

MEL GIBSON'S "THE PASSION": THE FILM, THE FIGHT, AND THE FACTS

Todd Clippard, Hamilton, Alabama

Mel Gibson will soon release "The Passion of the Christ," a film he co-wrote, directed, and invested \$25 million of his own money to produce. The film depicts the final hours of the life of Jesus Christ. The Passion is said to be the most realistic production of the death of Jesus Christ ever produced. To add to the authenticity, the movie is in Latin and Aramaic.

As one might expect with a film of this nature, there is a firestorm of controversy surrounding the film. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a group which seeks to stamp out any negative references to Jews, is up-in-arms over the film. A visit to their website (www.adl.org) reveals a number of articles on the front page decrying Gibson's film as antisemitic (anti-Jew) and anti-Catholic. Now before putting stock in what the ADL has to say about the film, one should understand their view of the gospels. According to Jewish "scholars," the gospels are neither "fully historically accurate nor consistent."¹ According to the ADL, "The film unambiguously portrays Jewish authorities and the Jewish mob as the ones responsible for the decision to crucify Jesus."² In the eyes of the ADL, any attempt to tell the truth about Jews is defamatory in nature.

Additionally, many in the Catholic Church are also speaking out against the film. "Sister" Mary C. Boys, professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, condemned the film on the basis that it "heightened the role of the Jews in the Crucifixion," adding, "the Jewish mob is shown as a huge blood-thirsty, vengeful group."³ Paula Fredriksen, another Catholic "theologian" and professor at Boston University, condemned the film as being inconsistent with the "Catholic Church's current teaching" concerning the crucifixion. Allow me to explain. In 1965, in an edict known as *Vatican II*, the Catholic popes (beginning with Pope John XXIII and ending with Pope Paul VI) declared that the Jews were not responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Apparently, these men knew more than the inspired apostle Peter,

who, on the first Pentecost after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, said to his audience, "Ye men of Judaea (i.e., **Jews**) . . . Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonder and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:14, 22-23). Not long afterward, Peter said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel (i.e., **Jews**) know that God hath made this same Jesus, **whom ye crucified**, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Fredriksen condemned Gibson's directorial comments, indicating the crowd at Jesus' trial "was frenzied with blood lust [as] it screamed for his death." Seems to me I remember reading somewhere of a huge crowd of Jews screaming "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" and "His blood be on us and on our children!" Oh yes, now I remember, it was in **the Bible** (Lk. 23:21; Matt. 27:25). Fredriksen continued, "That's a Jewish crowd, and that's not in the gospels."⁴ What in the world has this woman been reading?! It certainly hasn't been the Bible!

Ultimately, all men are guilty of the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus died to save us from our sins (Matt. 20:28; 1 Jn. 2:1-2). As a sinner (Rom. 3:23; 6:23), I must accept the fact that my sins were responsible in part for His death. I mourn the fact that Jesus had to die, but rejoice in the truth that He did so out of his great love for me (Gal. 2:20).

Endnotes

¹"Gospel, or Mel Gibson movie?", *The Birmingham News*, August 22, 2003, 6H.

²"ADL Concerned Mel Gibson's 'Passion' Could Fuel Anti-Semitism if Released in Present Form," Press release, August 11, 2003, http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS_12/4291_12.htm.

³"Gospel."

⁴Ibid.

DEAD OR ALIVE?

Chuck Webster, Editorial

“The Viet Nam Veteran’s Memorial is striking for its simplicity. Etched in a black granite wall are the names of 58,156 Americans who died in that war. Since its opening in 1982, the stark monument has stirred deep emotions. Some visitors walk its length slowly, reverently, and without pause. Others stop before certain names, remembering their son or sweetheart or fellow soldier, wiping away tears, tracing the names with their fingers. For three Viet Nam veterans—Robert Bedker, Willard Craig, and Darrall Lausch—a visit to the memorial must be especially poignant, for they can walk up to the long ebony wall and find their own names carved in the stone. Because of data-coding errors, each of them was incorrectly listed as killed in action” (*Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching*, ed. Craig Larson, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993, p. 47). *Dead, but alive* . . . isn’t that a perfect description of the Christian?

Before we became Christians, we lived self-satisfying lives. We did whatever pleased us—whatever fulfilled our needs. Our recreation, our jobs, our spare time—everything we did—was centered around *self*. But then one day we died. One day the gospel touched our hearts and we keeled over . . . as we submitted in obedience to the good news of Christ. Paul writes that when we “were baptized into Jesus Christ,” our “old man” was “crucified” (Rom. 6:3-6). We put him to death, buried him in that watery grave, and came out of that tomb a new man. At that point we became **dead to self**. As a result, we are no longer living to please ourselves. We surrendered that freedom and are now willingly submitting ourselves as slaves to a new Master, Jesus Christ. Not slaves held against our will, but bond-servants who voluntarily surrender ourselves to lives of service. This means that when our will conflicts with our Master’s will, we do as He desires. This means that we have the attitude of Christ in the garden, as He prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup

pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). You might say we committed a kind of spiritual suicide . . . *dead to self, but alive to Christ*.

But another death is involved in the Christian life. Paul says that the old man is crucified so that “the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6). He continues by stating, “For he that is dead is freed from sin” (6:7). When we put on Christ we “died unto sin” (6:10). So not only must we be dead to self, but we must also be **dead to sin**. The apostle had just finished discussing the marvelous grace offered through Christ and how that although many “were made sinners” as a result of Adam’s sin, many shall be “made righteous” through Christ (Rom. 5:19). He stressed that the matchless grace of Christ could certainly overcome the effects of the sin of one man. Some of them might have responded to this discussion of grace by saying, “Well, we can just do whatever we want and let grace flow more freely! If grace is so wonderful and can cover every sin, why don’t we just give it many opportunities to work?” But, in order to correct this possible misunderstanding, he answers their question before they even ask it. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (6:1). Does the liberty we enjoy in Christ mean doing whatever we please? “God forbid. How shall we, *that are dead to sin*, live any longer therein?” (6:2). Having died to self, we must also die to a lifestyle of sin. As Christians we have turned our backs on the practice of sin, using our bodies as “instruments of righteousness unto God” (6:13). It certainly doesn’t mean we are perfect, but it demands that we walk in the light, repenting of and confessing our sins as there is the need (1 Jn. 1:7-10). *Dead to sin, but alive to righteousness*.

