it." Then the teacher added, "If you will rewrite this paper with a more realistic goal, I will reconsider your grade."

The boy went home and thought about it long and hard. He asked his father what he should do. His father said, "Look, son, you have to make up your own mind on this. However, I think it is a very important decision for you."

Finally, after sitting with it for a week, the boy turned in the same paper, making no changes at all. He stated, "You can keep the F and I'll keep my dream."

Monty Roberts now owns a 4,000-square-foot house in the middle of a 200-acre horse ranch. Oh, and he still has that school paper framed over the fireplace. He didn't allow his teacher to crush his dream.

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

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

## SHOULD A CHRISTIAN BE LIKE THE DEVIL?

*Chad Dollahite, Ariton, Alabama*

The answer to the question asked in the title of this article seems almost too obvious—**no!!!** But, upon closer inspection and study of the devil and *some* of his attributes, there are certain traits that, when properly applied, can help Christians to be better servants of God. When it comes to lying, cheating, and any other forms of ungodliness that epitomize the devil and all he stands for, Christians obviously ought to be as different from him as day is from night. But, in this article, we will notice eight characteristics of Satan that, *used aright*, ought to be present in Christians.

**Satan uses all available methods.** He will use any and every available means to get someone "on his side." Paul said, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). He further stated that ". . . we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). Satan will even transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). We as Christians ought to use every available method, not to cause men to sin and lose their souls (as Satan does), but to help them do whatever they need to do to **save** their souls by obeying God. What a lesson for us as Christians—use whatever necessary means (within the context of scriptural authority) to help ourselves and others to get and stay right with God!

**Satan is patient.** Satan tempted Jesus three different times (Matt. 4). Did he care that he was dealing with the Son of God, the *least* likely person *ever* to sin? Absolutely not. He continued to tempt Jesus, and he was patient, using a different approach each time, until Jesus finally told him, "Get thee hence, Satan" (v. 10). Can there be any doubt? Satan is patient! He will wait to get someone to do wrong. Christians need to learn to be patient. It may be that we know of someone whom we believe will *never* obey the Gospel, but be patient, and keep sowing the seed, for if Satan's patience pays off at times, giving him converts, certainly patience in trying to convert souls *to* God will pay off as well.

**Satan is not easily discouraged—he doesn't quit.** Satan will take whatever "bits" he can get and work with them, and he will not quit—*ever!* In Luke's account of the temptation of Jesus, he records, "And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him **for a season**" (4:13, emp. mine). Satan was not successful in the least in tempting Jesus, but it by no means discouraged him. One only has to look as far as the Garden of Gethsemane to see Satan at work on Jesus again, undoubtedly wanting Jesus to forego the cross and the impending suffering, but Jesus again resisted and overcame (Matt. 26:36-42; Lk. 22:39-44).

Again, Christians can learn a valuable lesson, not for evil, but for good. We must not get discouraged, whether in soul-winning or simply remaining faithful to God. Christians can learn from Satan's persistence and "never say die" attitude that we should never give up or quit when it comes to Christ and His church. As Paul put it, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). Let us remember the words of our Lord, ". . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10b).

**Satan accepts people quickly.** This fact is so obvious that it hardly needs mentioning. Yet how many times do we see new brothers and sisters in Christ almost completely ignored by their new family? The devil is always quick to accept his new converts and make them feel wanted and welcome. Are we? Read 1 John 4:11-19.

**Satan is always looking for prospects.** Peter tells us in his first epistle, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (5:8). Satan is always "on the prowl," and he is always looking for prospects. How about us as Christians? Are we always on the lookout for someone to convert to Christ or restore to Christ? If not, why not?

**Satan knows the Bible.** Looking again to Satan's temptation of Jesus, Satan even quotes Scripture to Christ: "And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Matt. 4:6). Of course, it is one thing to know Scripture, but another thing altogether to use it aright. As Christians, we can learn a lesson from Satan about knowing Scripture, but let us know it **and** use it properly in our lives.

**Satan works day and night.** In His parable of the tares, Jesus talks about a man who sowed good seed in his field, only to have an enemy come by night and sow tares among the good seed; Jesus then elaborates that the enemy is the devil (Matt. 13:24ff, 39). While

Satan and his minions certainly prefer to work in the dark (cf. Jn. 3:19; Acts 26:18), they work "round the clock" trying to get men to do evil. Should we as Christians not work equally hard trying to get men to do what is right? That is not to say that we should never take rest at all (cf. Mk. 6:31), but it is probably safe to say that we generally err on the side of too little work, as opposed to too much. We can learn from Satan how to work diligently to bring others and ourselves into a right relationship with God.

**Satan believes in God, heaven, and hell.** James tells us, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (2:19). Satan believes in God, heaven, and hell, but he certainly does not believe in the sense that he does what God would have him to do! How many

Christians are practical atheists? They profess to know him, yes, but by their actions, they deny God, heaven, and hell. Read James' very next verse: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" As Jesus put it, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Lk. 6:46). True belief is more than just acknowledgement; it is acknowledgement coupled with obedience!

Should a Christian be like the devil? Certainly not, but there are certain traits of the devil that, when applied properly in our lives, make us much better servants of our heavenly Father. Let us not simply seek to practice these traits of Satan, for he falls far short in many (i.e., knowing the Bible, but misapplying it), but let us seek to use these characteristics to the service and glory of God. WOT

## "WHERE THE BIBLE SPEAKS, WE SPEAK"

*B. J. Clarke, Southaven, Mississippi*

Man has often presumed to speak where God has not spoken. Isaiah mentioned those who "speak not according to this word" (Isa. 8:20). Of certain "prophets" who claimed to be speaking on God's behalf, God said, "I have not spoken to them, yet they ran" (Jer. 23:21). These messengers spoke "a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord" (Jer. 23:16). If these messengers had been content to speak where God had spoken, they could have caused some to turn "from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings" (Jer. 23:22).

Yet, instead of speaking what God had spoken, these prophets: (1) prophesied lies in His name and caused God's people to err (Jer. 23:25,32); (2) caused God's people to forget His name by dreaming their own false dreams (Jer. 23:25,27,32); (3) stole the words of the Lord by keeping them from their neighbors (Jer. 23:30); (4) perverted the words of the living God (Jer. 23:36); (5) seduced the people (Ezek. 13:10); and (6) "strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life" (Ezek. 13:22).

According to Jeremiah 14:14, when speakers fraudulently claim to speak for God, they are prophesying: (1) lies; (2) a false vision and divination; (3) a worthless thing (NKJV); and (4) the deceit of their heart. God is against teachers who speak what He has not spoken (Jer. 23:30). God pronounces a "woe" against these foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing (Ezek. 13:2). Such prophets are of no profit (Jer. 23:32). Consequently, as recipients of God's wrath

and fury, such prophets will perish under the withering blast of God's punishment (Jer. 23:19-20; 27:15; 28:15; 29:31-32).

The mandate of 1 Peter 4:11 is that any man who endeavors to speak a religious message must "speak as the oracles of God." What is involved in speaking as the oracles of God? In short, speaking where the Bible speaks involves two primary things: (1) speaking **only** that which is in accordance with the truth of the Bible (not adding to the Word of God), and (2) speaking **all** that the Bible says (not subtracting from the Word of God).

In both Old and New Testaments, God has provided stern and stringent warnings concerning the addition to or subtraction from His Word. Jehovah instructed Moses to speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt "all that I say unto thee" (Exod. 6:29, emp. mine throughout). Moreover, Joshua was determined to speak where the Bible speaks by reading the law of Moses in its fullness:

And afterward he read **all** the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to **all** that is written in the book of the law. **There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them** (Josh. 8:34-35).

To the children of Israel, Moses said:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I

teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. **Ye shall not add** unto the word which I command you, **neither shall ye diminish** ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you (Deut. 4:2).

What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: **thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it** (Deut. 12:32).

The principle of this legislation was not confined to the Pentateuch. John closed the book of Revelation with these words:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, **if any man shall add** unto these things, **God shall add unto him the plagues** that are written in this book: **And if any man shall take away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, **God shall take away his part** out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

The Old Testament books of history also demonstrate the zeal of certain ones to speak only where the book (Bible) spoke, no less and no more:

And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare

good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, **what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak** (1 Kng. 22:13-14).

The wisdom literature of the Old Testament declares:

**Every word** of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. **Add thou not** unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar (Prov. 30:5-6).

Additionally, the prophetic writings clearly demonstrate that the prophets were commanded to speak everything that God had instructed them to say. They were to “cry aloud and spare not” (Isa. 58:1-2). Like Moses, Jeremiah was going to serve as God’s mouthpiece (Jer. 1:9). God told him to go and “speak unto them all that I command thee” (Jer. 1:17). In fact, God told Jeremiah to speak all that he had received from God even though God knew in advance that the people would not hearken to his message (Jer. 7:27).

Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD’s house, **all** the words that I command thee to speak unto them; **diminish not a word** (Jer. 26:2).

The record reveals that Jeremiah spoke the entirety of the message God had given him:

Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the LORD shall answer you, I will declare it unto you; **I will keep nothing back from you** (Jer. 42:4).

Jeremiah spoke unto “all the people **all** the words of the LORD their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, **even all these words**” (Jer. 43:1). His attitude is kin to that of the apostle Paul, who told the Ephesian elders:

And how **I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you**, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house . . . Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all** the counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 26-27).

I fear that a multitude of preachers today (who would never dream of deliberately teaching false doctrine) are deliberate in their omission of preaching on certain Bible subjects. Can a preacher truly be described as “speaking where the Bible speaks” when he refuses to speak about many things

concerning which the Bible speaks?

For example, can a man genuinely claim to “speak where the Bible speaks” if he never speaks about the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage? Has God spoken in the Bible on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage? Indeed. Has He spoken clearly enough about the matter for us to understand the truth about what constitutes adultery? He must have, for He plainly announces that adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). Can you imagine, for one moment, God’s condemning adulterers to an eternal hell and then failing to provide adequate information in the New Testament for one to determine whether he/she is guilty of such a damning sin? If God did not give us enough information to determine what constitutes adultery, then He left us in the dark about a matter of eternal consequence. The fact is that we possess ample information to speak where the Bible speaks on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In fact, John the Immerser didn’t think that the subject was fuzzy and unclear. He emphatically announced to Herod concerning his wife, “It is not lawful for thee to have her” (Matt. 14:4). Because the land is “full of adulterers” (Jer. 23:10), we must not be afraid to speak where the Bible speaks on this subject, or any other subject revealed by God! According to Solomon, “there is a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:8). For some, it is well past time!

WOT

## MODERN MEDICAL MAYHEM

*Brad Harrub, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama*

It was one of the most gut wrenching things I have ever had to witness. During my undergraduate years, I worked part-time at a facility that cared for Alzheimer’s disease patients. Day after day I would watch family members come to care for their loved ones. And day after day, they would leave in tears having not been recognized by their own spouse or children. Ailments of dementia such as Alzheimer’s disease and Parkinson’s tear at the very roots of many families across this nation. As such, millions of research dollars have been spent looking for a cure. In fact, one can barely watch the evening news without hearing about the latest scientific discovery. Without fail, most of these research reports discuss the “potential” benefits of fetal tissue or embryonic stem cells. **The media has inundated us with the idea that unless we use tissue from aborted babies or embryos, we will never be able to conquer these dreaded diseases. But is this the truth?**

Do aborted fetuses and leftovers from *in vitro* fertilization offer a **cure**? The truth is, we have been fed a lie—a lie that the media continue to use to justify the 1.2 million infants killed by abortion each year (see <http://www.apologeticspress.org/rr/rr2002/r&r0207a.htm>) and the 400,000 embryos that have been plunged into the icy depths of liquid nitrogen (see <http://www.apologeticspress.org/inthenews/2003/itn-03-17.htm>). We are continually told about the “potential” benefits of these embryonic tissues. But science has shown otherwise—not once, but twice!

In a telling article titled “Strike Two for Transplants,” Gretchen Vogel lamented: “For the second time, cells transplanted from fetuses into brains of Parkinson’s patients have failed to show a significant effect.” She went on to note that the double-blind study “failed to produce significant improvements in patients’ movement **but caused serious side effects in more than half the patients**”

(2003, emp. added). Not only did the aborted fetus tissue not help, it actually hurt in some cases! C. Warren Olanow and his colleagues conducted the collaborative study, which consisted of thirty-four patients, in an effort to determine the effects of transplanting fetal nigral neurons (nerve cells) into Parkinson’s patients. Parkinson’s patients, ranging in age from 30 to 75, received tissue transplants that were obtained from one to **four** aborted fetuses. Thus, in twelve cases, the tissue from **four** aborted fetuses was required to try and “cure” one Parkinson patient. I wonder if Mr. Kinsley would condone four human beings killed in an effort to save one himself? All told, **59** aborted fetuses were used in this study.

So what was the end result after using nigral cells from 59 aborted babies? The authors observed that “there was no overall treatment effect” (2003, 54:405). They went on to conclude, “Furthermore, unanticipated and potentially disabling off-medication

dyskinesias [difficulty moving—BH] developed in greater than 50% of patients. **We cannot therefore recommend fetal nigral transplantation as a therapy for PD [Parkinson's disease—BH], at this time**" (p. 413, emp. added). As Ms. Vogel noted, however, this was not the first time this type of procedure has failed. She wrote: "The first major study of the technique, led by Curt Freed of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver, ended in controversy when it failed to help patients overall and left some with frightening uncontrollable movements" (as reported in *Science*, March 16, 2001, p. 2060) [Vogel, 2003]. So we now have multiple clinical trials that conclusively show no effect (and

even detrimental effects in some cases) of having used the fetal tissue.

So why, then, is this not front-page news? Why haven't *Time* magazine and *CNN* made this a lead story? The sad fact is that the media are not interested in anything that will call *Roe v. Wade* into question. Our country upholds and parades any scientific "breakthrough" that might be of "potential" benefit to patients with Parkinson's or Alzheimer's disease. Yet when these "potential breakthroughs" are shown to be "potential killers," nothing is said, and the scientific data are ignored. Thus, the confetti from the parade gets swept under the rug, and the only thing the American people can remember is what a grand parade it was.

How much longer will we stay in the dark?

## References

- Kinsley, Michael (2003), "Cure Me If You Can," *Readers Digest*, pp. 102-107, August.
- Olanow, C. Warren, Christopher Goetz, et al., (2003), "A Double-blind Controlled Trial of Bilateral Fetal Nigral Transplantation in Parkinson's Disease," *Annals of Neurology*, 54[3]403-414, September.
- Vogel, Gretchen (2003), "Strike Two for Transplants," *Science Now*, [On-line], URL: <http://sciencenow.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/2003/827/1>. WOT

# HOW MANY HEAVENS?

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

Enoch (second century B.C.) wrote of ten heavens (*Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, 22:1). Jewish rabbis counted seven heavens (*Testament of Twelve Patriarchs, Levi 2-3*, cited by David Smith, *Life and Letters of St. Paul*, p. 335). The Bible mentions three:

## 1. "The heavens"

That vast aerial expanse (not a "firmament," meaning "that which is firm") above the earth where "the birds fly" and where are the sun, the moon, the stars, "and all their multitude," Moses called "the heavens" (Gen. 1:17,20; 2:1).

David wrote, "The heavens tell of God's glory, and the expanse proclaims the works of his hand" (Psa. 19:1).

## 2. "The heaven of heavens"

As eye-opening and stunning as are the physical heavens, in no way can they be compared to the eternal, the spiritual "heaven of heavens" (Deut. 10:14; 1 Kng. 8:27; Psa. 68:33; 148:4). The spiritual, eternal heaven is "the dwelling place" of God, called by Jesus "my Father's house" (1 Kng. 8:30; Matt. 6:9; Jn. 14:2). There is His throne (Isa. 66:1; Acts 7:49), and there are uncountable angels (1 Kng. 22:19; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 5:11).

Into "heaven itself" Jesus ascended, "far above all the heavens," to "appear in the presence of God for us" (Eph. 4:10; Heb. 9:24). Jesus is preparing places that have been "reserved in heaven" for those who "are kept by the power of God through faith for the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time" (1 Pet. 1:4-5).

Another Bible name for the "heaven of heavens" is "paradise," an attractive and beautiful word. Among the Persians paradise was "a grand enclosure or preserve, a

hunting-ground, a park, shady and well-watered, in which wild animals were kept for the hunt; it was enclosed by walls and furnished with towers for the hunters" (Thayer, p. 480).

Among the Jews, paradise was "a garden, pleasure-ground, grove, park" (Thayer, p. 480; cf. Neh. 2:8; Song 4:13; Eccl. 2:5).

In the Greek Old Testament (LXX, ca. 250 B.C.), the garden of Eden was called "paradise" (*paradeisos*, Gen. 2:8-9).

It is therefore no wonder that Jesus used the word "paradise" to describe the eternal, spiritual, heavenly garden: "to the one who overcomes, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in God's paradise" (*paradeisos*, Rev. 2:7).

## 3. "The third heaven"

However, when Jesus promised the dying thief beside Him on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43), He was not referring to the eternal, spiritual, heavenly garden. The Lord did not mean that He and the thief were going to the "heaven of heavens" that day, for three days later, on His return from paradise, He told Mary Magdalene, "I have not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn. 20:17). The "Father's house" (Jn. 14:2) is "in heaven" (Matt. 6:9), to which place Jesus had "not yet ascended" (Jn. 20:17), but He had been in paradise while He was in the tomb.