Once we submitted ourselves to a new Master (death to self) and changed the course of our lives (death to sin), we also put to death one big influencing

factor on our direction of life: the world. Christians are **dead to the world**. Paul writes: “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). In other words, we don’t let the world squeeze us into its mold. We don’t let it dictate how we act. We refuse to allow the world to tell us what we need to be happy, to be successful, to be self-confident. We “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 Jn. 2:15). Our lives are transformed by the renewing of our minds, which is accomplished by letting God’s Word, the “discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,” be *the* influencing factor in every decision we make (Heb. 4:12). We allow it to dictate the mate we choose. It serves as our “Marriage and the Family” guidebook. The Bible influences our career choice. It governs our work ethic. It guides us as we choose recreational activities. It is our acid test for all matters of right and wrong, whether moral, ethical, or spiritual. Our minds are completely renewed by what it teaches is acceptable, rather than by what the world holds up to be good or bad. In every aspect of our lives we allow a new set of values to be our guide. *Dead to the world, but alive to God’s Word*.

With all this talk of death, some people might think we are rather morbid people. But that couldn’t be farther from the truth, for we are alive and well in every important way. Concerning that which we serve, we are certainly *dead to self*, but we will *live forever* in our service to a new Master. Pertaining to our lifestyles, we are no doubt *dead to sin*, but we are full of a *living* righteousness through Christ. As touching our sphere of influence, we may be *dead to the world*, but our vibrant lives are guided by the *living* Word of God, which will stand forever . . . *Dead, but alive . . . the perfect description of the Christian.* WOT

AN OPEN LETTER OF APPRECIATION

Brandon Jackson, Jasper, Alabama

One responsibility I am grateful to bear is that of appreciation. Because I see good being done, I can feel the value of, or appreciate, what YOU do.

I want to use this opportunity to tell you how much what you do is appreciated! It must certainly seem like a thankless job . . . that what you do is never noticed . . . that no one truly sees the time and value of what you do. But though it may often go unsaid, we appreciate you, and we appreciate the work you do.

Are you active? Are you working for the Lord as a citizen in His kingdom? If so, then you have your reward. You will be blessed with a better life on earth and an eternal home in heaven. Isn't that enough? Yes, it is enough to keep going, to remain faithful, to stay active. Sometimes, though, we just want to be appreciated. We want someone to recognize a job well done and give us an "atta-boy." So, for all those who are hard at work, it is in the manner of Paul, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father" (1 Thess. 1:2-3). It is to you we offer this "Letter of Appreciation."

Elders

To our elders who have sacrificed their time and many nights rest in concern for our souls—we appreciate you. We feel the value of your efforts. We know the heavy weight of responsibility that falls upon your shoulders. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The diligence you pay to the Word of God does not go unnoticed. Your efforts to see that "all things are done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40) are watched and followed. As leaders in the congregation—examples of action, maturity, knowledge, and brotherly love—we appreciate you. You are our

elders, men we love and respect. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17).

Deacons

To the deacons who serve behind every congregation as our laborers in specific fields working to meet the needs of the congregation at large—we appreciate you. We see in the work of the deacon one who is willing to subject himself to service. In that service you make our work easier as members of the congregation. You take responsibility for servicing the buildings in which we meet or you serve to organize and order our work or visitation teams, or serve in a number of other ways. Ultimately, however, you help the elders in the completion of tasks, many of which we are unaware. And yet we feel the value of your work. We know the work is difficult to maintain, we understand the other responsibilities that also draw your attention, and we understand that often you work long nights or early morning. We appreciate you. "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13).

Preachers

To the preachers who stand before us to declare the Word of God, who reprove, rebuke, and exhort us week to week—we appreciate you. Your hours of study are of value not only to yourselves but to us as well: "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. 4:16). We know you labor over your words, the subjects chosen to preach, the illustrations used, the visits made, and the example lived. We appreciate you. We know sometimes it is said in passing through the doors but we mean it now . . . truly and deeply.

Teachers

To our teachers who throughout the week search for ways to effectively bring a lesson to life—we appreciate you. Your hard work may seem for nought, but in our homes we hear our children, the lessons learned from your lips, and realize the work you have done. We trust you with our children for a few hours each week, knowing that your work is but an extension of our own, and are constantly overwhelmed by the creativity, understanding, and love that they are shown. Our teachers are vitally important as each man and woman who serves makes up a part of our child's knowledge of God's Word. You are shaping the leaders of tomorrow, "holding fast the faithful word as he [an elder] hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9). We know you have your own family, a busy schedule, and work to do, so for your willingness to give our children some of your precious time, energy, and care, we appreciate you.

Fathers, Mothers, and Children

To every father and mother, and to every child who works for the kingdom of which we are all part—we appreciate you. Thank you for your conduct, courage, care, concern, and your commitment to making the congregation, the kingdom, and the world a place for Christianity to thrive. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). Though Paul speaks of those given these offices by inspiration, we appreciate all those who serve because of a desire that is fulfilled in the knowledge and application of the Word of God.

WOT

MISCARRIAGES—MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISREPRESENTED

Brad Harrub, Ph.D., Montgomery, Alabama

The call came when I was on my way out the door of our office to visit a coworker and his wife who were at the hospital delivering their second child. Hearing the voice of a dear friend on the other end of the line, I settled down into one of our secretary's chairs near the front door. In less than three minutes he turned my world upside down, forcing me on a long, hard, emotional roller coaster ride. He started out by telling me he had some good and bad news. The good news was that he and his dear wife had learned they were pregnant a couple of months ago. As I began to congratulate and tease him on what would be his third child, he quickly interrupted me and dropped the bombshell—his wife had just experienced a miscarriage.

As I sat there in free fall, I groped for the right things to say. There I was about to rejoice with a coworker who was having a baby in the hospital, and yet at the same time my best friend just revealed that he and his wife had lost one. As I inquired as to how he and his wife were doing, my friend went on with some of the details of the pregnancy. If this had occurred a couple of years earlier, my wife and I would have been on their doorsteps within minutes (literally)—even if all we did was sit in the floor and wipe away tears. A year earlier my wife and I had moved to Montgomery to join the work at Apologetics Press and, as such, our visits were now limited. During my tenure at the hospital, I watched many couples leave arm-in-arm, with tears blinding their path, as they made their way to the parking lot after realizing a pregnancy had been cut short. But this was the first time it hit so close to home.

A disturbing double standard

Within the medical community a miscarriage is known as a spontaneous abortion. While no one knows the exact statistics (especially considering many occur before a woman realizes she is pregnant), many suggest that one out of every two or three pregnancies end in miscarriage. Being the father of two young boys, I know firsthand the anxiety parents feel as they sit in a doctor's office, as the technician tries to locate a heartbeat. Those seconds drag by like hours until that familiar rapid whooshing sound is finally detected. For those who have experienced a miscarriage, the silence can be deafening as father and mother strain to detect a heartbeat. Consider those who have struggled for years to have children. They hear the thrilling news that they are pregnant. But before the paint dries on the nursery walls, their dreams are silenced.

Sadly, it occurs to me that we have a double standard of life that is encased within the womb. We dote on expectant mothers, showering them with compliments, praise, and attention. We talk openly about the life they are carrying, and ask if names have been picked out. But the second that life is cut

short, everything changes. The "standard operating procedure" in dealing with those who have experienced a miscarriage is often to leave them alone and give them lots of time and space to heal. The notion being that maybe if we don't make a "big deal" out of it, it will help in the healing process. But friends, it is a big deal! If we are going to argue (rightly) that life begins at conception, then we should not just whitewash individuals that experience this horrendous loss—this loss of a life. When James observed that "the body apart from the spirit is dead" (Jam. 2:26), the corollary must also be true in that **if the body is living, then the spirit must be present**. Since at each stage of its development the zygote/embryo/fetus is living, it must have had a soul/spirit instilled at conception. No other view is in accord with both the biblical and scientific evidence.

Consider what emphasis the Bible places on that unborn child. Job who was undergoing a terrible life crisis, cursed the day he was born when he said: "Why did I not die from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when my mother bore me?" (Job 3:11). First, how can something die if it is not alive in the first place? Following that, we observe in Job 3:13-16, where the patriarch listed several former-living-but-now-dead people with whom he would have had something in common if he had died *in utero*. Included in the list—along with kings and princes—was the child who experienced a "hidden untimely birth" (i.e., a miscarriage). Job considered the miscarried child to be in the same category as others who once lived but had died. Obviously, the Holy Spirit (Who gave guidance to the author of the book of Job) considered an unborn fetus as much a human being as a king, a prince, or a stillborn infant.

In the Old Testament, even the accidental termination of a pregnancy was a punishable crime. Consider Exodus 21:22: "If men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follows: he shall be surely fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him . . . but if any harm follows, then thou shalt give life for life." The meaning of the passage is this: If the child was born prematurely as the result of this accident, but "no harm follows" (i.e., the child survived), then a fine was to be exacted; however, if "harm follows" (i.e., either mother or child died), then the guilty party was to be put to death. Look at it this way. Why would God exact such a severe punishment for the accidental death of an unborn child—if that child were not living?

The death that didn't occur

Sadly, I think in the rush to try and "do the right thing," Christians often wind up doing nothing. We reassure ourselves that since (in many cases) the baby was not held or named

then maybe it is not as "real," thus it could not hurt as much. We contend that given time, the memory of this "accident" will go away. And so, week after week, Christian couples find themselves alone as they cope with enormous amounts of grief. Friends, while there may not be an elaborate funeral, no hearse, no flowers, there has still been a death in the family. How many countless Christian women have gone to sleep feeling the joy and pride of a swelling belly, only to have those feelings ripped out the following day for no apparent reason? While other mothers are pasting up handprints and colored hearts on Mother's Day, many Christian women are just trying to make it through the day without breaking down.

Consider just how traumatic it is to go from having everyone rejoicing with you about your pregnancy to suddenly having no one speak to you. As faithful Christians we need to realize the irony of fighting for unborn life in the case of abortion, but then remaining silent in the cases of miscarriage. Often, instead of getting sympathy and support, those experiencing miscarriages come away feeling that it is somehow their fault—when, in fact, it is not! Why not send them flowers, or a note on Mother's Day, just to let them know that you are thinking of them and praying diligently for them? Paul, in writing to the church in Thessalonica, admonished: "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thess. 5:11—emp. added). By giving a shoulder to cry on we help our brothers and sisters know that we share in their pain and loss. Jesus stated: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

In almost every auditorium of the Lord's church there are families that have been touched by miscarriages. Oftentimes these individuals remain silent, questioning their own actions or inactions. As Christians we need to work harder at consoling and comforting our fellow brothers and sisters who experience the unexpected loss of a child. There are no magic words that will make the situation better. But as Christians, we need to understand that this was a life in which God instilled a soul—and thus our comments and consolation should reflect that fact. Let us remind them that one day that individual will be in heaven happily awaiting the arrival of his or her faithful parents—"I shall go to him" David stated at the death of his child (cf. 2 Sam. 12:23). "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4—emp. added).