Thus Jesus used the word "paradise" with two different meanings:

- (1) "the paradise of God" in which those who overcome will "eat of the tree of life" (Rev. 2:7), which can be none other than the "heaven of heavens" (1 Kng. 8:27), the "dwelling place of God" (1 Kng. 8:30), the "Father's house," (Jn. 14:2), and
- (2) "the paradise" where Jesus went while

His body was in the tomb, from which He did not "ascend" to "the Father" (Jn. 20:17).

The second meaning fits the experience of a man, apparently Paul himself, who in A.D. 43 "was caught up into paradise" (2 Cor. 12:4), which he also called "the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). If Jesus' words in A.D. 27, that "no man has ascended up to heaven" (Jn. 3:13), were still true in A.D. 43, then the paradise, the third heaven, into which Paul was caught up, was not "heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24).

Since everything associated with the word "paradise" is beautiful and attractive, it is likely that the paradise to which both Jesus and Paul went, which Paul called "the third heaven," is the same place that Jesus called "Abraham's bosom," a place of "comfort" (Lk. 16:22,25). It appears, then, that there are three Bible names for an intermediate place of "comfort" where the redeemed are waiting until judgment day: "paradise," "Abraham's bosom," and "the third heaven." Then they will ascend into "heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24).

As to the question, "Are Enoch and Elijah in heaven?", they are not in "the heaven of heavens" (Deut. 10:14; 1 Kng. 8:27; Psa. 68:33), not in "heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24), for "no one has ascended up to heaven" (Jn. 3:13). But I believe that Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kng. 2:1,11) are in "the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2), which is also called "paradise" (2 Cor. 12:4). The spirit of Jesus was in paradise while His body was in Joseph's tomb (Lk. 23:43), and after His return from paradise He told Mary Magdalene, "I have not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn. 20:17). Now He has ascended into "heaven itself" (Acts 1:9-11; Heb. 9:24).

WOT

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Question:** One of our readers asks us to comment on the biblical teaching regarding friendliness, as well as the reason(s) why some people (even Christians) seem to be unfriendly.

**Answer:** The Bible often speaks of the need for all of God's children to be "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). "What is desired in a man is kindness . . ." (Prov. 9:22). "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10). "Love . . . is kind" (1 Cor. 13:4). "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Col. 3:13-14). One of the Christian graces is "brotherly kindness" (2 Pet. 1:7).

A cursory reading of Acts impresses on our minds the fact that the early Christians enjoyed one another's company. "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:44-47). They were "of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). It's quite clear that God's people are to be a *friendly* people . . . both to one another and also to the world.

Having said that, however, it should be noted that Christians have different personalities. Some are naturally extroverted—i.e., they are expressive and outgoing. Others are introverted—i.e.,

quieter and more reserved (or "shy"). Both should be friendly, but the extrovert's expression of goodwill may be more noticeable than the introvert's equally sincere, though more muted, expression. This point is important because some of our more sensitive brothers or sisters in Christ may equate quietness with unfriendliness, when such isn't necessarily the case.

In response to the latter part of the question, though, there are several possible reasons for unfriendliness. Some people have developed a cynical disposition and approach everything in life with a bitter spirit (they "sharpen their tongue like a sword," Psa. 64:3). Perhaps they have endured some of life's harsh blows or been reared in a spiteful atmosphere. Whatever the cause, they need to reflect often upon passages such as Ephesians 4:31: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (cf. Col. 3:8,19; Jam. 3:14-15). They need to focus on the joy of living in God's grace and pray often that God will help them rejoice in His salvation (Phil. 4:4; cf. Psa. 51:8-12).

Others may be reluctant to be friendly because of emotional insecurities, or they may feel uncomfortable in social situations. Spending time with fellow Christians—in a context of love, support, and approval—should help them overcome, to a certain extent, their doubts.

—Chuck Webster



**Question:** "A friend of mine has said some unkind things about me behind my back. I feel hurt and mistreated . . . I really do love her and want the situation between us to be better, but shouldn't she come to me first?"

**Answer:**

**1. Yes, your friend should come and ask for forgiveness.** Jesus said, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24).

**2. However, you also have an obligation to go to your friend.** "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Matt. 18:15). Do you really love your friend as you say you do? Then you need to go to her.

Too many of us hold on to the wrong belief that time and distance and silence can eventually heal all hurts. Maybe we don't want to seem petty or oversensitive. Maybe it's pride. Perhaps it's a fear of facing honest emotions. Whatever the case, time is not on our side when forgiveness is needed.

Let's have a closer look at an important scriptural principle from a passage . . .

"Be ye angry, and sin not: *let not the sun go down on your wrath*" (Eph. 4:26; KJV, emp. added).

This directive is linked to the next verse:

"*Neither give place to the devil*" (v. 27, emp. added).

The fact is, the more time we allow to pass between a wrong and the moment we ask forgiveness, the harder it becomes to go to the one we wronged. With the passing of time, our mind makes up more and more excuses to let the offense slide. . . . Not only that, but the passing of time also allows our hearts to grow cold and hard . . . [Beverly Caruso, "The Tie That Binds," *Loving Confrontation*, Bethany House Publishers, 1988, p. 41].

It has been my observation that unresolved hurt usually evolves into bitterness and animosity. Is this what you want? Will waiting on your friend to come to you alleviate your hurt? Will waiting on your friend bring the two of you closer together? Go to her—today.

**3. Your relationship with God depends upon your relationship with your friend.** (cf. Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:13; Mark 11:25-26). How can you communicate with your heavenly Father when you can't even talk to your friend?

Jesus took the first step towards reconciliation when man sinned against Him. I suggest that you do the same.

—Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

  
 e?mail  
 your questions to...  
 sixthavenue@tds.net

# THE POWER OF FAITH

*Johnny Ramsey, Rockwall, Texas*

Faith has substance and evidence backing it and Christians walk by faith in the midst of an ungodly world. We live in faithful loyalty to our Maker as Habakkuk 2:4 states so clearly. We dare not turn back from the path of fidelity once we begin the journey toward the home of the soul (Heb. 10:38-39). Being steadfast and true, one day we shall reap the end of our faith, the salvation of our spirits (1 Pet. 1:9). Such blessed hope is based upon being established in the faith and abounding therein with thanksgiving (Col. 2:7). In Christianity believing is seeing! When we really have trusting faith we have to speak up for the Lord (2 Cor. 4:13). Paul, in Acts 27:25, proclaimed boldly: "I have believed God and it shall be even as he hath told me."

The way of redemption is based upon faith (Gal. 2:16) and such an arrangement causes us to want to believe. This is a life from faith to faith (Rom. 1:17) that causes us to exclaim in the language of 2 Timothy 1:12, "I know whom I have believed." Such trust in God caused Joshua and Caleb to rely upon the promise of a land flowing with abundant provisions. Let us remember their vibrant words of faith: "We are well able to rise up at once and take the land."

This genuine faith propelled Esther to courageous action that could have caused her death but rather preserved the life of God's people! The power of faith in Daniel's sojourn is a study of magnificent heroism as he constantly opposed the popular way to stand up for truth. The sincere spirit of courage and conviction caused Elijah and Micaiah to withstand hundreds of false prophets and triumph over error, sin, and shame. In Proverbs 3 we are challenged to put our trust in the Lord and not our own strength. Job 13:15 is the epitome of genuine faith and confidence, come what may: "Though he slay me, yet I will trust him." Paul acknowledged that no man stood by him in difficult moments but the Savior was there to deliver him out of difficulty and loneliness (2 Tim. 4).

At the end of the sterling chapter on heroes of faith, the inspired writer declares: "These all died in faith." What a compliment! Being loyal even in the throes of certain death will grant us the crown of life bestowed by Christ (Rev. 2:10). The power of faith transcends all earthly cares and finds its fruition in the sacred halls of heaven. As our heart deepens in the way of the Lord our faith increases and new vistas of glory are unveiled (2 Cor. 10:15). Going onward in faith means God can use us to the zenith of our ability. Too many folks never know the fullness of a righteous faith because they never view Christianity as an adventure or divine romance. Read Genesis 45:5 and 50:20 where God's providence and Joseph's faithfulness meshed into a rare blessing for mankind. The power of faith is of exquisite value. How can greater faith help us?

**In our prayers.** We will learn to ask, seek, and knock (Matt. 7) with greater intensity and purpose. Confident that Jehovah will hear when we ask properly (1 Jn. 5:4) we will rejoice to know that His ears are open to our petitions (1 Pet. 3:12). Knowing that without God we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5) we will boldly seek help from on high (Heb. 4:16).

**In the midst of trials.** Troubles will come but greater faith causes us to be ready and not to falter beneath the load of tribulation. Psalm 30:5 tells us: "Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning." We will live more ardently (Jer. 29:13) and preach more incessantly (2 Tim. 4:2) because we know that heaven knows and cares!

**In generous giving.** We will cheerfully contribute to Christ's great cause by giving ourselves first of all (2 Cor. 8:5). God so loved that He gave and so shall we. Greater faith broadens the horizon as we view the lofty heights of the heavenly prize.

Faith, yes, greater faith, propels us to the higher ground of devotion and loyalty God intended when He sent the Savior to draw us to glory (2 Cor. 5:14). WOT

## The Words of Truth

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

**Address Service Requested**

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) in electronic form (e-mail or on disk or CD).

Please send all correspondence to:

## The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





## MOPPING UP

*Brandon Jackson, Jasper, Alabama*

Wielding a mop can be an amazing skill. Starting with a clean bucket of water and a dirty floor one proceeds to get the “dirt” in the bucket and the “clean” on the floor. It requires patience, skill, and elbow grease to make the process work. Some people have swept their lives clean, or even wiped their slates, but have you ever heard of someone mopping up his life? What a wonderful analogy.

Start by filling your bucket. Every person who sets out to mop a dirty floor must prepare a bucket of water to be used to loosen the dirt. Fill your bucket from the clean flowing fountain of God’s Word.

- *Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (Jn. 4:13-14).*
- *For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).*

Next, grab that mop and get to work. You see, it is the mop which applies the water to the floor. The mop represents our application of God’s instruction. We must apply the cleansing water of God’s Word to our lives or it just stays in the bucket. It takes work. It takes delving into a study of the Word of God each day to gain skill in application.

- *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).*
- *I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word (Psa. 119:16-17).*

I can remember working at a movie theater, cleaning up after everyone had gone home. I would take my mop and begin at the back of a theater and mop every row until I reached the bottom. That was hard work; I expended hours of time and energy in removing the cola and candy that covered the floors. But, cleaning the theaters demanded hard work.

It takes practice and skill to take the lessons of the Bible and put them to use in our lives. However, we can take courage in the

knowledge that everyday we pull out that bucket, fill it up, and take a mop in our hand. We work daily to make our lives free from the sin that tries to cover them up.

It took my work **and** a supply of fresh clean water to get those theaters clean. Some people would mop with the same bucket of water all day long and the only thing they accomplished was . . . smearing the dirt around. It does not matter how hard one works on his life without a clean supply of water, without God’s Word, the only task accomplished is a smearing of godly principles. Why settle for an unsightly smearing when God’s Word is so freely made available to us? Take the time to study it, apply it, and keep it fresh in your life. You will be amazed at its power to leave your soul sparkling clean.

- *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).*
- *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).*
- *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (Psa. 119:11).*

When one truly applies the Word of God to his life and follows the commands found therein he **can** “mop up” his life. The wonderful thing about God’s plan is that it does not matter what condition your floor (life) is in—mopping up with His Word will make it brand new. You may only have a few spills or a small layer of dust, or it may be that you have deep dark scuffs. It won’t matter. With God’s Word and a consistent application of it your life can be “spic and span.”

- *Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation (Psa. 24:3-5).*
- *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil (Isa. 1:16).* WOT

# DO WE MISUNDERSTAND BAPTISM?

Chuck Webster, Editorial

Our denominational friends believe that we do. In fact, this religious topic has probably stimulated more discussion between us than any other point of doctrine. The debate currently rages on, and will until the Lord comes back, in spite of clear New Testament teaching. Baptism is the act at which we contact Christ's blood (Rom. 6:3-5) and have our sins forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16). It puts us into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27), "saves us" (1 Pet. 3:21), and washes us (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5). Through it we experience the new birth (Jn. 3:3-5). Without doubt, baptism stands between the penitent, believing sinner and salvation.

With that said, however, have some among us put *too* much emphasis on baptism? Please consider:

## **We misunderstand baptism if we think the act itself without understanding will save us.**

"If I can just get him to be baptized, . . ." seems to typify some people's attitude concerning immersion. It's almost as if genuine faith and repentance are irrelevant. All we need to do is get him in the baptistry. *Then* we have a conversion . . . *Then* we can move on to someone else.

If we have such a shallow view of conversion, we misunderstand what the Bible teaches about being saved. The more important questions are: Does he truly believe that Jesus is God's Son, that He loves us so much that He suffered and died at Calvary? Does he really believe that Jesus was raised the third day, and that the same power that raised Him will one day raise us from our graves? Is he penitent . . . *truly* penitent? Is there evidence of *godly* sorrow? Does he realize how badly his sins have hurt God? Does he want more than anything for his sins to be forgiven? Does he tremble at the prospect of facing Christ in judgment as an unbeliever? Does he love the Lord?

When a person truly believes in Christ and mourns over his sins, he will not scoff at baptism, questioning its significance. When he is convinced that he is lost and can be saved, his attitude will be like those at Pentecost as he cries in desperation, "I am a sinner. I crucified Christ. I am lost . . . What can I do?!" (cf. Acts 2:37). He will not need to be prodded into being baptized.

The efficacy of baptism is inextricably linked with the understanding in the heart of the one being baptized. To believe and practice otherwise is to make it into a rite equivalent to the empty sacraments of the ritualistic segments of "Christendom."

"You have obeyed *from the heart* that form of doctrine to which you were delivered," Paul said (Rom. 6:17, emp. added). If baptism without understanding saves, then our chief aim would be to get people to submit to the *rite*, not to get them to engage in true repentance, which is the most difficult act in the plan of salvation. Since baptism is meaningless without understanding, our primary aim is, rather, to stimulate others' understanding and touch their hearts. *Then* they will obey.

An incident in Paul's life clearly illustrates this fact. When he encountered the Ephesian disciples on his third missionary tour, he discovered that they had been baptized, but that their baptism had been John's—not Christ's; i.e., they had been baptized after Pentecost (when the baptism of the Great Commission became effectual—Lk. 24:47; Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 1:8) with an incomplete understanding of Christ. They did not know He had come. Instead of looking *backward* to Christ, they had looked *forward*. They did not know about His personal ministry, teaching, or death, burial, and resurrection. When Paul corrected them, they instantly recognized what they needed to do: "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). Why the second immersion? The answer is clear: their understanding had been incomplete when they first obeyed.

How does this impact us in a practical way? It means that we should be careful to emphasize the importance of the mind and heart as we teach others about Christ, instead of merely trying to evoke a certain outward action. If we miss this point, we could very likely *immerse* sinners without *converting* them.

## **We misunderstand baptism if we think it will save us without faithful Christian living.**

We would never believe that one act of obedience, once rendered, would forever guarantee our salvation, would we? Consider this historical lesson: Israel had been soundly defeated by its arch enemy, Philistia, losing 4,000 men. "Why did God forsake us?" they asked. "It must have been because the ark of the covenant was not with us." So they brought the ark from Shiloh, fought the Philistines, and this time they . . . won, right? Not exactly. ". . . Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot

soldiers" (cf. 1 Sam. 4:1-11). Apparently they thought that if they had the *symbol* of God's presence with them, His blessings would surely follow. Never mind their unfaithfulness and rebellion. Disregard the fact that they wanted God's blessings without the consequent obligations. All they wanted was victory, and the ark was supposed to deliver it.

We scoff at their presumption and shake our heads at their hypocrisy. "How ludicrous of them to think that an artifact could guarantee their victory . . . we would never do something like that," we proudly affirm.

But actually members of the Lord's church do it regularly. Maybe we don't have a tangible object to put our confidence in. We are far too cultured to rely on a graven image or hand-carved statue. *But we look back at our baptism and think it assures our salvation.* Never mind our apathetic attitude toward the death that baptism represented and our lukewarm commitment to the church purchased by the blood. Disregard our becoming distracted by all of the pleasures of this world. Forget about our lack of fervor for spiritual things. "After all," some say, "I was baptized in that baptistry/creek/pool in 19\_\_ , and I've got a certificate to prove it!" It is almost as if they think that baptism is similar to a ticket they purchase for admission to a theater production. Their attitudes imply they believe they have their "ticket" punched and how they live afterward does not affect their ultimate destination.

The Bible teaches, of course, that God gives salvation when we respond by faith to His commands, and continued salvation depends on our walking in the light of Christ, continually repenting of and confessing our sins (1 Jn. 1:7-10).

It is sad when people believe that a single act of obedience—because of its significance in the plan of salvation—guarantees their eternal destiny. Their misunderstanding leads to a false sense of security, and consequently they do not heed others' pleas concerning the importance of faithfulness. Because they have "the ark in their possession," they lose their sense of urgency in their relationship to Christ.

The Bible is clear: baptism is *for* the remission of sins and puts one into Christ's body, but its significance does not give the act itself—apart from faith and repentance—an inherent saving quality, nor does it grant a once-for-all salvation. *NOT*

# WAS THERE A REINCARNATED PROPHET OF GOD?

Mark T. Tonkery, South Point, Ohio

Reincarnation teaches “that the soul reappears after death in another and different bodily form” and is a popular belief in today’s world. In fact, some, because of its popularity, have turned to the Bible to try to justify it by using the prophet John the Baptist. As we study the New Testament, however, we see clearly that trying to prove reincarnation from biblical texts is impossible and that reincarnation is a false idea and teaching.