THE LION AND THE LAMB

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

From the island of Patmos the apostle John "in the Spirit" ascended into heaven and saw in God's right hand a scroll "sealed tightly with seven seals" (Rev. 1:9; 4:1-2; 5:1). When no one "could open the scroll," John "wept much" (Rev. 5:3-4). One of the twenty-four elders said to him, "Do not weep. Look! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the descendant of David, has conquered! He can break the seals and open the scroll!" (Rev. 5:5).

However, the one who took the scroll from God's hand was not a Lion, but a Lamb (Rev. 5:6-10). What is the explanation?

All 66 Bible books are interlocked. The history of the Lion and Lamb pattern begins in Genesis. In about 1706 B.C. the patriarch Jacob prophesied about one of his sons: "Judah will stoop and crouch as a lion, and as a lion, who will arouse him? The scent will not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until the Peacemaker comes, and him the peoples will obey" (Gen. 49:9-10). Apparently because the lion is the king of the jungle, God planned that a descendant of Judah would be given a king's scepter of "all authority in heaven and on the earth," and as a lawgiver the King would issue "the law of the Spirit of life," the words of which will "judge" all people "in the last day" (cf. Matt. 28:18; Rom. 8:2; Jn. 12:48).

Isaiah added to Jacob's prophecy that he coming lion-like King would be a descendant of King David: "And a throne will be established in lovingkindness, and one will sit thereon in truth, in the tent of David, judging, and seeking justice, and swift to do righteousness" (16:5). "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and on his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (9:7).

Other prophets spoke of the coming monarch as a second "David" (Jer. 30:9;

Ezek. 34:24; Hos. 3:5). But we are shocked to read that Jacob's prophecy of a lion-like king among his descendants (Gen. 49:9-10) would be "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep is silent before his shearers, so he will not open his mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

How could a king sitting "upon the throne of David" (Isa. 9:7) be "like a lamb"? Or be called a "servant of rulers" (Isa. 49:7)? Seven times Isaiah called him a "servant" (42:1; 49:5, 6, 7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11). As a lion and a lamb are opposites, so are a king and a servant. Indeed Jesus, "the son of David" (Matt. 1:1; 9:27), was a servant: "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). Everywhere he "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). When "Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with fever," Jesus "went to her, took her hand, and raised her up. The fever left her" (Mk. 1:30-31). On another occasion, Jesus took a towel and wrapped it around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel" (Jn. 13:4-5).

Jesus' purpose in coming to the earth was to be "the offering for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2). He volunteered His life as a "ransom" (Matt. 20:28). A ransom for the release from the guilt of sin is impossible by "perishable things, as silver and gold" (1 Pet. 1:18). Ours was a debt we could not pay. When John the immerser "saw Jesus coming" he exclaimed, "Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).

The blood of the Lamb has "purchased for God men of every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The Lord adds to the church day by day every saved sinner (Acts 2:47, KJV; Acts 5:11) and so it can be said that "He bought" the church "with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Baptism puts a sinner "into Christ" (Gal. 3:27), and "in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His

grace" (Eph. 1:7).

While the Lamb was on the earth He was not a king (Jn. 6:15). But after He had given "His life as a ransom" (Matt. 20:28), then He "conquered him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14), and so He "led captivity captive" (Eph. 4:8), and "stripped rulers and authorities, boldly exposing them in His triumph" (Col. 2:15). He had entered "the house of the strong man" and had bound him (Matt. 12:29). In so doing, He "indeed abolished death, and has brought to light life and immortality through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

On His return to heaven, having been raised from the dead to be "set" on David's throne (Acts 2:30). He became the "King of kings" (Rev. 17:14) on Pentecost Day, May 28, A.D. 30 (Acts 2:1-47). He "must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25-26). "Then is the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God" (1 Cor. 15:24). Thanks be "to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

How did Jesus become a lion, a conquering king? Only by first being a submissive lamb. His path to the crown was preceded by His path to the cross. The way to the top began down below. Like "a lamb," He "humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross" (Isa. 53:7; Phil. 2:8). He won by losing. He gained by giving up.

When the twenty-four elders and four living creatures in heaven saw the Lamb who was able to open the scroll, they combined their voices in a new song of praise to him: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were murdered, and with your blood you purchased for God men of every tribe and language and people and nation, and you made them to be a kingdom and priests for our God, and they reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10).

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Question: "I am incarcerated. A lot of times I am asked the question, 'What denomination do you follow?' I always say, 'I am just a Christian—a member of the church of Christ.' Then after that it's hard for me to explain. Would you please tell me how I can discuss this and make it clear to others?"

Answer: This can be a sensitive question. It is difficult to talk about the concept of one church with those who are only acquainted with sectarianism and division. No one likes to think of his religious affiliation as anything less than adequate. Everyone who belongs to a church sincerely believes that his faith is just as acceptable to God as his neighbor's.

It is easy to become uncharitable and appear arrogant in a discussion on the Lord's church (2 Tim. 2:23-25). Our mandate is to lovingly, yet firmly, communicate the truth in this realm (1 Pet. 3:15; Eph. 4:15). While not everyone will be receptive, this should not deter us from our task. Please consider the following:

An illustration:

You might ask those around you to define the word "denomination" and then inquire, "What are some possible divisions of a U.S. \$100 bill?" A single \$100 bank note could be DIVIDED into the equivalent of one hundred dollars with a \$50 bill, a \$20 bill, a \$10 bill, a \$5 bill and five \$1 bills. Point out that any of these nine bills are but *a part of a whole*.

New Testament teaching:

The Lord's church is presented in Scripture as *the whole thing*. It is "the FULNESS of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23b—emp. mine, mb). It is never spoken of as a "segment" or "part" of a larger religious entity. In fact, the word "church" is used only in two senses in the Bible: 1) as the

UNIVERSAL church over which Christ is Head (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18); and 2) in reference to LOCAL churches [i.e., congregations] in a given geographical area—"the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:1), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), and "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16; cf. Acts 14:23; 20:28). "Christians" (Acts 11:26) "were of one heart and one soul . . ." (Acts 4:32a); they were not denominated or divided (Phil. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:2). They followed "one faith" (Eph. 4:5), adhered to the same doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3, 10; 2 Tim. 1:13), and contended for the (singular) faith (Jude 3).

On the other hand, denominationalism—by its own admission—is composed of more than 1,600 religious groups, often wearing different (man-made) names, teaching conflicting religious doctrines, and endorsing contradictory practices. Note an excerpt from *The Standard Manual For Baptist Churches* by Edward T. Hiscox:

"It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but 'one Lord, ONE FAITH, and one baptism,' AND NO DIFFERING DENOMINATIONS EXISTED, that baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, 'baptism was the door into the church.' NOW, IT IS DIFFERENT . . ." (p. 22—emphasis mine, mb).

You might want to ask your peers as to why things are different today. Religious plurality is obviously not in harmony with either the Lord's prayer (Jn. 17:20-21; cf. Matt. 15:1-14), or the standard practice (Acts 2:42, 47; Col. 3:17) of His disciples. In fact, on those few occasions when weak and immature brethren in the first century attempted to denominate and fracture themselves (1 Cor. 1:11-13), they were hastily condemned as "carnal" and "unspiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1ff; cf. Gal. 5:21).

Some questions:

- How many churches did Jesus promise to build (Matt. 16:18)?
- How many churches did Peter try to build (Matt. 17:4)?
 - What was he told (v. 5)?
 - How did he and his friends react when they were told to listen only

to Christ (v. 6)?

- How should men react today when they consider building a church not sanctioned by the Father?
- How many different churches or choices of churches can we have today without dividing the body of Christ?
- Can you read of any "hyphenated" Christians in the Bible (1 Pet. 4:16; Acts 11:26)?
 - Was Paul a Southern Baptist-Christian?
 - Was Peter a Methodist-Christian?
 - Was John a Lutheran-Christian?
 - Was James a member of a Jehovah Witness group or any of the other hundreds of religious sects we find today?
- How many approved denominations can you read about in the New Testament?
- Did John, Peter, or Paul ever encourage men to join the church of their choice (Gal. 3:27)?
- Does Jesus desire a \$50, a \$20, a \$10, a \$5, and five \$1's, OR does He desire a \$100 bill (Jn. 17:20-21; Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6)?

I appreciate your sincere question, as well as your desire to share the gospel with your fellow inmates (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 28:19-20). In closing, you might ponder the words of John Wesley, noted Methodist leader of long ago. He wrote:

"Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgotten: and that we might all agree to sit down together as humble, loving disciples at the feet of a common Master, to hear His word, imbibe His Spirit, and transcribe His Life in our Own" (*Wesley's Notes on the New Testament*, p. 7).

To that we might add a hearty "Amen" (1 Cor. 1:10)!

—Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana



 sixthavenue@tds.net

BREAKING BAD HABITS

Drew Kizer, Leeds, Alabama

We are slaves of the lifestyles we choose. In Peter's words, ". . . For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved" (2 Pet. 2:19). Paul said, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). For most of us, our personal "slavery" is manifested in habits—the behavioral patterns we follow on a daily basis. When these habits are good they promote happiness and success. But when they are bad they represent a powerful, oppressive force.

Generally speaking, the sins that will condemn a person are those that are committed habitually. Society calls them "addictions." The Lord sees them as forms of rebellion against goodness and righteousness.

The Bible describes sinful habits in interesting ways. For example, those addicted to sin are spoken of as being "full of" sin, as if they were saturated with evil. Jesus said the Pharisees were "*full of greed and self-indulgence*" (Matt. 23:25). Some have mouths "*full of curses and bitterness*" (Rom. 3:14). Peter condemned false teachers who had "*eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin*" (2 Pet. 2:14). And of the Gentiles Paul wrote, "*They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness . . .*" (Rom. 1:29).

Counselors today have their hands full dealing with clients who are addicted to sex. Accordingly, Paul wrote of those whom God "gave . . . up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity . . . to dishonorable passions . . . to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done" (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). It is true that some are "afire with passion" (1 Cor. 7:9).

Furthermore, rehabilitation clinics and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are well populated with pitiable souls enslaved to alcoholic beverages. No wonder Solomon wrote, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Prov. 20:1; cf. 23:29-35).

Others are enslaved by their own tongues. In fact, James said, "no human being can tame the tongue . . ." (3:8). A host of other examples could be listed, but these suffice to show the crippling power of the taskmaster called Sin.

But there is good news. Sinful addictions can be overcome through Christ. The driving force behind any addiction, good or bad, is the heart (cf. Matt. 15:19; Mk. 7:21-23). The Christian life enables a person to transform that heart from that which produces evil works to that which produces righteousness (Rom. 12:1-2). Other practical suggestions could be added regarding how an individual might overcome addiction, but the key is to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5; Gal. 2:20).

Maybe we are all slaves, but we don't have to keep the same master.