In Luke 1 we see that John the Baptist, “shall go before him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” John the Baptist was a special person with a distinct purpose from God (Jn. 1:6-7). It is important to note that Luke 1:17 does not say that John the Baptist would be the literal incarnation of Elijah the Tishbite from 1 Kings 17:1 but *be in the spirit and power of Elijah*. This was to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of Malachi 4:5-6 and Isaiah 40:3.

John the Baptist understood that he was not the literal Elijah the Tishbite. “And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No” (Jn. 1:21). John the

Baptist knew that he was not the literal Elijah the Tishbite reincarnated. As one reads John 1:21 it is apparent that the people in John’s day did not understand the prophecies of the Old Testament about Elijah and John the Baptist, but this was not uncommon for the people in John’s day. Many did not understand the prophecies about Christ either. For example, in John 6:15 the people wanted to make Jesus a literal king that would rule like Herod or Caesar; however, this was not to be. The people in John 1:21 asked John the wrong question. The people of John’s day believed that the prophecies of the Old Testament about Elijah were to be literal and that he would somehow be resurrected from the grave. The idea of reincarnation was foreign to them and was not even considered—their minds were on resurrection. Yet John the Baptist told them that he was not Elijah the Tishbite resurrected or reincarnated.

It is apparent by reading the Scriptures that the crowds still did not realize who John the Baptist was, so Jesus tried to explain (Matt. 11). Here, Jesus said John the Baptist was Elijah: “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears let him hear”

(Matt. 11:13-15). Jesus was trying to explain what Luke 1:17 has already stated; i.e., John the Baptist had the *spirit and power* of Elijah, and not that he was the *literal* Elijah the Tishbite. John the Baptist was not the resurrected or even reincarnated Elijah, but he took on the prophetic role and spirit of Elijah. He did not come to re-live the life of Elijah nor did he come to make things right that went wrong in Elijah’s life, because Elijah was already dead. Jesus affirms that a person’s life on earth is over when he dies. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46). This point is made clear again in Hebrews 9:27: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” John the Baptist did not repeat Elijah’s life until he “got it right,” nor does any human. John the Baptist was sent to this world as a unique individual to fulfil prophecy and to prepare the way for Jesus Christ.

Just as John the Baptist was a unique individual with a purpose and direction in life, so is every person. Man does not need to believe in reincarnation to find meaning and purpose. He simply needs to read the Bible, which points one to Jesus Christ, who gives true meaning to life and death. *WOT*

## “I HAVE SINNED”

Eddy Gilpin, Salem, Virginia

The phrase “I have sinned” appears nineteen times in the Bible (KJV). It was stated by ten different people; some were sincere, while others were not. A study of this phrase reveals some interesting lessons.

First, the person who said it the most was David. What makes this of great interest is the fact that David was said to be “a man after mine (God’s) own heart” (Acts 13:22). Certainly if a man with the credentials of David often needed to take stock of his life and confess sin, so should every individual (cf. 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10, 17; 1 Chron. 21:8; Psa. 41:4).

Second, some who made the statement were not sincere: Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), Achan (Josh. 7:20), and Judas (Matt. 27:4). From these it can be learned that such confession

must proceed from the heart and not just from the mouth.

Third, one of the subjects who made the statement said it twice—once to himself, and again to his father. While in the “far country,” the prodigal son made a decision and said to himself, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned . . .” (Lk. 15:18). Upon returning home he made the confession to his father (Lk. 15:21). From this occasion it can be seen that, although God knows our hearts, He still wants to hear our voices. While it is the case that one can pray to God without doing so in an audible way (cf. 1 Sam. 1:13), it is also the case that prayer is an act in which one must engage with all his mind. Thus, one must approach God in the fashion that God has revealed (Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15-16) and

not after the dictates of his own heart.

Fourth, it is interesting to note the statement that accompanies Job’s remark that he had sinned. He stated, “I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that *I am a burden to myself?*” (Job 7:20). In sinning, Job admitted that he had become “a burden to himself.” Indeed how foolishly we often act in being “our own worst enemy.” When we sin against God we become a burden to ourselves.

To Christians, John said, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9). Do you have sins that you need to confess to God?

*WOT*

# HINDERING CAUSES TO A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WORD

L.R. Wilson, deceased

[Editor's note: We believe you will enjoy the following article, written by Lawrence Ray Wilson and published in The Minister's Monthly in June 1956. Brother Wilson served churches in Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Texas, and contributed articles to the Gospel Advocate and Firm Foundation. He was born on December 23, 1896, and passed away several years ago.]

There are so many hindering causes to a proper understanding of the Bible that many good people have felt it useless to try. However, they do not show the same indifference toward other matters in which they have an interest. The social security law is much more complicated than the practical teachings of the Bible, yet most people manage to find out how to get the benefits of social security. The income tax law is a real headache to every honest person who tries to figure it out. Yet most of us manage to do so each year. If we have enough concern about the teachings of the Bible, we can learn enough about it to be pleasing to the Lord and to serve our fellowman. If we do so, however, it will be necessary to remove the following hindering causes.

1. *Prejudice.* The greatest hindrance to a proper understanding of God's Word is that of prejudice. It is appalling how many people have their minds already made up regarding what the Bible teaches. Once this is done it is nearly impossible to change their thinking. Prejudice is one of the most difficult of all obstacles to remove. People hate to change their minds. There is hardly any crime that has not been committed because of prejudice. It was prejudice that caused the Jewish people to reject the Christ, and the gospel concerning Him. It was prejudice that caused Paul and the other apostles to suffer martyrdom. We suspect the truth is missed by more people as a result of prejudice than any other cause. There is not much we can do for those who refuse to see the truth.

2. *Indifference.* Many read the Bible for the sake of reading it. They recognize it as a good book, a book that has many wonderful lessons in it, but they are indifferent toward what it says. They do not regard it as of any consequence. It seems never to occur to them that it is the book by which they are to be finally judged. They read it very much like they would a novel, a short story, or some other work of merit, but of no special importance. The fact that they shall one day stand before God and be judged by the things written in the Bible makes little or no impression on them. It never occurs to them

that it is a matter of eternal life or eternal death. Until we come to regard the Bible as our one and only way to heaven we can never grasp its sublime truths.

3. *Distinction.* Some read the Bible for the sole purpose of distinction. They are not concerned with the truth at all. They merely want to impress someone. Some simply love to argue. Some like to find obscure passages and try to embarrass preachers or other sincere souls. They think it makes them look "smart." Lawyers sometimes study the Bible to impress a jury. Some study the Bible because they think it makes them friends to talk about it, or it may improve their business. Such motives always blind us to the truth.

4. *A desire to please the world.* Some want to be like the world about them. They read the Bible with but one thought in view: how to justify their desire to be like the world. Sometimes a man wants to please the rich and the mighty. In order to do so he twists the Scriptures so as to mean what he wants them to mean. Those who preach to royalty can always find Scripture to justify the deeds of those they serve. Until we can forget about the world and look objectively at the Word of God we can never understand or appreciate it.

5. *Science.* In ages past the hierarchy and other ecclesiastics thought they understood all that was in the Bible, scientifically and otherwise, and that it was sacrilege to try to discover any new truth, either in the field of science or religion. Those who first talked about the earth being round were excommunicated, or were threatened with excommunication. The religious authorities retarded the progress of science for centuries. They were actually afraid that the scientists would discover something that would upset all of their beliefs. We need never be afraid of any truth the scientists may discover, or any fact they may unfold. Truth is always truth, and any denial will not change it. But if the ecclesiastics went to one extreme in ages past, the scientists have gone to the other in more recent years. Apparently some think that the Bible must either be rewritten, or at least reinterpreted to fit every new theory they may put forth. But a theory is one thing while a proven fact is another. We are not afraid of any proven facts. We should not get alarmed every time someone comes up with some new theory. God is the author of both the book of nature and the book of revelation. When we thoroughly understand both we are not afraid of any contradictions. Let us not then feel that we are bound to make the Bible fit every new hypothesis that some put forth. When and if

they prove their hypothesis, we may then re-examine the Bible to see if we clearly understood it in the first place. Meantime, let us not lose our heads over any seeming contradictions.

6. *A book of mysteries.* Some look upon the Bible as a book of mysteries which no one can understand. To them it is a bundle of riddles. Hence, they see no sense in trying to understand it. Because those who were in favor of slavery could find ample justification in the Bible for their beliefs during the war between the states, while those who opposed slavery could find an abundance of scripture in support of their views, or because every denomination seeks to justify its tenets by the Scriptures, they regard the Bible as a bundle of riddles, which can be made to support any views we want. It never occurs to them that lawyers can do the same in their study of canon law, or that physicians may do the same in their study of diseases and their remedies. If we were to go on this theory, then we would have no lawyers, no physicians, no school teachers, nor, in fact, any other professional men. It would be foolish to study architecture, engineering, or any other technical course. Until we learn to look at the Bible objectively, sifting out what is theory, what is guess, and take the facts as they are intended by the Holy Spirit, we can never grasp the sublime truths of God's Holy Word.

7. *A human book.* Many think of the Bible as they do any human document. They think it good, practical, and superior to nearly, if not all, other human documents, but not necessarily infallible. They regard it as inspired, if they are allowed to tell you what they understand by inspiration. They think of it as being inspired in the same sense that the works of Shakespeare were inspired, or the framers of our federal constitution were inspired. It is not the inerrant Word of God. It is not the final authority in religion. It is not necessarily a matter of life and death for those who accept or reject it. They do not regard it as God's final Word to man while he lives upon the earth. They prefer to rely upon some peculiar dream, the "still small voice of conscience," or their own powers of reason and discrimination, or on the "voice of experience." They simply cannot bring themselves to think of the Bible as the final authority upon which they must stand or fall, live or die. It is the word of God, they admit, but not THE final Word of God. Men can never understand it as long as they look upon it in this light.

## “BIG BOYS DON’T CRY”

Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama

So we tell little boys when they fall. Then they read in their Bibles that Jesus wept. Does that mean He was a “sissie?” No. One has to consider the reason for the tears. Are they tears of weakness or strength? Of fear or compassion? Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3), and He wept on three occasions. Each time He left us the right example.

**JESUS WEPT AT LAZARUS’ TOMB (Jn. 11:35).** The shortest verse in the Bible says a lot! It tells us that the Great Physician had good “bedside manners.” He knew that Mary and Martha needed somebody to care about their pain. They had lost a brother and their hearts were breaking, so even though He was about to resurrect Lazarus, He “wept” with those that wept” (Rom. 12:15; Job 30:25). He illustrated the Jewish proverb:

Among those who stand, do not sit;  
Among those who sit, do not stand;  
Among those who laugh, do not weep;  
Among those who weep, do not laugh.

This shows us that Jesus is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15; Psa. 35:13-14). Harry VIII, wandering disguised one night in London, was met at the foot of a bridge by night watchmen. They did not believe he was the king, so they shut him up without fire or candle in the Poultry Compter. Upon liberation he granted thirty chaldrons of coals and some breads for the night prisoners in the Compter. Experience brings sympathy. This world would be better if, instead of putting others in their place, we more often tried putting ourselves in the place of others. Those who have felt affliction, doubt, sickness, and temptation are more apt, and better equipped, to console those in similar conditions (2 Cor. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 3:8). Christians are tenderhearted (Eph. 4:32) and have been known to cry upon occasion in funeral homes and hospitals. *These are tears of sympathy.*

**JESUS WEPT OVER JERUSALEM (Lk. 19:41-45).** This was the most glorious public moment of Jesus’ life. He was ushered into the city with a hero’s welcome. Everyone is singing His praises (literally), yet . . . He breaks

down in passionate sobs.<sup>2</sup> Like the Psalmist, rivers of water ran down His eyes, because they kept not the law (119:53, 136, 158; cf. Jer. 13:17). Like Paul, there was great heaviness and continual sorrow in His heart for His kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:2-3). He had done all He could to get them to believe, yet they persisted in doubt. He had come that they might be enlightened, but they chose darkness (Jn. 1:11). He wanted for them the abundant life, but they wanted eternal death (Jn. 10:10). The city He had just entered was on God’s “hit-list” (Mt. 24:4-34), and Sodom and Gomorrah got off easy by comparison (24:21). These voices now shouting, “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord” (19:38), would soon scream, “Crucify him crucify him, His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:25; Mk. 15:14).

Jesus still weeps for lost cities and souls. He longs for men to mourn over their own sins (Matt. 5:4), so He won’t have to. A legend from the Middle Ages tells of a young woman who was expelled from heaven and told that she would be remitted only when she brought back the one gift God valued most. She brought back a blood drop from a dying martyr. She collected coins a destitute widow had given to the poor. She found a Bible used by a powerful preacher. She returned with dust from the shoes of missionaries who served long years in a distant land. Each time she was turned away. One day she watched a man on horseback come to a fountain where a small boy was playing. Seeing the boy, he was reminded of his own childhood innocence. Then, looking into the fountain, he saw his hardened face. He was overcome by sins, and began to weep penitent tears. She took one of those tears to heaven whereupon the door opened wide<sup>3</sup> (2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 55:7; Ezek. 18:21; 2 Kgs. 22:19). The lost die daily unprepared for what awaits them. Many never give the afterlife an afterthought. We must make them think. Jesus let His tears drive Him to Calvary; ours must drive us to tell of Calvary (Mk. 16:15). *These are tears of sorrow.*

**JESUS WEPT IN GETHSEMANE (Heb. 5:5-7).** The Bible here reveals a detail about that night in the Garden that neither Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John gives us. It says, “. . . when he had offered up prayers and

supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard . . .” Jesus wept in Gethsemane the night He was arrested. This was not silent, personal grief, but loud, public crying. The disciples—had they been awake—could have heard it at the stone’s-throw distance.<sup>4</sup> This episode shows Christ’s humanity. He did not want to suffer Calvary’s humiliation, pain, and separation (Heb. 12:2). He prayed that God find some other way to save man, but there was no Plan B (Mk. 14:32-35; Lk. 22:40-44).

Americans take 33,000,000,000 aspirins a year.<sup>5</sup> Jesus knows every headache. Sixty to ninety percent of medical office visits are for stress-related symptoms.<sup>6</sup> Jesus knows every stressor (Eccl. 8:16; Lk. 10:40; 21:34). Countless pillows are wet each night with heartache’s tears and sleep flees from dread of the future. Jesus sees every tear and understands every fear. We can cast our cares upon Him for He cares (1 Pet. 5:7). He understands because He has been there. Augustine of Hippo said, “God had one Son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering.” Everybody has problems; the wise ones let their troubles drive them to the Garden of prayer. *These are tears of struggle.*

Man is the only creature God made that can cry. No other experiences sorrow to the extent we do. But God is there to comfort (Psa. 23:4; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; 2:4; 7:2-11). Big boys sometimes cry—for Christians never outgrow being children (of God).

### References

<sup>1</sup>Interestingly, the root of the word weep here (*klaio*) means, “to sob, or wail aloud.” It does not just mean to become teary-eyed or weep silently (*dakruo*).

<sup>2</sup>The word is *klaio* again.

<sup>3</sup>Don McCullough, “Jesus the Judge,” *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 129.

<sup>4</sup>*Strong’s, ischuros*, means “forcible; boisterous, mighty” and *crying, krauge*, could be translated “an outcry” (it comes from a root, *chris*, meaning, “to croak as a raven: scream aloud; shriek, exclaim”).

<sup>5</sup>*Reader’s Digest Book of Facts.*

<sup>6</sup>*Harvard Business Review* (11/12/94).

WOT

## THE AUTHORITY OF GOD’S WORD

Jason Carter, Covington, Indiana

God told Adam, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). This information must have been relayed to Eve, because she told the serpent what God had said (Gen. 3:2-3). The

serpent twisted what God had said by adding one little word: “You will **not** surely die” (Gen. 3:4, emp. added).

God’s Word can be twisted and perverted in many ways. Paul warned against such perversions (Gal. 1:6-9), as did the apostle John, forbidding our adding to or subtracting

from God’s revelation (Rev. 22:18-19). Despite these warnings, the gospel is perverted by many in the religious world. God’s Word is not respected when it is changed to fit one’s personal desires. Following are just a few examples.

• *God’s Word says:* “He who believes and is

baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:16). *Religious leaders of today say:* "He who believes will be saved and then, at a convenient time for him in the future, he will be baptized."

- *God's Word says:* "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). *Religious leaders of today say:* "Repent, and you shall receive remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then those who wish to be baptized may."
- *God's Word says:* "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). *Religious leaders of today say:* "Speaking to one another in

psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart, and with your hands, and on the piano, and drums, and guitar, and whatever other instrument you desire, to the Lord."

- *God's Word says:* "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). *Religious leaders of today say:* "And the religious body will determine who will be added to the church by the democratic process of voting, after they are saved."
- *God's Word says:* "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:12). *Religious leaders of today say:* "And I permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, for it is a shame for her talents to go to waste in silence."

There are many more examples that could be offered, but the point is clear: God's Word is not esteemed as the final authority among many religious leaders of today. They refer to their creed books before they search the pages of the New Testament.

It is the aim of those in the churches of Christ to restore first century Christianity. One early restorer coined the phrase, "Speak where the Bible speaks; be silent where the Bible is silent." Such is a biblical position. The apostle Peter instructed, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11).