WOT

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CHUCK WEBSTER, EDITOR

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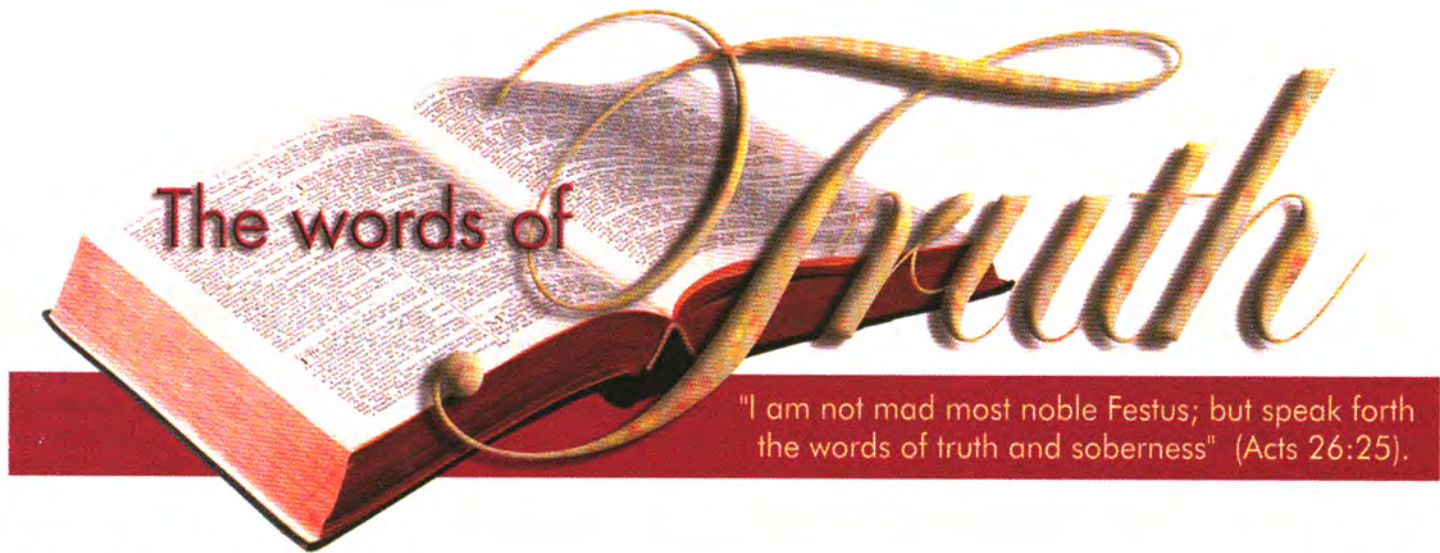
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Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
1501 6th Avenue
Jasper, AL 35501
Phone: (205) 384-6446
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BE USABLE!

Chad Dollahite, Chattanooga, Tennessee

One of the most degrading and insulting things one person can say to another is, "You're useless!" No one wants to be *called* useless and, even more so, no one wants to *be* useless. What is quite sad is that some people *consider* themselves useless. Let us never forget, brethren, that no Christian is without value!!! As Christians, we are the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), and to say that any of us is useless is wrong. It is true that some of God's children may shirk their duties and/or live unfaithfully, but no child of God is totally useless. Even the unfaithful Christian may repent, get his life right, and become active and useful once again in the Lord's service.

In Acts 18:24-28, we meet for the first time a man named Apollos. Apollos was certainly not useless in his service of God. In fact, he made himself quite usable, and he is a great example for Christians today. Notice from Acts 18:24-28 the following characteristics of Apollos that made him usable:

Apollos was talented (v. 24). The Scripture says Apollos was "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures." Here is a man who had talent. He not only had a talent for speaking/preaching, but he also knew God's Word quite well. Talent certainly helps make a Christian usable, but it is not the "be-all and the end-all." Probably all of us have known someone, perhaps even a gospel preacher, who was quite talented, but who failed to put God first, thus becoming unfaithful to his Lord. And, talent can also be developed. Some naturally are better at public speaking, some are better at singing, and so on. But, talent in these areas (and others) can be developed by practice and training. Being talented certainly helps one become usable in God's service.

Apollos was trained (vv. 24-25). We have already noted that Apollos was "mighty in the scriptures" (v. 24). Verse 25 describes him as a man who was "instructed in the way of the Lord." One would be hard-pressed to say Apollos had not had some training somewhere along the way. What about us, fellow Christians? Are we attending Bible study? Are we present at worship when the Word is being proclaimed? What about the other methods we can use to train ourselves to be usable for our Master? If we hope to be usable in the Lord's church, we should take advantage of the many training opportunities. A scientist does not simply wake up one day and discover he is a scientist; rather, he goes to school and seminars to be trained. Likewise, a usable, knowledgeable Christian will

not suddenly wake up one day and discover that she knows God's Word; the Bible must be studied. One who takes advantage of opportunities for training will certainly be most usable in the Lord's church.

Apollos was teachable (v. 26). Apollos knew only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila came along and heard Apollos teaching, and they took him aside to instruct him more completely. Apollos apparently learned quite well, for we read of him further in the New Testament doing the work of the Lord faithfully (1 Cor. 3:6; Tit. 3:13). What a lesson for Christians today! How often a brother or sister gets upset at being corrected, as opposed to listening humbly and learning to be more usable for God! If we ever find ourselves in the position of correcting others, we need to be sure that we do so properly and with all humility (Eph. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:25). On the other hand, if we ever find ourselves being corrected, we should listen intently, learn from it, and do as Apollos and become more usable as a consequence. Even if the corrector is not wholly right, it would do us all well to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jam. 1:19).

Finally, Apollos was trustworthy (vv. 27-28). When Apollos was going to travel to Achaia, the brethren at Ephesus sent a "letter of recommendation" to the brethren there; and, Apollos, when he arrived in Achaia, proved that the letter from Ephesus was true, as he helped the brethren out when he arrived there. Apollos proved himself usable because he proved himself trustworthy. It is always a risk to recommend someone that one does not know very well, and what a relief it is when the one recommended proves trustworthy and lives up to the recommendation! Furthermore, Apollos proved how trustworthy he was further as he mightily convinced the Jews (v. 28). A usable person will no doubt be a trustworthy person.

Every Christian ought to desire to be usable in the kingdom of God. When one reads about Apollos in Acts 18:24-28, it is hard to avoid noticing how this man made himself usable by being talented, trained, teachable, and trustworthy. Christian brethren, would you be usable as Apollos? It is not an accident or a "gift" that a select few "just have," but it is something that must be desired and worked for to be obtained. May God help us all, whether we are young or old, to determine always to be usable in service to God Almighty.

WOT

HOW DID GOD HARDEN PHARAOH'S HEART?

Chuck Webster, Editorial

God's sending the ten plagues upon Egypt has no doubt fascinated many of us since we were children. Who hasn't wondered what it would be like to have millions of frogs everywhere—in your bedroom, your bed, your oven, your cooking pans (Ex. 8:3)? And then to have them all die at the same time—Moses really understated the matter when he said simply, “and the land stank” (Ex. 8:14). What would it be like if all the dust in the country turned to lice? Or if all the drinking water turned to blood? This story has intrigued us all since we began to hear it in Sunday school years ago. In this Bible story, however, God made a statement which many have struggled with: “And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them” (Ex. 7:3-5). With only a cursory reading of that passage, we might think that God forced Pharaoh to disobey Him. In fact, many who hold a Calvinistic view of God make that argument. But to determine how God hardened Pharaoh's heart, we need to consider first the overall thrust of the Bible, and then this apparent difficulty will vanish.

Several important biblical principles are abundantly clear.

1. God never forces man to do anything against his own will. Contrary to what some teach, we do not have to do anything we do not want to do—a fact that has been true since the beginning of time. When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden He gave them specific instructions concerning what they could and could not do, but He did not make their decisions for them. When Eve was tempted by the serpent God didn't intervene to keep her from sinning. Did He want her to sin? Of course not! He chose not to stop her because He made human beings with free will. He has always encouraged us to choose the right way, but He has never forced us (Deut. 30:15ff; Josh. 24:15; Prov. 1:29; 3:31). Our service, worship, and obedience as well as our disobedience are by our own choice. No one can force us to act

contrary to our will.

2. God cannot even tempt man to sin, much less cause him to. Notice what James wrote: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (Jam. 1:13). It is against God's divine nature to tempt man to sin. A perfectly holy and just God causing man to commit an unholy action is a contradiction of terms!

3. God loves man and wants him to be saved. Surely if there is any theme in the Bible which is repeatedly emphasized it is God's love for man. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Is it possible that God could send His only begotten Son to earth to suffer and die for man's sin and at the same time compel him to sin (Jn. 3:16)? Surely God's love and desire for man to be saved prohibits His causing him to sin.

4. God can look into the future, know how men will react to certain circumstances, and use those events to His glory without causing them to happen. For example, God knew that Jesus would be crucified thousands of years before it happened. He told the serpent in the garden that Eve's seed (Christ) would bruise Satan's head (Gen. 3:15)—a prophecy that was fulfilled at the cross. Peter clearly stated that the crucifixion of Christ was according to God's predetermined plan. “[Christ], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:23). Peter could not have called an action of God a “wicked” thing; but that is exactly what he did if we are to equate foreknowledge with the removal of man's free will. But the fact that God foreknew an event and even predetermined how it would fit into His sovereign plan does not mean that He forced the participants to carry out certain actions. It would violate God's equity if He had forced men to crucify Jesus and then condemned them for doing something in which they had no choice.

Now, understanding that God always allows man to have free will, that He never tempts anyone to commit sin, that He wants

all to be saved, and that His foreknowledge does not imply His directly causing an action to occur, we turn our attention to the matter of Pharaoh. The Bible plainly states that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3,13,9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8). But the Bible also asserts that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15,32; 9:34). Which is true? Certainly the Bible does not contradict itself, and upon a closer examination, we see that the passages are perfectly consistent. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by telling this heathen ruler to do something he was not willing to do. He told Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt—something Pharaoh absolutely did not want to do. Yet, at the same time, God never took away Pharaoh's free will. Egypt's ruler could have obeyed God at any time if he had chosen to do so. But he chose not to, and in so doing hardened his own heart. He refused to submit his will to God's will. God, because of His omniscience, looked into the future and knew how Pharaoh would react to this situation. Pharaoh was a worldly king who cared nothing for the God of heaven. God chose to use these circumstances to show the Egyptians and the Israelites His great power and glory. He never forced Pharaoh to disobey Him. Rather, He used a heart that was already hard to accomplish His will.

Does God harden hearts today? Certainly. But He does so only indirectly through the effect that His Word has on the hearts it touches. “For the word of God 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). When God's Word contacted those present at Pentecost, it “pricked” their heart, creating in them the desire to be saved (Acts 2:37). When the same word met Stephen's accusers, these hearers were “cut to the heart” (Acts 7:54). Instead of their hearts conforming to the intent of Stephen's message, they became like stone, causing them to search for stones to kill God's servant. The difference in the responses of Acts 2 and Acts 7 lay not in the message, but in the nature of the hearts. We should be concerned with making sure our hearts are conditioned so that they become soft and pliable when confronted with biblical precepts.

WHAT MUST I KNOW TO BE SAVED?

Eric Lyons, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, Alabama

The question frequently is asked by those who are contemplating becoming children of God. "How much do I have to know in order to become a Christian?" Some feel like they have to know every detail in the Bible before taking action to get rid of sin in their lives. Others believe they need every question "under the sun" answered before becoming a Christian. Some want to know about the origin of the races. Others want to know whether or not there is life on other planets. The Bible, however, never indicates that for one to become a Christian, he has to know every detail about every book in the Bible, or that a person has to be able to answer every question that arises. But what, if anything, is necessary for a person to **know** before becoming a disciple of Christ?

First, an individual contemplating his spiritual life must understand that the reason there is even something for him to do is that he has sinned. Everyone who has reached the level of mental maturity (sometimes referred to as "the age of accountability") so that he or she understands what sin is (cf. 1 Jn. 3:4; 5:17) has sinned (Rom. 3:10,23; 1 Jn. 1:8). [The one exception, of course, was Jesus—1 Pet. 2:22.] Sin is that which separates man from God (Isa. 59:1-2). For a person to be

saved, he first must have knowledge that he is a sinner, and as such stands in a lost condition. One of the reasons Jesus condemned certain Jewish priests, elders, and sects was that they did not admit their sinfulness after hearing the preaching of John the baptizer (Matt. 21:31-32)—though the tax collectors and harlots (i.e., sinners) did acknowledge their sin, and believed.