We will not worship in a way that has no command or example in the New Testament, the inspired guide for all Christians. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17). *WOT*

## LOOK WHO'S TALKING

*Eric Lyons, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama*

As we study and defend the Bible, we must keep in mind that we are dealing with an inspired record that contains numerous uninspired statements. Even though "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16), not everything that the inspired writers recorded was a true statement. For example, after God created Adam, He told him not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil lest he die (Gen. 2:17). Yet, when the serpent approached Eve, he "informed" her that she would **not** die if she ate of this forbidden fruit (3:4). Obviously, Satan was not inspired by God to say, "You will not surely die." In fact, as we learn later, he actually lied (Jn. 8:44). However, when Moses recorded hundreds of years later the events that took place in Eden, he wrote by inspiration of God (cf. Lk. 24:44; Jn. 5:46). When Jesus healed a demoniac, some of the Pharisees accused Him of casting out demons, not by the power of God, but by the power of "Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matt. 12:24). Like Moses, Matthew did not write a lie, but merely reported a lie. The inspired writers of the Bible are in no way responsible for the inaccurate statements that are recorded therein. Whether the statements were true or false, they reported them accurately.

When giving a defense for a particular truth the Bible teaches (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15), or when refuting the error that someone else may be teaching (cf. Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2), we must keep in mind who is doing the talking. The above examples are rather elementary: Satan's statement and the Pharisees' allegations clearly were false. But what about when statements are made by individuals who do not seem "as bad" as these?

Oftentimes when attempting to defend a certain doctrine, a person will quote a verse from the book of Job and say, "See, that's what it says . . . the book of Job says . . . therefore my doctrine is proven true." Not

long ago I read an article by a gentleman who was defending a doctrine by citing various verses in the book of Job. This man never indicated who made the statements; he simply cited all of them as being true statements. Those who "defend the truth" in such a way totally disregard one of the fundamental rules of interpretation—knowing who is speaking. One who studies Job must realize that it is an inspired book that contains many **uninspired** statements. For instance, we know that Job's wife was incorrect when she told him to "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). We also know that many statements made by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were incorrect. Nine of the 42 chapters in the book were speeches by these "miserable comforters" (16:2) whom God said had "not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has" (42:7). Clearly, then, one never should quote these men and claim it as an inspired truth.

Finally, we must understand that even though Job was "blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (1:1), there is no indication that his speeches were inspired. Neither He nor anyone else in the book ever claimed his statements were "given by inspiration of God." In fact, when Jehovah finally answered Job out of the whirlwind, He asked: "Who is this who darkens counsel by **words without knowledge?**" (38:2, emp. added). Obviously, God never would have asked such a rhetorical question had Job been inspired. Prior to the Lord's speeches, Elihu twice accused Job of the very same thing (34:35; 35:16). Later, Job even said himself: "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, **which I did not know**" (42:3, emp. added; cf. 30:16-23). Clearly, then, these passages indicate that Job's speeches were not inspired.

Through the years, various authors have sought to establish scientific foreknowledge in the passage found in Job 26:7 where Job, in

speaking of God, observed that "He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing." Two items from this passage are alleged to be prescientific in nature. First, appeals have been made to the fact that one supposedly can observe an "empty space" in the northern skies—a space where there are no stars, thus corroborating Job's statement about an "empty space" in the north. Second, some have suggested that since Job's phrase, "He hangs the earth on nothing," is literally true (because as everyone now knows, the Earth is freely suspended in space), this is an example of scientific foreknowledge. But if we attempt to convince people that this verse is to be taken literally, how do we then consistently deal with statements in the same chapter that obviously are figurative (such as verse 11: "The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his rebuke")? Further, there is no empty space in the north. Instead, "billions of stars and galaxies extend outward in all directions" (DeYoung, 1989, p. 95). [Job was not speaking of a **literal** "empty space" in the north. During his day, pagan gods of idolaters were said to live "in the north." Job pointed out, correctly, that this could not be true because in the north there was nothing but "an empty space."]

The honest Christian desires to defend the Word of God with every legitimate weapon in the apologetic arsenal. However, we only hurt the cause of Christ when we employ arguments that are backed by uninspired statements. When studying your Bible or when teaching and defending one of its many truths, always remember to **look who's talking**.

### References

DeYoung, Donald B. (1989). *Astronomy and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Question:** I have a question in response to the article on marriage and divorce in a previous issue: Suppose you were divorced for any reason. If every sin [including divorce for any reason] is washed away at baptism [beginning a new life], shouldn't you be allowed to get married again? After all, you have started a "new life."

**Answer:** This is a very good question, and one which we will examine carefully. When it comes to the subject of marriage, especially our own, or someone we know, it is easy to let our emotions control us. We tend to allow how we feel to get in the way of what the Bible reveals.

God's plan for holy union has always been that one man be married to one woman for life (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-9; Eph. 5:28-32). Sadly, our homes are not "fitting the bill." Why is that? Only two possibilities exist—a misunderstanding of God's Word or a disregard of it.

To answer the question above, let's ask three questions: 1) Who has a scriptural right to get married? 2) Who has a scriptural right to get divorced? 3) Who has a scriptural right to marry again?

**Not everyone has a scriptural right to get married.** There are only three categories of people who may marry.

- A couple may marry if neither party has been married before.
- A husband or wife who has put away a fornicating spouse, himself/herself being innocent, may marry again (Mt. 19:9).
- A husband or wife whose spouse is dead may marry again— "only in the Lord" (Rom. 7:1-6; 1 Cor. 7:39).

In each of these cases, the rule applies to both Christians and non-Christians. We are all amenable to the laws of God. To illustrate it, suppose someone from

Tennessee (who is used to the interstate speed limit being 70 mph) visits Virginia. In Virginia the interstate speed limit is 65 mph. If the Tennessee visitor drives according to the 70 mph speed limit, instead of the 65 mph speed limit, he may receive a ticket from the Virginia State Police. Now suppose that when the Tennessee visitor is pulled over, he tells the officer, "But I am from Tennessee, not Virginia." The officer will say, "Yes, but you are in Virginia now." Everyone in Virginia—visitor or resident—is amenable to Virginia laws. The same is true when it comes to the laws of God—everyone is amenable to His laws (note the "whosoever" in Matt. 19:9).

**Not everyone has a scriptural right to get a divorce.**

- "Falling out of love" is not a scriptural reason for divorce.
- "Irreconcilable differences" is not a scriptural reason for divorce.
- Any other "reason" one may come up with is not a scriptural reason for divorce.

The only scriptural reason for a couple to divorce is fornication. Jesus is very clear on this point. In fact, we have to work hard to misunderstand His clear teaching on the matter. Jesus said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife **except it be for fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matt. 19:9; cf. Matt. 5:32). Again, keep in mind that the Lord's teaching here applies to Christians and non-Christians alike. We are all amenable to the laws of God.

Now, *must* the innocent party put away his or her fornicating spouse? The answer is no. He or she can choose to work through the problem. I have known of marriages in which one mate commits adultery, and the innocent one forgives.

**Not everyone has a scriptural right to marry again.** You may marry again if you have put away a fornicating spouse, yourself being innocent. You may marry again if your spouse has died, and your new marriage is to be "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39).

But someone says, "I was divorced years ago. My wife and I didn't get along, and so we just 'broke up.' Since our divorce, I have become a Christian. In becoming a Christian the blood of Christ cleansed my sins of the past and gave me a

'new life.' Don't I have a right to marry again, since I am now living a 'new life'?"

Is it true that baptism washes away every sin of the past? Unquestionably, yes! This is the very purpose of baptism (Acts 2:38). It is also true that at baptism, one begins a "new life" (Rom. 6:1-4). But baptism does not hide reality. The reality is that the person described above divorced his wife for reasons other than fornication. The reality is this person does not have biblical grounds to marry again.

Baptism never makes a sinful act a righteous one. If it had been adultery for this man to marry again (Matt. 19:9; cf. 5:32) before becoming a Christian, it would be adultery for this man to marry again after becoming a Christian. Furthermore, baptism, though it washes sins away, does not sanctify an unscriptural relationship.

If one has found himself divorced for reasons other than fornication, he must remain unmarried (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:10-11). Someone says, "to remain unmarried means that I can no longer have sexual relations." That is true. Abstinence is more difficult for some than it is for others, but it is not impossible. Otherwise, God would be commanding the impossible. Remember that Jesus said that a man could make himself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom.

In summary, the only ones who may marry are those who have never been married before, or those whose spouse has died (Rom. 7:1-4). The only reason for divorce is fornication. Divorce for any other reason is sin (Matt. 19:9). If a couple divorce for a reason other than fornication, they must remain celibate (1 Cor. 7). Those who have the right to marry again are those who have put away a fornicating spouse, themselves being innocent. A husband or wife whose spouse has died may marry again—"only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39).

—Neil Richey, Greenville, South Carolina

  
 e?mail  
 your questions to...  
 sixthavenue@tds.net

# JESUS—THE MASTER TEACHER

*Roger Johnson, Northport, Alabama*

There is no power which attracts attention like an authoritative word. Of Jesus it was said, "the multitudes were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). When we consider the large amount of space given in the gospel accounts to the recorded sayings and teachings of our Lord, it makes it imperative that we study the characteristics and scope of His teaching. Christ is the Teacher supreme! Unlike every other teacher, not only does His teaching still live, but He (the Teacher) lives! He is the incarnation of the truth He came to teach. All that He ever taught is perfectly summed up in Him. As we notice the following characteristics of our Lord's teaching, let us consider how we can implement them in making us more effective teachers.

**The authority with which Jesus spoke.** In the text, His teaching is contrasted with that of the scribes who basically had no message. They talked about trivialities and never spoke with any conviction. One common mistake made today by teachers and students alike is the frequent appeal to man's opinion and judgment, whether it be one's own opinion or that of another. Authoritative teaching makes an appeal to Scripture (1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Cor. 4:6) and not human opinion. All teachers would do well to follow Micaiah's decision: "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak" (1 Kng. 22:14).

**The boldness with which Jesus spoke.** His contemporaries stated that He spoke openly and none could successfully dispute Him (Jn. 7:26). He boldly exposed the sham of hypocrisy (Matt. 23), corrected religious error (Matt. 22:29), and tenderly pointed out moral deficiencies (Jn. 4:17-18). Christ is the perfect epitome of a man of steel and velvet with the courage and love to be bold, yet winsome. What an attractive quality for all teachers to develop!

**The simplicity with which Jesus spoke.** He was profound, yet "the common people heard him gladly" (Matt. 12:36). Frequently He taught by parables, illustrating great and sublime truths with very ordinary things. Is our teaching simple, or is it above the heads of the people?

It is impossible within the scope of this article to consider the substance and scope of our Lord's teaching, but just think of the variety of themes upon which He spoke with authority. The words of other great teachers have long been forgotten; Christ's words will abide forever (1 Pet. 1:24-25). No doubt our teaching will greatly affect the lives of others if we also will teach authoritatively, boldly, and simply. WOT

## **The Words of Truth**

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

**Address Service Requested**

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) in electronic form (e-mail or on disk or CD).

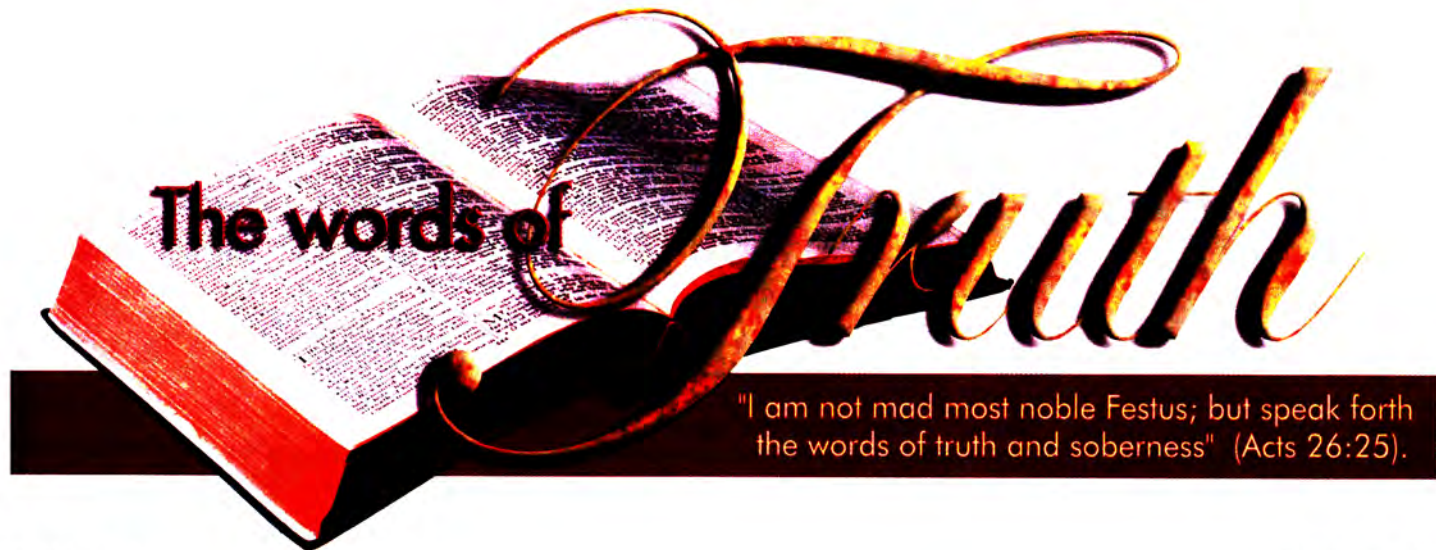
Please send all correspondence to:

## **The Words of Truth**

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





## WHERE ARE THE SEVENTEEN?

*Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana*

It was in the early morning hours of September 8. Night-time navigation was always difficult in 1860, but especially so on this occasion. Gale-force winds made the trip all the more perilous.

Around 2:30 a.m., about twelve miles off the Illinois coast, the steamboat "Lady Elgin" was suddenly rammed by a large, wooden schooner. Her crew attempted to plug the resulting hole in the hull with a mattress, but to no avail. The breach simply could not be repaired and pounding waves quickly forced water into her oak-framed body.

Edward Spencer was on board the Lady Elgin when the accident occurred. Oblivious to the storm and its attendant dangers, Edward plunged into the icy waters and began rescuing fellow passengers. There had been approximately 485 patrons on board (the ship was rated to carry only 300 people); about 380 of them drowned on that awful day.

Edward lived—and so did seventeen other people whom he had saved during the deluge. However, the strain of the occasion exacted its toll on his young body. The nerves in his legs had been irreparably damaged during the mishap, and doctors were forced to confine him to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

On his eightieth birthday, Edward's friends and family gathered to celebrate. Someone asked him, "What is your most vivid memory about that tragic day?" He replied, "Not one of the seventeen returned to thank me."

I wonder which burden was more difficult for Edward to bear? Was it the lifetime loss of movement in his legs, or was it the thoughtless negligence of those seventeen unnamed passengers whom he had snatched from that watery tomb long ago?

In Luke 17, Jesus came in contact with a group of men who were suffering with leprosy. Their plight—as well as their knowledge of the Lord's power—prompted them to cry for help. Commenting on this incident, one author notes:

"The law of Moses required those afflicted with the loathsome disease of leprosy to keep away from the rest of the people (Lev. 13:45-46). . . . Because lepers could not associate with others, they usually congregated together for the sake of association; and, in this instance, there were ten of them. . . .

Leprosy is one of the most dreaded and terrible diseases known to man. It starts with sores; then, it eats away at bodily tissues until the body itself begins to be consumed. The nose, the lips disappear; fingers decay and fall off; joint after joint separates, eventually, the vital organs cease to function and death follows.

Those who had leprosy were regarded as ceremonially unclean; they were required to live outside the city; and had to cry out 'Unclean! Unclean!' at the approach of others. The lepers remained at a distance because they were forbidden to draw near to others—this being a sort of

quarantine to keep from infecting more with the disease. . . .

Jesus heard the pitiful cries of these desperate men and was willing to help. He told them to go and show themselves to the priests . . . (Lev. 14: Matt. 8:4). Though actually clean through the miraculous power of Christ, these lepers had to be made legally clean by compliance with the law of Moses in order to be allowed association with the people."<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, despite the fact that Jesus had healed ten men, Scripture says that only the one Samaritan came back and expressed his heartfelt gratitude. "Now one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks . . ." (vv. 15-16a).

I wonder what the Lord felt when that singular leper returned and said "thank you" (v.17)? Then, too, I wonder how the Lord feels today when we fail to express gratitude for the "healing" He has granted us (Isa. 6:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:24)? He walked the lonely road to the cross; He gave His life as a ransom on our behalf. He made salvation possible to us all (Tit. 2:11). But are we saying "thank you" in return? Where is our gratitude?

Church leaders lament low Sunday night attendance, poor contributions, the inability to find adequate Bible class teachers, and the glaring lack of conviction for what is true and right. Congregations at times seem more concerned about buying furniture, installing carpet, and repairing plumbing than they do about the plight of men's souls (Matt. 16:26; cf. Acts 8:22) and eternity (Matt. 25:46). Could it be that we've forgotten about Edward Spencer? **Could it be that we've lost sight of the enormity of what Jesus did for us nearly 2,000 years ago on the tree** (Rom. 5:15-18; 6:23; Eph. 2:8)? When the apostle Paul considered his deliverance from the consequences of sin (i.e., death—Rom. 6:23) he exclaimed, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15).

When we begin to recognize the sacrifice that was made on Calvary, we will stop thinking in terms of obligation and requirement. Our motivation to follow Jesus won't be prompted by command *alone*, but also out of an abiding gratitude that pours forth from our lives (Jam. 2:14-26). Thankfulness will be translated into loving, life-long devotion and submission.

Do you need to say "thank you" to Jesus? Where are the seventeen? "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18; cf. Phil. 4:6; Col. 1:12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2; Heb. 13:15).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>J. Noel Meridith, "Exhortations for Servants," *Luke*—Fifth Annual Firm Foundation Lectureship, William S. Cline, editor, 1988. pp. 414-415.

# A DANGEROUS “PROFESSION”<sup>1</sup>

Chuck Webster, Editorial

On-the-job accidents and homicides claimed the lives of 5,524 Americans in 2002, which was down 6.6% from 2001. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the workplace death rate is the lowest it has been since recordkeeping began in 1992.<sup>2</sup> It's still fairly dangerous to go to work, however, at least if you choose certain professions. The most dangerous job is timber cutting. “The mortality rate among lumbermen, 118 timber cutters per 100,000 workers, heads the list of the top 10 most dangerous jobs in America . . . and was more than 26 times that of the average U.S. worker.”<sup>3</sup> A distant second is the fishing industry (71.1/100,000), followed by pilots and navigators (69.8), structural metal workers (37.9), and driver-sales workers (37.9). Finishing out the top ten were roofers (37.0), electrical power installers (32.5), farm occupations (28.0), construction laborers (27.7), and truck drivers (25.0).<sup>4</sup>

I searched diligently, but I could never find preaching listed on any list of dangerous jobs. But despite that, it *should* head the list, far above commercial fishing or timber cutting. Of course, from a purely *physical* standpoint, it isn't very dangerous. Preachers have been known to make their listeners angry on occasion, but few have provoked the response Stephen endured (Acts 7). A preacher's work is usually not physically stressful, so “on-the-job” deaths are fairly rare. With that said, however, it is *terribly* dangerous.

**Preaching is dangerous because we wield the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).** Our tool isn't a social program, designed by sociologists to meet the latest ill of the underprivileged. We don't formulate the theories of the psychologist to help the troubled as they cope with life's daily struggles. Nor do we wield the buzzwords or the under-the-table favor of the politician to court the masses for extra votes. Our instrument of choice isn't the scalpel or surgical knife of the medical doctor as he restores health to the sick. No, our instrument is much more powerful and important than any of those. The tool of our trade is the Word of God, which is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12, NKJV). “Preach the word,” Paul told Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2). “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16). “. . . from childhood you have known the Holy

Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

What makes this aspect of our work so dangerous is the enormous power of God's Word for good . . . or evil. Handled correctly (2 Tim. 2:15), it imparts faith and saves men's souls (Rom. 1:16). Used flippantly, ignorantly, or deviously, however, the Word can cause great harm. Satan modified it only slightly and deceived Adam and Eve (Gen. 3). We must be careful that we do not add to or take away from it, lest we be condemned (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19). If by carelessness we preach it incorrectly, it could cause ourselves—and others—to lose their souls. Some “untaught and unstable people twist” the Scriptures to “their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16). The Lord harshly rebuked those who distorted His Word (cf. Matt. 15:9).

**Preaching is dangerous because we handle humanity's most valuable possession.** The financial advisor must feel an enormous amount of pressure, especially when handling the investments of wealthy clients. If poor judgment or neglect causes him to invest poorly, he may lose millions. A surgeon handles something, however, for which even the wealthy would trade all their possessions—their lives. As he contemplates his work, he must grasp its gravity and the importance of having a keen mind and steady hands. An attorney chooses his words carefully as he addresses the jury, knowing the freedom of his clients hangs in the balance. Though worldly minded people would never put a preacher's work at the same level as the investor, attorney, or doctor, our work concerns something which everyone will one day appreciate more than his money, life, or freedom: his soul. “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). Put another way, we might ask, What if an investor helps his client gain a tremendous fortune but knows nothing of encouraging him to lay up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20)? A hundred years from now, will the wealthy client be thankful for his investor's work (cf. Lk. 16:19-31)? Or, suppose an attorney—through careful preparation and legal maneuvering—secures his client's freedom, but cannot help him find freedom in Christ (Jn. 8:32). Will the eternally

imprisoned soul be thankful to his lawyer as he lifts up his eyes in torment? What about the doctor whose expertise saves a patient's life, but who is unable to show him the Great Physician? When both have entered eternity, will the patient thank his doctor for sparing his life on earth for a few more years, or will he be more concerned about the health of his soul?

We're tremendously thankful for professionals who use their ability to do good for others. Christians who are successful in secular areas can often use their influence for eternal good as personal workers, Bible class teachers, and elders. In fact, their success will open doors for them that may never be open to the “full-time” preacher.

Having said that, though, what a privilege it is for the preacher to spend his days working with the souls of men and women without being burdened by “the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:2)! With Paul we exclaim, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). The world may ignore the preacher as he quietly takes his Bible to an unbeliever's house and teaches a soul about Jesus. Others may think it a waste of time for him to invest hours into preparing his sermons and Bible classes.

But God is watching, and the preacher's work will follow him into eternity.

John MacArthur writes:

“I am continually overwhelmed by the responsibility and liability that possess the preacher of God's Word. We all look with indignation at the lawyer or judge who, for the motive of personal wealth, distorts the truth in attacking the reputation and personal possessions of people—while reducing them to poverty. We respond with similar indignation to the quack doctor who, by incompetence, hazards the health and life of someone for the purpose of financial gain. Such people deserve to be considered criminals; the pain and loss of their victims should rightly be laid to their account. . . .

But what about me as the purveyor of God's truth, the physician of the soul? Shall I not be held responsible to God for any perversion of truth, however witless, and for my negligence and lack of skill? What earthly regulatory association validates me? Do not I, who preach God's Word, face a higher court than the legal bar or any medical tribunal? James said, ‘Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment’ (Jam. 3:1).

No profession has as high a liability potential as that of the preacher of God's Word. God will judge every preacher on the truthfulness and accuracy of his preaching.

Any failure as a spokesman for God brings not only shame (2 Tim. 2:15) but judgment. . . . There will be a day of reckoning for the preacher. Only a certain kind of man, then, has the right to be considered a lawyer, a judge, or a physician. The standard is significantly higher for the preacher."<sup>5</sup>

Preaching is a way of life that shouldn't be entered flippantly or casually. Its gravity has been emphasized for generations by older preachers as they counseled young men who were contemplating becoming preachers: "If you can do anything else, do it." A man should become a preacher only when he realizes the gravity and awesome potential of his work.

To those who are considering preaching, don't do it unless you are serious about it. You will be held to a higher standard, and you must be willing to accept that

responsibility. You will have numerous opportunities to influence your hearers' eternal destiny—that is not the life everyone can or should live.

To those of us who are already preaching, we remind ourselves never to become so professionalized that we view ourselves simply as another group of "white-collar professionals." God has blessed us with the opportunity to work full-time in His kingdom. That, while a wonderful privilege, is also dangerous work, and that makes it very serious business. We should treat it accordingly.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I fully realize the difficulties in calling preaching a "profession" or "job." It is a profession only in the sense that a preacher is supported financially by the church to do

his work. A gospel preacher, however, pursues his work because he loves God, the Word, and the souls of men, so it is no doubt more appropriate to call his work a "passion."

<sup>2</sup>Kim Khan, "The Ten Most Dangerous Jobs in America," <http://moneycentral.msn.com/content/invest/extra/P63405.asp>, October 14, 2003.

<sup>3</sup>Les Christie, *CNN/Money*, "America's Most Dangerous Jobs," <http://money.cnn.com/2003/10/13/pf/dangerousjobs/?cnn=yes>, October 13, 2003.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>John MacArthur, Jr., and the Master's Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, Word Publishing, Dallas, 1992, p. xiii. WOT

## LAMENTATIONS AND CHRIST

*Drew Kizer, Leeds, Alabama*

The message of the book of Lamentations is obscured for a number of reasons. It gets lost in the midst of the prophetic utterances of major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Also, perhaps the subject matter is unattractive. How many people really want to study about "lamentations?" But within this little book are precious gems to be mined from inspiration.

One important theme within this series of poems attributed to Jeremiah is the sufferings of Christ. Lamentations is not quoted by the writers of the New Testament, but its words often foreshadow images from the life of Christ, particularly His sufferings. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes this and reads the book during the last part of the Passion Week every year. Consider some of the amazing similarities between Lamentations and Christ.

The prophecy is directly related to the great suffering of the people of Judah following Babylonian conquest. Jeremiah describes in woeful poetry how young women were being raped, princes were being hung up by their hands, elders were being berided, and people in general were being subjected to oppression (5:11-16). Starvation was so great that mothers resorted to cannibalism (2:20; 4:10). Consequently, there was bitter weeping throughout a city once characterized by "precious things" in days of old (1:2, 7).

Such suffering reminds the reader of Jesus—"the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:12)—and His great torture on the cross of Calvary.

Another similarity involves the reason behind the terrible suffering recorded in this little book. Jeremiah makes it plain that sin is behind it all, crying, ". . . woe to us, for we

have sinned!" (5:16). In chapter 1 alone, the sin of the people is blamed for Jerusalem's pain a number of times, and it is described in four instructive terms: "transgressions," (i.e., trespasses beyond God's law—1:5); grievous sin (1:8); rebellion (1:18, 20); and "wickedness" (KJV) or "evildoing" (ESV) (1:22).

Wickedness was also behind the crucifixion. Isaiah prophesied, "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities . . ." (53:5). According to Peter, Christ bore the sins of the whole world as He hung on the "tree" (1 Pet. 2:24).

3. Because sin was the culprit, the woes that followed were in actuality punishment inflicted by God Himself. Jeremiah proclaims that the Lord has "bent his bow like an enemy" against His people (2:4). This wrath, of course, flowed out of His never-failing righteousness; He had afflicted Jerusalem, His own city, "for the multitude of her transgressions" (1:5).

Astonishingly, the affliction of Christ is also attributed to the work of the Father. Centuries before the cross, Isaiah described Him as "smitten by God, and afflicted" (53:4). Perhaps this is the explanation behind Jesus' agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). God, who is too holy to look at evil (Isa. 59:1-2; Hag. 1:13), momentarily had to turn His back on His own Son, who was burdened with the sins of the world.

4. Here a contrast needs to be interjected amongst the similarities: while Lamentations represents people suffering for their own sins, this is not true in the case of Christ. There are three great stories in the Bible involving suffering—Job, Lamentations, and the crucifixion of Christ. But each story is

very different as it relates to sin. Job, for instance, was accused by his friends of sin, but in reality his suffering had nothing whatsoever to do with iniquity. The Jews in Lamentations, however, were receiving the consequences of centuries of rebellion against God's will. The crucifixion presents another, very different vantage point. Jesus suffered, not apart from sin, nor because of His own sin, but for the sins of others (2 Cor. 5:21). This fact ought to instill deep appreciation within the heart of every believer.

5. Finally, in the cases of both Lamentations and Christ, there is a message of hope. Interestingly, one of the most positive messages on hope in the Bible is found in the heart of Lamentations: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion," says my soul, therefore I will hope in him" (3:22-24).

Likewise, even on Golgotha, there was hope! On the Day of Pentecost, following the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, Peter reminded the Jews of the prophecy of David, which said, "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption" (Acts 2:27). Even at the cross, there was the hope of resurrection. And Christians today can look back at that hope and derive comfort in knowing that their own resurrection has been permanently secured (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:20-23).

At one point in his poetry, Jeremiah sighed, "What can I liken to you . . . O virgin daughter of Zion?" (2:13). That question finds its answer in the sufferings of Christ. May every Christian dwell upon the sacrifice paid on his behalf and respond with deep and sincere appreciation. WOT

## DOES IT REPRESENT YOU?

*Bob Bauer, Auburndale, Florida*

I don't know if the following story is true, but the message is still advantageous:

"It happened one time after the preacher had made an appeal in church for a great and worthy cause, that a certain woman—a member of the church—came to him and handed him a check for \$50, asking if her gift was satisfactory. The preacher immediately replied, 'If it represents you.'

There was a moment of soul-searching thought and she asked to have the check returned to her. She left with it and a day or two later she returned, handing the preacher a check for \$5,000, and again asked the same question, 'Is my gift satisfactory?' The preacher gave the same answer as before, 'If it represents you.' As before, a truth seemed to be driven deeply. After a few moments of hesitation she took back the check and left.

Later in the week she came again with a check. This time it was for \$50,000. As she placed it in the preacher's hand, she said, 'After earnest, prayerful thought, I have come to the conclusion that this gift does represent me and I am happy to give it.'"

Does what you give to God truly represent you? It may seem like the church is constantly trying to get into your wallet or pocketbook. There are the weekly offerings as well as special offerings for missionaries and building funds. Some religious groups even take two or three offerings each time the congregations are assembled. What we give financially to the church and ultimately to God should be done cheerfully and liberally. It would be horrible to miss the joys of heaven because of selfishness or greed.

However, I am not referring to that type of giving. What I am referring to is the giving of oneself. The apostle Paul wrote concerning the Christians from Macedonia and their liberal financial support that they gave beyond their ability even while being in "deep poverty" (2 Cor. 8:2-3). But he went on to write, ". . . but they first gave themselves to the Lord. . ." (2 Cor. 8:5, NKJV). No amount of money given will

make up for the lack of obedient service to God, and it seems the Macedonian Christians were well aware of that. They gave of themselves first.

In his letter to the Christians at Rome, Paul wrote that they were to present "their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1). In other words, their lives were first and foremost to be given to serving God. Would your children say that serving God acceptably is first and foremost in your life? As a Christian, does your family see you living what you claim to be? Do they see you studying your Bible, praying, worshiping, helping others, etc.? Do your words, your recreation, your business practices reflect a godly attitude? Maybe, like the woman, you need to give some "earnest, thoughtful prayer" to what you are giving to God. Maybe you need to adjust your life—your gift to God—to that which truly "represents you." WOT

## ENCOURAGEMENT FROM PSALMS

*Scott McCown, Parrish, Alabama*

Leah was an attractive coed . . . a business major with a bright mind and a good family background. Life had always been good to her. Over Christmas, however, her father lost his job with the company after twenty years. Leah's brother had been sick and a blood test revealed a rare disease. For Leah, life took a downward spiral . . . she felt hopeless. Her family and her life had become a failure.

Most of us realize life is a series of mountains and valleys, opportunities and obstacles, ups and downs. The law of averages, as well as Murphy's Law, tells us we will have problems—some small, some major. The dilemma is: When I have these problems, how will I survive? Paul writes:

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; . . . For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are

seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:8,9,16-18).

Paul is saying that problems are a matter of perspective. We would probably agree that we often perceive our own problems as greater than everyone else's. The Hebrew writer gives us a godly perspective: "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-3). Do not focus on the circumstances that bring you down, but rather on the Christ who overcomes circumstances.

There are some passages in Psalms that help us with our perspective. Psalm 37:1-5 reads:

"Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him: and he shall bring it to pass."

Look to **God's goodness**, David says. We tend to focus on the negative. Such a focus is an "all or nothing trap." If one thing goes wrong then everything is wrong . . . if one person criticizes me then everyone is against me. It is the "Chicken Little Syndrome," where if an acorn falls on your head, the sky must be falling.

When the situation looks depressing, it may mean we have quit looking at the good in our life. Return your focus to the goodness of God. Thank Him for what He has done. It is amazing what gratitude can do for depression.

David tells us to remember God's goodness. If we think all of life is bad, we should make a list of what God has given us. List every blessing, from the smallest to the biggest blessing. You will find that we all have so much to be thankful for, especially in our nation.

- We worry about car problems, when most of the world doesn't even have a car.
- We worry about making mortgage payments, when much of the world would like to have a roof.

- We worry about the cost of health care, when much of the world would like the smallest of care.
- We worry about our children's grades in school, when many in the world wonder if their children will go to school.
- We worry about where we will have lunch today, asking, "will the service be good?" Many in the world wonder, "will I eat today?"

As Christians we can add to these the blessings found in being a part of God's family (Eph. 1:3). These blessings include the association of His children, the privilege of prayer, and our salvation. When we realize the blessings God gives us, we realize God is good!

Maybe the entire world does not seem to be against you; maybe you simply feel defeated. You are always tired, drained, and out of energy. You feel like a failure, you think you are incompetent, you might as well throw in the towel. You are defeated, so you might as well admit it—nothing you do will work out for your good. There is a Psalm for you to consider:

"In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth" (Psa. 31:1-5).

When the situation looks defeating, when you are feeling like there is no hope for your life, the psalmist says look to the **greatness of God**. Realize your strength is not in

yourself, but it comes from God. Allow God to be your fortress, your rock, your power source, and your strength. Plug into God's power.

Maybe you have been studying the Bible with a member of your family for a long time. It seems improbable that he will change. It may be that you are having difficulty in your family. You are caring for aging parents, a sick spouse, a rebellious teen, or a busy and active young child. You may be experiencing a crisis in your personal life. Whatever the situation, remember that all things are possible with God. "[God] is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). Look where the power is. The power works within us to do what we think is impossible. This power isn't miraculous events or great physical feats that impress people. This is power to live for God to work His plan no matter what life's circumstances are. Realize there is great power with God—*God is great*. Realize the blessings God gives you—*God is Good*.

Maybe not everyone is against you, and you don't feel like a failure, but maybe the situation is simply dark. You do not know where to turn. You feel all alone, isolated. You can attend worship with 300 people and still feel alone. You might live in a house full of people and still feel isolated.

God understands. The psalmist records:

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the

darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psa. 139:7-12).

Open your eyes to the closeness of God. It doesn't matter where you are in life, how isolated you feel, how alone you may be. If you are a child of God, then God is with you. You are not alone.

There is nowhere you can go in this universe and God not go with you. It is encouraging to know that even when you feel alone, God is with you. You cannot escape the presence of God. You have the promise that God is going through your problems with you.

God's message to you is "Draw near to Me and I will draw near to you." Realize:

- God is with you—*God is Close*.
- Realize God's power—*God is Great*.
- Realize God's blessings—*God is Good*.

The Goodness, Greatness, and Closeness of God are wonderfully encouraging. God made these characteristics known in Christ, specifically in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Think of Christ's sacrifice in this light:

- God is *Good* in that He sent His Good Son when we were not good.
- God is *Great* in that Jesus rose from the grave. God has power over death for us too! We will be raised to be eternally with Him.
- God is *Close* in that Not only did He love the world, but He loves us as individuals . . . He cares for each of us personally. He wants the best for every man, woman, and child. WOT

## LUKE, THE BELOVED HISTORIAN

Jason Jackson, Stockton, California

The gospel of Luke begins with the following remarks:

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed" (Lk. 1:1-4, ASV).

Leon Morris characterizes Luke's introduction by saying, "The opening paragraph is one sentence in good Greek style, with classical vocabulary, rhythm and balance."<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the other gospels, Luke begins with a literary introduction that is personal (e.g., "it seemed good to me," emp. added). While the opening lines of Luke differ from Matthew, Mark, and John in this regard, the style is similar to some of the renowned secular histories of antiquity. *The History of Herodotus* (484-425 B.C.) begins like this:

"These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes, in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done . . ."<sup>2</sup>

For similar examples, see *The Gospel of Luke* by William Barclay.

Luke, like Matthew, Mark and John, wrote by the inspiration of God (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16). And when Luke introduces his narrative, *by inspiration* he indicates the following things concerning his account of the life and ministry of the Son of God. First, he notes the precedent for such a work.

Second, he outlines the process needed to accomplish it. Third, he reveals the purpose for which he records those matters. The Holy Spirit guaranteed the accuracy of Luke's gospel, which includes 1:1-4, and in these verses God teaches us something about the methodology of the revelatory process, in which he employed human agency and ability.

### The Precedent for Luke's Gospel

"Forasmuch" signifies "a fact already well known," which provides justification for Luke's work.<sup>3</sup> It was well-known that "many have taken in hand" to write about Jesus of Nazareth. Speculation about the identity of the "many" is futile. Some scholars suppose that Luke must have been acquainted with Matthew and Mark from a study of the text. Regardless, it is apparent that Luke is not absolutely dependent on those Gospels, for 50% of his material is unique to his work.

Luke commends these former works. First, he noted the consistent reporting of "those matters." These writers drew up narratives that agreed with the teaching that circulated among the congregations at the time, for the writings were "even as they delivered them unto us."

Second, Luke recognized the reliability of the narratives, for they were based on eyewitness testimony.

Third, the works were further validated by the fact that the eyewitnesses themselves had been changed by what they "saw and heard" (cf. Acts 4:20). Therefore, they were "ministers of the word."

Fourth, Luke indicated that the things Jesus Christ "did and taught" (see Acts 1:1) were "fulfilled among us." These events were not in the distant past; they were still capable of demonstrable proof—the evidence was fresh at hand (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5-8). A.T. Robertson observed, "Luke writes after the close of Christ's earthly ministry and yet it is not in the dim past."<sup>4</sup>

With these familiar facts before his audience, Luke seized on the precedent for writing about the historical roots of Christianity. Significant interest abounded concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and Luke knew that additional good could be accomplished by supplementing the current literature with a more comprehensive work while thorough verification was still possible.

### The Process of Luke's Research

Luke's gospel was written upon the basis of investigation. His research was complete, thorough, and comprehensive in order to record the truth. He describes himself as

"having traced the course. . . ." He followed a trail of evidence bit by bit. He utilized a process "whereby one arrives at a knowledge of the matter."<sup>5</sup> Luke used the perfect tense when he wrote "having traced," indicating that the investigation was over and his findings were preserved in his document.

Luke reveals that his research was *thorough*. He said that he investigated the course of "all things." Concerning the relevant facts, he made thorough inquiries. His research no doubt involved a number of investigative techniques. He may have made use of other narratives, which represented the account of eyewitnesses. He had the opportunity to talk to people like James (Acts 21:17-18), son of Mary and Joseph, and a half-brother of Jesus. What might Luke have learned from James, the son of Mary, about the things she wondered and pondered in her heart (Lk. 1:29; 2:29,33,51)?

Did Luke interview Mary herself, if she still lived? What could Mark have told the physician and companion of Paul when they were together in Rome (Col. 4:10,14)? While in Jerusalem, Luke met people like Mnason, "an early disciple," in whose house Luke stayed (Acts 21:15-16). Might Luke have interviewed some of the 500 brethren to whom the resurrected Christ appeared (1 Cor. 15:6)?

Not only was Luke's research thorough in every detail, it was *comprehensive* as well. He wrote that he traced the course of all things "from the first." He researched and recorded more than any other writer concerning the foundational events of Christianity. He reported the amazing circumstances of John's birth, the angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary, Mary's visit with Elizabeth, the shepherds' worship of Christ, the visit to the temple and the testimony of Simeon and Anna, and the twelve-year-old Jesus talking with the elders in the temple.

A.T. Robertson says, "The idea of Luke seems to be that, having decided to write another and a fuller narrative than those in existence, he first made an investigation of all the available material that he could lay his hands upon" (p. 51). This comprehensive investigation led him back to a day when an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias in the temple (Lk. 1:5ff).

Luke also indicates that his *aim* was to verify the events. He was concerned with the truth, not just a good story. He traced the course of all things "accurately." Consider Luke's precise care with the facts. He relates the beginning of John's preaching with no less than six political figures and their respective jurisdictions (Lk. 3:1-3). His

accurate reporting is also illustrated in the book of Acts where he mentions thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine Mediterranean islands.

When he spoke of the ancient world, he was accurate. When he used political terminology, he was precise. When medical insights were appropriate, his skill enabled him to paint a more vivid picture. It is not without reason that the former critic of Luke would write, having traced the course of Luke himself, "The present writer takes the view that Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness."<sup>6</sup>

### The Purpose of Luke's Gospel

Dr. Luke did not scoff at the idea of the virgin birth or at the thought of the resurrection of the dead. It was not, however, that he had observed these kinds of things in his medical career. To the contrary! Yet, with unabashed clarity, Luke presents these remarkable events with certainty, based upon the abundant evidence that he reviewed.

And when *you* trace them, step-by-step, you will "know the certainty" of these matters concerning the life of Jesus Christ. He reported the truth concerning Jesus' life—from His virgin birth to the miraculous ascension. And the truth to which these facts and events point is: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk. 19:10, ESV).

Luke distinguishes himself from the eye-witnesses who saw and heard these things (note the "they" versus "us" in Luke 1:1-2). But his investigation was so thorough, his research so comprehensive, his aim to record the truth so noble—that although he himself was not there, he can take us there, that we may know the certainty of "those matters." In fact, once we leave verse three (i.e., the "me" reference), the greatest historian fades into the background behind the greatest story ever told.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>*The Gospel According to St. Luke*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Transl. George Rawlinson, New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup>*Luke the Historian in the Light of Research*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup>Rienecker, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup>William Ramsay, *The Bearing of Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979, p. 81).  
WOT

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



**Question:** I'm a member of the Church of Christ in \_\_\_\_\_, and I would appreciate it if you would answer a few questions for me concerning the topic of Trustees in a church:

1. Does the church have to have Trustees?
2. If so, then are the elders the ones who should be appointed as Trustees?
3. What is their function or what is the function of the Trustees especially toward the church's financial concerns?
4. What is a Trustee?

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,  
[name withheld]

[Because of the legal aspects of this question, we asked Matt Vega, an attorney in Memphis, for his input. Matt also serves as a deacon at the Collierville Church of Christ.]

**Answer:** Let's take the questions in reverse order:

4) There are two definitions of a trustee: (a) a member of a governing board, or (b) a person to whom legal title to property is entrusted to use for another's benefit.

3) Assuming Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ has the first definition in mind, all corporations (whether for-profit or not-for-profit) are managed by a governing board. In the case of a not-for-profit corporation, the board is called a board of trustees. A board of trustees is responsible for all legal obligations of the legal entity, while

the second definition of trustee has more narrowly defined responsibilities such as making sure the mortgage payments and other financial matters are met. In either sense of the word, a trustee must discharge his duties in good faith and with the degree of diligence, care, and skill that an ordinarily prudent person in a comparable position would exercise under similar circumstances. This duty is commonly referred to as the "duty of care." In addition, each trustee has a "duty of loyalty." That means that no trustee may undertake an act or omission which that person knows or believes to be contrary to the best interest of the corporation or beneficiary of the trust (e.g., a conflict of interest). If a trustee fails to satisfy the duties owed to the corporation, he may be held personally liable for his conduct. Conversely, when a trustee has discharged his duty in accordance with his legal obligations, he is protected from personal liability.

2) Elders should, by reason of their office in the church, be the trustees of any corporation formed by the church.

1) Lastly, let me respond to the question "Does a church have to have trustees?" in typical lawyer fashion by answering, "Yes—and no." No, a church does not have to have trustees. There are many thriving churches today that are unincorporated, and hence do not have a board of trustees. But the difference between an incorporated and an unincorporated entity can best be compared to a minor versus an adult. Minors cannot enter into contracts, nor may they legally own title to property in their own name. A church that has formed a corporation has the right to enter into contracts and own assets in the corporate entity's own name. However, in many states an unincorporated church does not. Thus, most churches choosing not to incorporate will still find it a legal necessity to entrust legal title to its real property to specified individuals acting as

"trustees" for certain limited purposes (e.g., to secure a mortgage loan). On the other hand, full incorporation provides several added benefits, not the least of which is protection from liability. The elders of an unincorporated church may face personal liability for contracts or personal injury lawsuits. Additionally, the members of an unincorporated church may also be personally liable. However, members of an incorporated entity are not personally liable because the corporate entity is the responsible party. Ultimately, the decision whether to incorporate or appoint trustees is a matter best left to the good judgment and discretion of the elders. The biblical authority to do so as a matter of expediency is implicit in the principles of stewardship and shepherding (Matt. 25:14-30; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Tit. 1:7: "For a bishop must be blameless, as a **steward** of God, . . ." emp. added). Just as Paul invoked the privileges of his Roman citizenship to further the gospel (Acts 16:37; 25:11), elders should decide when and under what circumstances to avail themselves of the legal devices and protections available to the church. That said, it should be understood that neither incorporation nor designation of trustees is required for tax exemption or IRS 501(c)(3) status. While I might recommend churches to incorporate for various reasons, tax exemption status is not one of them.

*Due to the general nature of its contents, this article is not and should not be regarded as legal advice.*

—Matt Vega, Collierville, Tennessee

  
**e?mail**  
 your questions to...  
[sixthavenue@tds.net](mailto:sixthavenue@tds.net)

# FELLOWSHIP?

*Mark E. Teske, Glasgow, Kentucky*

Fellowship is a very simple concept. We gain fellowship with God when we become a child of His—a Christian. A direct result of this relationship is that we then have fellowship with all other faithful Christians as well.

1 John 1:7 says, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, **we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (emp. added). Fellowship with one another is based upon “walking in the light.” Thus, when one no longer “walks in the light,” he is no longer in fellowship with God or other Christians.

“Withdrawal of fellowship” is something that we must understand in light of this simple Bible teaching. A withdrawal of fellowship isn’t something that a “good” Christian initiates against a “bad” Christian. Withdrawal of fellowship is something that happens when a Christian ceases to walk in the light. When a Christian ceases to repent of his sins and pray for forgiveness, he has chosen to live a life in disobedience to God and has **by his own actions** chosen to withdraw fellowship from his God. By withdrawing fellowship from God, the person has also withdrawn fellowship from other Christians as well.

When such an action occurs, faithful Christians are commanded: “you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Any actions that are taken in such a situation should be taken in love, obeying the command, “whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12).

If the person continually fails to repent of his sin, the church is commanded to take action: “Purge the evil person from among you” (1 Cor. 5:13). Obedience to this command is not to be out of vengeance or hate, but is a public acknowledgment that the person has withdrawn himself from fellowship with both God and other Christians. *WOT*

## **The Words of Truth**

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

**Address Service Requested**

The words of

*Truth*

CHUCK W. ABETON, 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) in electronic form (e-mail or on disk or CD).

Please send all correspondence to:

### **The Words of Truth**

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@fds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411





## HOW MUCH IS THE SOUP OF THE DAY?

*Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana*

Esau returned home exhausted from his hunting excursion in the field . . . Driven by hunger, his first thoughts turned to the all-you-can-eat buffet at "the Tent Dweller's Restaurant" (Gen. 25:27). The Record says, "And Esau said to Jacob, 'Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary'" (v. 30). The Hebrew phrase translated, "feed me," means *let me swallow* or *let me gulp*. Table manners didn't matter to Esau; he simply wanted his usual<sup>1</sup> hearty meal of red lentil soup.<sup>2</sup>

According to the waiter, the "current market price" for the soup of the day was one birthright. "But Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day'" (v. 31). The hunter's need for sustenance was so intense that he agreed to the exorbitant price (v. 32). Jacob offered his elder sibling a bowl of soup on the condition that Esau would make an oath<sup>3</sup> before God as to his intentions. Esau consented and the two brothers exchanged destinies over a single meal. Call it a Patriarchal "power lunch."

The birthright referred to the *right of the first* (born) or "primogeniture." It was typically<sup>4</sup> bestowed upon a man's eldest son and included at least three factors: 1) a double-portion of the father's estate (Deut. 21:17), 2) the responsibility of providing for the families' physical welfare, and 3) spiritual oversight of the entire clan (Gen. 18:19; cf. 22:9; 26:25; 35:1).

Sadly, the only aspect of the birthright that absorbed Esau's thinking was the double-portion (cf. Gen. 27:31). He was a man of "the here and now" and attached no value to the eternal aspects of his inheritance. Note: "And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). It is interesting to observe that Scripture judges Esau's conduct—not Jacob's.<sup>5</sup> The word "despise" means to disesteem. It is elsewhere rendered disdain or condemn. Esau underestimated his heritage. It would have not only given him possession of Isaac's property, but it would have put him in the ancestral line of the Prom- ised Seed (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 17:1-8; Gal. 3:16).<sup>6</sup> Commenting on this occasion, the Hebrew writer said, "Lest there be any fornicator or **profane person like Esau**, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright" (Heb. 12:16—emp. added). To "profane" something is to make that which is sacred common or temporal. This is exactly what Esau did; he sold his hallowed birthright for a simple bowl of red soup.

"How foolish," you might say. How foolish, indeed. But how

many of us are guilty of quite the same thing today?

- How many of us trade time with our wives and children for our vocation? We exchange our eternal lineage (cf. Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1; 2 Tim. 1:5) for temporal wealth and prestige.
- How many of us trade a thorough study of the Sacred Word for hours of watching television?
- How many of us trade Sunday evening communion with the Sovereign God of the universe for a football game (i.e., the Super Bowl) on Sunday night? (Ironically, some "shepherds" of the local flock even move or cancel worship services for such an event!) Shades of Esau!
- How many of us trade Lord's Day morning worship for late-night activities Saturday evening?
- How many of us change entertainment and recreation for the opportunity and privilege of serving needy saints?
- How many of us trade involvement in secular service organizations (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.) for the honor of teaching a Bible class in our home congregation?
- How many of us trade the blessing of a generous contribution for excessive credit card debt?

Beloved, we—like Esau—have a birthright (Rom. 8:16-17; Heb. 12:23). And when we fail to live up to its demands and privileges, we forfeit the inheritance our Father wants to bestow upon us (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).

Esau paid far too much for the soup of the day. What about YOU, dear child of God? Will you cherish your right of the first, or will you despise it (Matt. 16:26)? Think about it.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Evidently he had eaten Jacob's soup before (v. 29).

<sup>2</sup>Lentils referred to the edible seeds from a plant pod.

<sup>3</sup>An oath was a promise made with a solemn appeal to God to render judgment in the event the promise was not accomplished.

<sup>4</sup>Exception—1 Chron. 5:1-2.

<sup>5</sup>Jacob had the right goal, but not the right method. He tried to "help" God (v. 23) along by his own actions.

<sup>6</sup>Note: "Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob . . ." (not Esau—Matt. 1:2).

# THE CREATION “DAYS”—LITERAL OR FIGURATIVE?

Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California

Dr. George Wald of Harvard University was a militant proponent of the theory of evolution. He was, though, at least honest enough to admit that the theory was fraught with some very serious difficulties. These problems, however, in Wald's view, were not insurmountable.

He solved some of the “impossibilities” by appealing to “time.” Time itself, he said, “performs the miracles.” He characterized time as the “hero” of the evolutionary plot (p. 48).

Similarly, Robert Jastrow, an agnostic, and one of the most popular science writers of this era, has appealed to “time” as a means of explaining the theory of evolution. Jastrow wrote: “The key to Darwin's explanation is time, and the passage of many generations” (p. 112).

## The “Time” Motive

But why is “time” such a vital element in the evolutionary scheme of things? The answer is quite simple. There is no evidence, based upon scientific data, which proves that all living creatures have evolved from primitive inorganic substances by means of natural processes.

Dr. Jastrow concedes the point. “What concrete evidence supports that remarkable [evolutionary] theory of the origin of life? There is none” (p. 49). The solution to this riddle is to suggest that evolution occurs much too slowly to be observed by humans; it has progressed over vast eras of time. We are thus told that we must accept the theory “as an act of faith . . . without having concrete evidence to support that belief” (Jastrow, p. 52). And so, we are constantly bombarded with propaganda about the vast ages that are supposed to characterize the universe.

According to evolutionary chronology, the universe came into being (as a result of the Big Bang explosion) some 15-20 billion years ago. Our earth is said to have been born approximately 4.5 billion years ago. It is alleged that biological life was spontaneously generated about 2-3 billion years ago, and finally, Homo sapiens (true man) appeared about 3 1/2 million years back in the past. These figures are glibly thrown out as if there were some sort of ancient history book that records the dates. The fact of the matter is, there is no proof that these enormous figures have any validity at all (see Jackson, 1989).

Unfortunately, however, many have been intimidated by this aspect of evolutionary dogma. They have sought, therefore, in various ways, to accommodate the biblical record to this system of chronology. One of the methods of doing this is to suggest that

the “days” of the creation week are not literal days at all. Rather, the term “day” is a mere figure of speech which represents millions of years.

## The Popularity of the Day-Age Theory

The Day-Age Theory has made its impact in the community of Christendom at large, and its effect is apparent within the churches of Christ as well. In the denominational world Hugh Ross, a sectarian scientist-theologian of sorts, contends vigorously for the day-age concept, employing the same hackneyed arguments that have been answered scores of times across the years (Ross, pp. 45ff). It is sad that some within the brotherhood of Christ are giving favorable reviews of Ross' writings.

Within the church, the day-age view has had a number of defenders and sympathizers.

1. Jack Wood Sears, former chairman of the biology department at Harding University, has argued this position (see Thompson, p. 129).
2. John Willis, a professor at Abilene Christian University, speculated that the “days” of Genesis 1 could have been simply six points of argument—“literary devices”—in the author's outline of the creation events, with no chronological order or duration intended (p. 83).
3. Burton Coffman contended that the Day-Age Theory does no injustice to the sacred record (pp. 29-31).
4. Clem Thurman, editor of *Gospel Minutes*, wrote an article (April 4, 1986) responding to a reader's question as to whether the “days” of Genesis 1 were literal or not. Thurman used eighty-four words to present possible reasons as to why the “days” might be viewed as literal. He used three times that amount arguing that the creation “days” might not be literal. He then suggested that the reader could draw his own conclusions as to the “correct” viewpoint. It was not difficult, however, to surmise where the editor's sympathies lay. In reviewing this matter, one writer poignantly inquired: “Why not just be honest and openly advocate the day-age theory without going through all these machinations?” (Thompson, p. 130).
5. John N. Clayton of Southbend, Indiana, has long preached that it is “totally inconsequential” as to the view one entertains relative to the length of the creation days, and so he can argue the case both ways—and does (see Jackson & Thompson, pp. 83ff). In an issue of *The Christian Chronicle* awhile back, the editor opined that we just cannot “be

sure” as to the meaning of “day” in Genesis 1 (Shipp, p. 2).

It is quite unfortunate that these brothers have taken this compromising view of the clear text of Genesis 1. As well-meaning as they may be—in attempting to bring the Bible into harmony with what they perceive as good “science”—clearly, they have yielded to the influence of evolutionary chronology. And such capitulation is absolutely wrong.

## Biblical Arguments for Literal Days

There are powerful arguments which absolutely force the knowledgeable Bible student to the position that the days of the creation week were ordinary days.

1. A general rule of Bible interpretation demands that words be viewed literally unless there is a compelling reason for giving them a figurative sense. The term “day” is employed in Genesis 1 both of a twenty-four hour period (vv. 5,8,13, etc.) and of the “light” portion of that span (v. 5). Obviously the word was used by Moses in precisely the same way we use it today.  
It is ludicrous to contend that there is anything within that context which would suggest a “day” consisting of millions of years. Marcus Dods, not a conservative scholar, conceded: “If . . . the word ‘day’ in these chapters does not mean a period of twenty-four hours, the interpretation of Scripture is hopeless” (p. 5).
2. The expressions “first day,” “second day,” etc. (vv. 5,8) indicate ordinary days, just as similar language does regarding the rotation of offerings on certain days under the Mosaic economy [e.g., “first day,” “second day,” etc. (see Num. 7:12,18)]. Would any ever conclude that the “days” of Numbers 7 represented eons of time? Of course not. There is no motive to manipulate that context!
3. The days of the creation-week were of the same type as the ordinary Hebrew work-week. Note: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto Jehovah thy God . . . for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is . . .” (Ex. 20:11).

Notice the comparison between the “six days” of the Jewish work-week and the “six days” of the creation-week. Is anyone so obtuse as to believe that the Hebrew work-week consisted of six ages consisting of millions of years? Did Moses really mean to say: “Remember the

Sabbath age to keep it holy . . . for in six eons Jehovah made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is”?

4. The inspired writer clearly distinguished between “days” and “years” in Genesis 1:14. It is quite obvious that Moses was not employing the term “day” in some extraordinary sense. However, if the “days” of Genesis 1 signify years, then what does the term “years” mean?

### Common Sense Arguments for Literal Days

In addition to solid arguments based upon the biblical text, there are some plain, common-sense points that buttress the case for twenty-four hour days.

1. There are logical reasons to explain why we measure time in certain ways. For example, the earth revolves around the sun every 365 days. This determines our year. The moon circles the earth each thirty days. This marks the month. The earth completes one rotation on its axis each twenty-four hours, which constitutes our day.

The baffling question is: *why do we have weeks?* There is no astronomical phenomenon to explain this. Campbell observed that “nothing on earth or in heaven, can be assigned as an argument for the week, aside from the fact that the heavens and the earth were created in six days of twenty-four hours each” (p. 96). The fact is, the Hebrew word for week

means “that which is divided into seven” (Young, p. 78).

2. Each “day” of Genesis 1 was equally divided into periods of light and darkness. If the day represented millions of years, then there were obviously corresponding epochs of darkness. The vegetation which was brought into existence on the third day could never have survived those alternating periods of darkness.

Keil commented that “if the days of creation are regulated by the recurring interchange of light and darkness, they must not be regarded as periods of time of incalculable duration, of years or thousands of years, but simply as earthly days” (p. 51).

3. As indicated above, the world of plants came into existence on the third day of the creation week. Living creatures (e.g., fish, birds, insects, and animals were not created until the fifth and sixth days). Some plants are pollinated solely by insects. Clover is pollinated by bees and the Yucca plant has the Pronuba Moth as its only means of pollination. How did these plants reproduce during the millions of years of that alleged fourth day-age?

There is neither biblical basis nor scientific reason for contending that the creation days were vast ages. This view is merely a subtle compromise with evolution. We simply must not attempt to manipulate the plain meaning of the biblical text for the sake of placating unbelievers. “Science” has yet to catch up

with the Scriptures!

### Sources:

Campbell, Alexander (1958 Reprint), *Familiar Lectures on the Pentateuch* (Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club).

Coffman, Burton (1985), *Genesis* (Austin, TX: ACU Press).

Dods, Marcus (1903), “Genesis,” *An Exposition of the Bible* (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co.).

Jackson, Wayne (1989), *Creation, Evolution, and the Age of the Earth* (Stockton, CA: Courier Publications).

Jackson, Wayne & Thompson, Bert (1992), *In the Shadow of Darwin—A Review of the Teachings of John N. Clayton* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

Jastrow, Robert (1977), *Until The Sun Dies* (New York: Warner).

Keil, C.F. (1980 Reprint), *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

Ross, Hugh (1994), *Creation And Time* (Colorado Springs: Navpress).

Shipp, Glover (1994), *The Christian Chronicle*, December.

Thompson, Bert (1995), *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

Wald, George (1954), *Scientific American*, August.

Willis, John (1979), *Genesis* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Co.).

Young, E.J. (1964), *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed). WOT

## IF CHURCHES OF CHRIST ARE WRONG

*Dave Miller, Montgomery, Alabama*

Churches of Christ have been ridiculed and browbeaten for the stance they take on a variety of biblical doctrines. They have been berated for their insistence that the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God is displeasing to Him. They have been accused of teaching that they are the one true church and “the only ones going to heaven.” They have been distinguished from the denominational world by their view that the Lord’s Supper must be observed every first day of the week, that women are not to function as leaders in worship, and that denominationalism is sinful. It often seems as though much of the religious world, while disagreeing with one another in their theology, nevertheless find unity in their common disdain for and opposition to churches of Christ.

One prominent viewpoint held by churches of Christ that places them in opposition with practically the whole of Christendom is the essentiality of water baptism for salvation. They maintain that the Bible teaches that in order for the alien sinner to contact the blood of Christ in order to receive forgiveness for sin, he or she must **obey the gospel** (Rom. 1:16; 2:8,16; 2 Thess. 1:8). Obedience to the gospel consists of hearing the gospel message of

salvation, believing it and believing in Jesus as the One who saves, repenting of past sins, confessing belief in the person/deity of Christ, and being immersed in water for the remission of sins (Rom. 10:9-10,17; Jn. 8:24; Mk. 16:16; Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Due to the inclusion of water immersion as prerequisite to the forgiveness of sins, churches of Christ have been demonized and vilified as teaching “works” salvation, and thus denying that the blood of Jesus is the cleansing agent in salvation from sin. In fact, many denominationalists have pronounced condemnation upon churches of Christ for their teaching on this point, even insisting that those who submit to water baptism as an act of obedience prerequisite to salvation, and those who so teach, are doomed and condemned to hell. Consider, for example, the following forcefully stated contention:

The religious sect known as the “Church of Christ” has many peculiar and aterrant doctrines that are contrary to the Word of God. It is a most deceptive and dangerous **cult**. Their teaching of baptismal regeneration is an age-old heresy that has **damned millions to hell, and is still doing**

*so today*. The idea that they are the one, true, and restored church of Jesus Christ puts them in the same league with the Mormon and Roman Catholic churches.

If you are a member of this “church” or have been influenced by its teachings, we challenge you to ask your preacher the questions that follow, then get your King James Bible out, open it up, and ask the Holy Spirit to **show you the TRUTH** (John 16:13). If you have **never been saved in the Bible sense**, for heaven’s sake, do not mistake being “washed in the baptism of the church” for being **washed in the blood of Christ** (Martin, 2003, emp. in orig.; emp. and ital. added).

But wait a minute! Churches of Christ teach that faith in Christ precedes baptism. Consequently, churches of Christ believe and practice that an alien sinner must believe in Jesus before he or she is baptized. To put it in the extra-biblical words of the denominational world, churches of Christ believe that a person must “accept Jesus Christ as Savior” **before being baptized**. In fact, churches of Christ believe that the person must **confess** that faith in Christ—in like fashion with the Ethiopian

eunuch who, in the King James Bible, is recorded to have verbalized: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). So from the perspective of the denominational world—and by their own admission—members of churches of Christ were saved when they "believed in Jesus."

But much of the denominational world teaches that once a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior, he or she cannot fall from grace. This viewpoint is standard Calvinistic theology that unfortunately has been deeply embedded in Christendom for over five centuries. Hence, if a person has faith in Christ, and receives Him as Lord and Savior, that person is instantaneously saved and forgiven of all past sin, and from that moment forward cannot lose his salvation—he cannot so sin that he will be ultimately lost; he "will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere to the end" (Leith, 1963, p. 342).

So if the denominations are correct, it necessarily follows that members of churches of Christ were saved when they believed in Jesus. **They, therefore, cannot fall from grace—though they believe and teach that water baptism precedes forgiveness!** If churches of Christ are shown to be wrong in their position on water baptism on the Day of Judgment, the Lord may verbally reprimand them for their misconception, but He will not condemn them to hell—since they accepted Him as personal Savior while on Earth. If, on the other hand, churches of Christ are correct in their grasp of Bible teaching; if, in fact, Jesus Himself requires people to submit to water immersion as an act of obedient faith that precedes salvation (Jn. 3:5; Matt. 28:19); if He expects people to study the New Testament sufficiently to conclude that one must **understand** the essentiality of water immersion before He can or will bestow

forgiveness by His blood, what will be the status of those who fail to do so? To reword the question in the words of Peter: "What will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17). Paul gave the answer when he wrote of a time "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" (2 Thess. 1:8, emp. added).

#### Sources:

Leith, John, ed. (1963), *Creeds of the Churches* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books).

Martin, David (2003), "Common Sense Questions A 'Church of Christ' Preacher Cannot Clearly Answer," [On-line], URL: <http://www.solidrockbaptist.net/index2.html>

WOT

## THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Mark Lindley, Ripley, Mississippi

Does man possess a conscience, an innate sense of right and wrong that directs his decisions? If he does, what is the origin of this sense of moral obligation? Did it come from rocks and dirt as evolutionists propose, or is there a more adequate explanation? I am persuaded that a more plausible explanation is that an eternal, all-powerful, and all-knowing Creator is responsible for man's conscience.

The Moral Argument, as it is sometimes called, is powerful in establishing the existence of God. It cannot be successfully denied that man, universally, has a sense of moral obligation. Men of every generation and civilization have had some sense of fairness and justice. Even an atheist who denies the existence of God has a sense of moral obligation. An atheist may deny this, but if his wife and children were brutally murdered he would feel that a real moral wrong had been committed. But why would he? Where did he get this sense of fairness? The truth is, it originated with God.

The argument for the existence of God based upon man's morality is as follows: (1) If at least one human being has a sense of moral obligation that cannot be explained except on the basis of God, then God exists. (2) There is at least one human being who has a sense of moral obligation that cannot be explained except on the basis of God. (3) Therefore, God exists.

A fundamental law of science is that for every effect there must be an adequate cause. What caused man's conscience? Did it come through the process of evolution? Evolutionists insist that man is simply matter in motion. If this is true, one might as well make a moral appeal to a rock as to make one to man. Are rocks and dirt the source of

man's sense of moral obligation? Is it reasonable to believe that dead matter operated on itself so as to produce man's capacity to feel a sense of justice and guilt? Do rocks and dirt have an innate sense of moral obligation? The answer to all these questions is no!

Furthermore, *only man* has this sense of moral obligation. Scripture declares: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen.1:27). Paul affirmed that "we are the offspring of God" (Acts 17:29). If there is a God and He created man in His own image, then we should expect man to be unique, different from all other creatures, and that is exactly what we find. Man possesses a sense of "ought" that other creatures do not have. For example, if in a rodeo a mad bull tramples and gores a cowboy to death, the bull is not arrested, tried, and condemned to the electric chair. It is understood that the bull is not morally responsible. But if one man murders another man, we hold him responsible for his actions. We do so because it is understood that man lives on a higher moral plane than animals. A dog does not feel guilty for stealing a bone from another dog, but if one man steals from another, his conscience, if trained properly, will cause him discomfort. Why does man have this sense of moral obligation but other creatures do not? The only logical answer is that God gave this innate sense of moral obligation.

However, skeptics object that all cultures do not live by the same moral codes. They argue that differences in what is viewed as right and wrong prove that man's morality is not from God. According to their position, if man's sense of moral obligation were from

God, all men everywhere would have the same views of right and wrong. But this objection misses the point. While there may be differences from culture to culture in what is viewed as right and wrong, *all men feel that there is a standard*. They feel an obligation to do what they believe is right, and when they do what is believed to be wrong they feel guilt.

A case in point is Saul of Tarsus. Before he was converted, Saul was a fierce persecutor of the church (Acts 8:3). The Scriptures make it clear that Saul was very sincere while persecuting the church—he thought he was doing the right thing (Acts 26:9). When he learned he was wrong, he changed; he repented of the wrong he had done. The point is this: even though Saul was wrong for persecuting the church, *he thought he was doing what was right*. His conscience (being improperly educated) commended him. Later, Saul learned the truth and then (his conscience being properly educated) he changed. Saul's conscience functioned, even when it was misinformed. Why? Where did he get such a conscience? From rocks and dirt? No! It came from God!

Evolutionists cannot adequately explain why men have a sense of morality while animals do not. They are faced with the dilemma of how a sense of right and wrong came from rocks and dirt through the process of evolution. For those who believe the Bible, however, the answer is clear: Man's conscience came from God, and this sense of moral obligation separates man from all other creatures. Evolution says that man is a little higher than the apes, but God's Word says: "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor" (Psa. 8:5).

WOT

# COLOSSIANS 3:16—MORE THAN A VERSE TO USE AGAINST INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Daniel Rogers, Rising Fawn, Georgia

Often, in defending the Bible's clear teaching that instrumental music is not authorized in worship, we have cited Colossians 3:16 as a proof-text, and seldom have we truly studied this magnificent verse in its context and mined its true riches. This is unfortunate, because Paul's admonition regarding singing contains much more than the authority to sing, unaccompanied by instruments, in worship. To be sure, such an argument is warranted by the text of this verse, but there is much more inherent in its content.

To begin a proper study of any verse, we must first notice its context. In Colossians 3, Paul began a series of admonitions based on the theme of exalting Christ by living in a way that is fitting for one who has been "raised together with Christ" (v. 1). In verses 5-11, Paul centers on things which the Christian is to "put to death," and cites specific examples of sins that characterized the Colossians before they became Christians. Beginning in verse 12, Paul discussed things the Christian is to "put on." In verses 12 through 14, he listed a number of dispositions which the Christian is to possess, summed up and superseded by love (v. 14). In verse 15 Paul mentions the first of a pair of things that are to govern the actions of a Christian: the peace of Christ, and it is to rule, or literally, to act as an umpire or arbiter, in our hearts. It is this peace to which we are called to be members of Christ's one body. This seems to indicate several things: first, that in the occasion of a conflict, that which is in keeping with the peace of Christ should be chosen, and second, that this peace extends to our relationship within the body of Christ, the church. Paul then added the admonition to be thankful. The peace of Christ affords the Christian much for which to be thankful, and thus Paul reminded the Colossians to be thankful for this peace and the blessings it brings.

Then, in verse 16, Paul said that the "word of Christ" is to dwell in the Christian. Kenneth Wuest has made the following observation regarding this phrase:

"The word of Christ" is the word spoken by Christ. This expression is not limited to His utterances while on earth in His humiliation, but refers to the entire body of truth as given through the N.T. writers. "Dwell in" is *enoikeo*. The word *oikos* means "a home." *Oikeo* means "to

live in a home." The exhortation is to the effect that the Christian is to so yield himself to the Word that there is a certain at-homeness of the Word in his being. The Word should be able to feel at home in his heart. The saint should give it unrestricted liberty in his life.

It is interesting to note that the word *enoikeito* is in the present tense, active voice, and imperative mood—Paul is issuing a command that the Word of Christ is to "dwell" in Christians continually (present tense), and actively (it is to be practiced). The word "let" must be inserted into our English versions to accommodate our idiom, but in the original, Paul says, "The word of Christ dwell in you . . ." This is an example of the third-person imperative, which is possible in the Greek language, but in English we have no direct equivalent. We might say, "may the Word of Christ dwell in you," but even this does not carry the full weight of the imperative, as it is more hortatory or permissive than imperative. The overlying principle of this admonition seems to be, as Paul succinctly stated it in verse 17, that the Word of Christ is to so characterize the lifestyle of the Christian that all he says and does is guided by its precepts and authority. The authority and guidance of the Scriptures is fundamental to any teaching of the Bible, and especially to this verse. It is no wonder then, that we have traditionally pointed to this verse (correctly) when dealing with an issue of authority such as the use of instruments of music in worship, because neatly compacted into this powerful little phrase is a rock-solid argument for the place and authority of the Scriptures in the life of the Christian. It is also interesting to notice the adverb by which the apostle qualified the dwelling of the Word in the Christian: "richly." Another rendering of the Greek word *plousios* here could be "abundantly." One of the amazing themes of Scripture is the abundance with which God provides His children. Throughout the Bible, we find God giving to his faithful in such quantity that there is "abundance" (Matt. 13:12), or "leftovers" (Matt. 15:37), or "overflowing" (Isa. 66:12). But notice that the command is directed to Christians ("in you")—thus it is the responsibility of the individual to see that the Word is able to dwell in him abundantly. Such a command implies the necessity of studying the Word,

comprehending it, and living it out in everyday practice.

Paul followed up the command to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . ." with the prepositional phrase, "in all wisdom." There has been, historically, some dispute among scholars as to whether the phrase goes with the preceding command or the following one. Frankly, as far as the Greek goes, either construction would seem to make sense. Further, as far as biblical teaching goes, either construction would also make sense. For example, if Paul (and the Holy Spirit, since Paul was inspired to write these words) meant, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," such would be fitting. In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul admonished Timothy to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Certainly a certain amount of wisdom would be implied in such a command, and if Paul had such an idea in mind in Colossians 3:16, it would fit quite well. On the other hand, if "in all wisdom" goes with the following command, it would fit equally well. For example, if Paul meant "in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs . . .", he would be in complete harmony with James, who prescribes caution in teaching (Jam. 3:1), and with his own instruction to Titus that the older men and women are to be "temperate, grave, sober-minded, etc." (certainly these are components of wisdom) in their demeanor as they teach the younger men and women. Paul had pointed to Christ as the source of wisdom earlier in the Colossian epistle (2:2-3), and whether he was saying here that the Word of Christ is the source of wisdom, or that the wisdom gained from the Word of Christ is to be implemented in the application of teaching and admonishing in song, is unclear. It may be that both ideas were extant in the inspired phrase. In any case, we have demonstrated that both applications are supported linguistically and scripturally, and thus we would do well both to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom," and "in all wisdom [to] teach and admonish one another . . ."

We then move to the particular application of this command: "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with

grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Notice first that the direction of our singing is twofold: we are singing “to the Lord,” and yet we are “teaching and admonishing one another” with the same songs. There is a wonderful duality in service to God that exhibits itself both in pleasing the Creator, and in doing good to our fellow man. Indeed, the two cannot be separated in practice; for, according to John, to love God and hate one’s brethren is impossible (1 Jn. 4:20). Thus, as we sing in worship to God, we are both teaching and admonishing our brethren, and receiving teaching and admonition from them. This particular aspect of our responsibility to sing carries with it some rather thought-provoking responsibilities: if we are teaching and admonishing, then we are individually responsible for the act itself, as well as the demeanor in which we perform it, and for the content of our teaching. Remember that Jesus commanded His disciples to be about the business of teaching (Matt. 28:18-20), and thus, in singing, we are partially fulfilling that command. But we are also responsible for the demeanor in which we do this teaching. Paul commanded those who would restore a lost brother to do so “. . . in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). This instruction would imply that there is a certain kind of demeanor that should characterize our teaching: we should be energetic about it, because souls depend upon it (Jude 22-23), and we should be loving as we do it (Jam. 5:19-20), and we must also be cautious to ensure that we are only teaching the truth (Matt. 5:19). Now, if we are teaching and admonishing as we sing, we must do so energetically. Half-hearted singing will be no more effective in teaching and admonishing than would a mumbled sermon presented with an obvious spirit of apathy. We must be loving in our attitude as we sing: the axiom has often been quoted that people “don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The principle certainly applies to singing, as well as to all other methods of teaching and admonishing. We must also be careful to sing things that are in harmony with God’s will. It is no more permissible to teach false doctrine in song than it would be to preach it from the pulpit. I am particularly troubled with the lyrics of certain songs that appear in our songbooks. For example: some songs teach that we pray to Jesus, despite the fact that Jesus Himself clearly taught His disciples to pray to “Our Father which art in Heaven . . .” (Matt. 6:9). And some teach that “Jesus is coming soon,” or, “it won’t be very long,” in spite of the clear teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24:36 that “of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of

heaven, but my Father only.” And others teach that the Holy Spirit somehow guides our lives in a supernatural way, regardless of the Bible’s clear teaching that it is the Scriptures that are “given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Surely, if we are to adhere to Paul’s inspired command in 1 Corinthians 14:15 to “sing with the spirit, and . . . sing with the understanding also,” we must consider the words we are singing, and whether they are in harmony with divine teaching. Each Christian will be held accountable for that which he teaches, whether it be in conversation, or in song; we must be careful to sing only those things that are in keeping with the “word of Christ dwelling in you.”

Paul then went on to introduce the specific means by which we are to carry out this command: psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. **Psalms** clearly refers to the singing of the Psalms of the Old Testament, and would have been an integral part of the worship of early Christians. The Psalms had been the songs of praise of the Israelites, and following the introduction of Christ’s new covenant, they continued to be sung by Christians in praise to God. To argue that the Psalms were often sung in Old Testament times with instrumental accompaniment is to make a futile argument: the worship of God in Old Testament times also involved the sacrifice of animals, but with the coming of Christ’s church, those practices, along with the Law of Moses, were abolished. Hence, if we are to practice an act in worship today, we must do so with the permission of the New Law, and here we have such permission to sing psalms, but the authority for playing instruments along with the singing is nowhere to be found. **Hymns** are “songs with religious content, hymns/songs of praise especially in honor of a deity.” These seem to have been songs of praise that were not directly related to the Psalms of the Old Testament, but were, nevertheless, scriptural in content, and laudatory in thrust. Hymns may have been a favorite of the Gentile churches, since the Psalms, originally written as Hebrew poetry, would have been very cumbersome to translate into Greek as poetry, and even more so to sing, since the Greek language did not readily accommodate the Hebrew poetic style and meter. **Spiritual songs** are simply songs with spiritual content and message. These might include songs other than the Psalms and hymns, which are characterized by spiritual meaning and content.

At this point, Paul renamed the action of

which he was speaking by adding the word “singing.” Previously, he had referred to the action as “teaching and admonishing” (though singing was clearly the means by which this was to be accomplished, since psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are given as the means whereby this was to be accomplished). But here, he specifically identified the action he was commanding and added a qualification to it: “with grace in your hearts.” It is significant to note that the Greek word translated “singing” here is the verb, *ado*. There has been much discussion of Paul’s use of the word *psallo* in reference to singing in Ephesians 5:19, but there can be no mistaking his term here. *Ado* simply means, “to sing.” There is no reference whatsoever to any sort of instrumental connotation in this word. Thus by the law of exclusion, the apostle Paul commanded the Colossians to sing as a means of worship, teaching, and admonition; not to play instruments. He qualified the action of singing by the phrase “with grace in your hearts.” The word grace translates the Greek word *charis*, which can have a number of meanings. Here, it most likely refers to thankfulness or gratitude. As Paul had mentioned in verse 15, we are to be thankful to the Lord. This is to be expressed by our peace-characterized lifestyles, as well as by our Word-characterized singing. The object of our thanks and our singing is God. He has given us all manner of blessings, and therefore deserves our thanks and our praise in song. It is quite humbling to remember that our singing is to be directed to God, even though we are to benefit from the same songs. This ought to cause us to remember that the song service is not done for our own pleasure, but for that of God. As a result, there is no room for unauthorized innovations in the song service done simply because “I like it,” or “it is uplifting to me.” We are praising and serving God in our song service, and our focus is to be upon what He wants and has commanded. There is much more to singing than the simple act of edifying, though the singing may edify. Paul clearly pointed out that our focus and direction is to be upon worshipping God in our songs.

While we have been correct in using this passage to defend the practice of a *cappella* singing in worship, we should never be guilty of failing to study the truths it presents regarding all aspects of our song service and, indeed, even our lives. This powerful verse is full of helpful teaching on the authority, manner, and means of our worship to God in song. Let us never fail to give the inspired Record our full attention and study, as it is the vehicle through which we may obtain eternal life. WOT

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



[Editor's note: Below is a follow-up question from last month's Q&A. We again asked Matt Vega, an attorney in Memphis, to address the principles involved in this area of church organization.]

**Question:** I read an article in your November 2003 issue of *The Words of Truth* (Questions and Answers). I was wondering if I could ask [additional] questions . . . on the subject. I have heard of congregations . . . creating bylaws. I have always thought that the Lord's church did not need bylaws since we have the Bible as our only guide and source of authority. Churches that do this said they needed bylaws to incorporate and acquire a loan, etc. Three questions:

1. Is it common for churches of Christ to have bylaws?
2. Do you think that it is adding to the Bible?
3. Do you think the church should support this?

**Answer:** 1. *Is it common for churches of Christ to have bylaws?*

I made some brief (not exhaustive) inquiries and found that it is common for churches of Christ to file articles of incorporation and adopt bylaws patterned after their state. To establish the structure of the corporation to the extent that it will stand up to criteria tests of the courts, the law, and the Internal Revenue Service, a corporation does need to adopt bylaws. However, corporate bylaws are not filed with the state—they are kept in the church's minute book and do not need to be very complicated.

2. *Do you think it is adding to the Bible?* Not if done properly. Bylaws should not be used to add or take away from the Word as the church's sole authority in matters of doctrine. In fact, bylaws should expressly reaffirm that fundamental principle. With that said, bylaws are generally limited to non-doctrinal matters related to managing the corporation. The spiritual principles of stewardship and shepherding require careful forethought and planning on the part of church leaders, and there is nothing unscriptural about memorializing those efforts in the church minutes as "bylaws" so long as their judgment in such matters of expediency is consistent with the principles and precepts of the Scriptures. Bylaws cannot be lawfully changed except by a majority

vote of the board of directors. Since the board should consist solely of the elders, however, this should not pose a problem.

3. *Do you think the church should support this?* For the foregoing reasons I know of no Scriptural reason for being divisive over this issue. So long as the bylaws are carefully drafted to allow the Bible to be used as the sole guide in matters of doctrine, I would place bylaws into the same category as church bulletins, announcements, and even religious periodicals, all of which ensure things are "done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40) and "with one mind" (Phil. 1:27).

*Due to the general nature of its contents, this article is not and should not be regarded as legal advice.*

—Matt Vega, Collierville, Tennessee

**Question:** Would you please discuss 1 Corinthians 15:29?

**Answer:** In the midst of the most extensive discussion of the doctrine of the resurrection recorded in a singular, biblical context, Paul makes an extremely enigmatic statement as part of his defense of its reality. 1 Corinthians 15:29 says, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" The quandary may be compounded in light of the practice of modern false religions and cults, such as the Mormons, who baptize for the dead (John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1999, p. 285). If they baptized for the dead then and some do today, is it sanctioned by God? Does that practice help us understand 1 Peter 3:18-21, where Peter says Jesus "preached unto the spirits in prison"?

Apparently, the early church fathers did not think so. Didymus the Blind, in his *Pauline Commentary From The Greek Church*, wrote, "The Marcionites baptize the living on behalf of dead unbelievers, not knowing that baptism saves only the person who receives it" (Thomas C. Oden, Ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, Vol. 7, 1-2 Corinthians. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999, p. 166). The New Testament teaches that baptism is to be obeyed by one capable of possessing active faith (Mk. 16:16), responding with a change of mind, i.e., repentance (Acts 2:38), orally confessing Jesus (Rom. 10:10), submitting to the act of baptism to be saved (1 Pet. 3:21; incidentally, the context seems clearly to teach that Jesus taught to those disobedient in Noah's day through Noah's preaching and not by a personal appearance to lost souls in the Hadean world. The latter idea is absurd and unbiblical.) and possessing the ability to rise and "walk" thereafter (Rom. 6:4). All of this necessarily implies that the subject of baptism can only apply to the living. The dead can do none of these things.

So, to what did Paul make reference in 1

Corinthians 15:29? Johnny Ramsey gives the following possibilities: (1) a reference to the baptism of suffering; (2) those baptized to replace martyred saints; (3) those baptized out of respect of dead, Christian loved ones, and, as he believes; (4) "if we did not believe he was raised from the dead there would be no purpose in such action. Why should we prepare for death by doing God's will if Christ be not raised . . .?" (Wendell Winkler, Ed. *Difficult Texts of the New Testament Explained*. Montgomery, AL: Winkler Pub., 1981, pp. 282-284.). This certainly may be, though Paul might simply have been referencing a false practice to show that even such demonstrates a common conviction in the fact of the future resurrection of the dead. "They" baptize for the dead, but "we" stand in hourly jeopardy (cf. 15:30).

Whichever of these or other hypotheses one may accept, it is false and futile to believe that being baptized by proxy for a dead, lost person is efficacious. When one dies, he or she will then face a certain judgment (Heb. 9:27; 10:29; etc.). Each person will be judged according to the deeds he or she, as an individual, did while in the body (2 Cor. 5:10). The most straightforward possibility, it seems, is that Paul, taking an absurd practice of his day, proved the resurrection through even that.

### Additional resources:

J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton. *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light, nd. pp. 152-153. McGarvey holds the third view cited by Ramsey.

W. Robertson Nicoll. *The Expositor's Greek Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974. pp. 930-931. Nicoll also believes something akin to the third possibility suggested by Ramsey.

Guy N. Woods. *Questions and Answers: Open Forum (Vol. 1)*. Henderson: Freed-Hardeman College, 1976. pp. 115-118. Woods ascribed to the view that Paul references the import of baptism, re-enactment of Christ's burial and resurrection, as proof of the resurrection of the body.

—Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, Virginia

[Editor's note: In addition to Neal's excellent discussion above, you might consult Wayne Jackson's well-written article at <http://www.christiancourier.com/archives/deadBaptism.htm> for further study.]

  
 email  
 your questions to...  
 sixthavenue@tds.net

# THE PROPHECY OF CYRUS

*Eric Lyons, Montgomery, Alabama*

Imagine taking a trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and visiting the State House where the Constitutional Convention took place in 1787. During the tour, your guide points to a document dating back to just this side of the Convention—about the year 1820. The piece of parchment tells of a man named George W. Bush from Austin, Texas, who would be President of the United States within the next 200 years. But how could someone know that a man named George W. Bush would be born in the United States? And how could someone know more than a century before Mr. Bush ever was born that he would be President of the United States? Furthermore, how could someone in 1820 know that a man from Texas (named George W. Bush) would be President of the United States when Texas wasn't even part of the Union yet? Such a prophecy truly would be amazing! Yet, obviously no such prediction was ever made. In fact, despite all of the publicity that "psychic hotlines" are getting these days, only God can foretell the future.

One of the reasons we can **know** the Bible is from God is that it contains hundreds of prophecies about individuals, lands, and nations similar to the example above. One such prophecy was about a man named Cyrus and two nations: Babylon and the Medo-Persian Empire. Isaiah vividly described how God would destroy the powerful kingdom of Babylon, "the glory of kingdoms" (13:19). Writing as if it had already occurred (commonly known as the "prophetic perfect," frequently employed in the Old Testament to stress the absolute certainty of fulfillment, i.e., Isa. 53), Isaiah declared Babylon would fall (21:9). He then prophesied that Babylon would fall to the Medes and Persians (Isa. 13; 21:1-10). Later, he proclaimed that the "golden city" (Babylon) would be conquered by a man named Cyrus (44:28; 45:1-7). This is a remarkable prophecy, especially since Cyrus was not even born until almost 150 years after Isaiah penned these words.

Not only did Isaiah predict that Cyrus would overthrow Babylon, but he also wrote that Cyrus, serving as Jehovah's "anointed" and "shepherd," would release the Jews from captivity and assist them in their return to Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding the temple. All of this was written almost two hundred years before Cyrus conquered Babylon (539 B.C.). Amazing!

In case you're wondering about the factuality of this story, secular history verifies that all of these events came true. There really was a man named Cyrus who ruled the Medo-Persian Empire. He did conquer Babylon. And just as Isaiah prophesied, he assisted the Jews in their return to Jerusalem and in the rebuilding of the temple.

Truly, "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). *WOT*

## **The Words of Truth**

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

**Address Service Requested**

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) in electronic form (e-mail or on disk or CD).

Please send all correspondence to:

## **The Words of Truth**

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ  
1501 6th Avenue  
Jasper, AL 35501  
Phone: (205) 384-6446  
Fax: (205) 302-0595  
E-mail: sixthavenue@tds.net

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Jasper, AL  
Permit No. 411