Second, the one who aspires to become a Christian must know something about Jesus—the One Who came to save us from our sins (Lk. 19:10; Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8). A person does not have to know every one of Jesus' parables, or be able to quote the Sermon on the Mount, but he must know that Jesus is the Son of God Who died and was raised so that all men might have their sins forgiven and live eternally with Him in heaven (Tit. 2:11-14; Heb. 2:9). In other words, before becoming a Christian, a person must have heard the gospel (Good News) of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Finally, the individual who aspires to become a child of God must realize there is something for him to do (cf. Acts 2:38; 16:30; 8:36). If one understands that the Bible says he must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn. 8:24), repent of his sins (Lk. 13:3,5), confess that Jesus is God's Son (Rom. 10:10), and be baptized for the

remission of his sins (Acts 2:38), he then possesses enough knowledge to put on Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:27) and become a Christian, being added by God to the church that Christ established (Acts 2:47; Matt. 16:18; Rom. 16:16).

Contrary to the belief of some, a person who desires to become a Christian does not have to know the whole Bible thoroughly before he takes action. Nor is there a need to have every question imaginable answered. The Ethiopian eunuch heard one Christ-centered lesson from Phillip before asking, "What hinders me from being baptized" (Acts 8:35-36)? The three thousand on Pentecost heard only one gospel sermon before accepting the grace of God and obeying the plan of salvation (Acts 2:41). They did not wait around for years, thinking they were not knowledgeable enough to be followers of Christ. Rather, they were convinced of their sins (Acts 2:37), heard the gospel, believed it, and obeyed it. It is **after** one becomes a Christian that God commands us a person to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18), and to continue to study the Word in order to teach others (Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 3:15). WOT

DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT PROMISE A FUTURE LIFE?

Hugo McCord, Vancouver, Washington

If one restricts himself to some verses of the Old Testament, he could reasonably conclude that no future life beyond the grave is taught, for "man has no preeminence above the beasts" (Eccl. 3:19). Human beings and "the beasts that perish" are equal (Psa. 49:12, 20). Both people and animals "all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccl. 3:20; cf. Gen. 3:19).

But there is something in a human that the above Old Testament verses do not

mention, something that does not "turn to dust" when he dies. That something—invisible, intangible, unweighable—is called man's "spirit" (Isa. 57:16) or "soul" (Lev. 17:11). "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" (Eccl. 11: 5). All you know is that God "forms" (*vasar*, as a potter) "the spirit" within the embryo (Zech. 12:1).

The prophet Samuel "died" and was "buried" at Ramah (1 Sam. 25:1). But the spirit that God had formed within his embryonic self in Hannah's womb, being immortal, had not died (Matt. 22:32)! And, in his case, his spirit, his soul, returned from the spirit-world and had a conversation with King Saul (1 Sam. 28:8-19).

This information—that the spirits (souls) of people are alive and conscious after the death of their bodies—helps us to

understand that when an Old Testament verse says that “the dead know not anything” (Eccl. 9:5), the meaning is “the dead [bodies] know not anything.”

Likewise, when an Old Testament verse says that “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in Sheol” (Eccl. 9:10, ASV), the meaning of *sheol* is the “grave” (as in the KJV).

Likewise, when an Old Testament verse says that “in death there is no memory” of God, and that “in the grave” there is no thanksgiving (Psa. 6:5, KJV), it is because a person’s spirit (soul) has left the body. Similarly, “the dead [bodies]” do not “praise” God, nor corpses “that go down into silence” (Psa. 115:17, KJV; cf. Psa. 88:4-12; Job 10:21; 24:19-20; Isa. 14:11; 38:18).

When “the dust” (the corpse) returns “to the earth as it was,” then the undying spirit “returns to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). However, man’s physical and spiritual natures do not forever stay separated! There is a resurrection. A psalmist rejoiced: “God will redeem my corpse (*nephesh*) from the grave, and he will receive me” (Psa. 49:15).

The usual translation of the Hebrew word *nephesh* is “soul,” but in Psalm 49:15 that meaning is impossible because a man’s soul, his spirit, never enters the grave. Another Old Testament meaning of the word *nephesh* is a dead body, a corpse (Num. 5:2; 6:6; 9:6, 7, 10; 19:11, 13), which meaning exactly fits Psalm 49:15. The psalmist is rejoicing that God will redeem his corpse from the grave and that he will have a future life beyond the grave, even with God!

David also looked forward to getting out of the cemetery: “You will rescue my corpse (*nephesh*) from the depths of the grave (*sheol*)” (Psa. 86:13). As in Psalm 49:15, the meaning “soul” for *nephesh* is impossible, for a man’s soul, his spirit, never enters the grave. Furthermore, as in Psalm 49:15, the meaning “corpse” for *nephesh*, and the meaning “grave” for *sheol*, exactly fit Psalm 86:13.

The KJV translators, after using “grave” for *sheol* in Psalm 49:15, changed in Psalm 86:13 to use “hell” for *sheol*. This they did, not because they thought David was talking about the hell-fire of eternal

punishment, but because in 1611 the word “hell” (derived from the German (*hohle*), simply meant a hole, and so they used the word “hell” to mean the “grave” as they had done in Psalm 49:15.

It is then clear that the psalmist (a son of Korah) and David are to be raised from the dead (Psa. 49:15; 86:13). But startling is another prediction, written by David, and written as if he was talking about himself, but he was not! He was talking about a conversation in heaven between Jesus and his Father: “when heavenly plans were made” (“My God and I”) back in eternity (Eph. 3:11) that after the cross “joy” would be “set before” Jesus of a happy resurrection (Heb. 12:2). Jesus was thrilled that the plan called for such a short time in the grave that His flesh would see no decay: “My heart rejoices and my tongue is glad, and my flesh also will live in hope, for you will not abandon my corpse (*nephesh*) in the grave (*sheol*), and neither will you allow your holy one to see decay” (Psa. 16:9-10).

Though David used the first person, he could not have been talking about himself, for his “flesh” did not “live in hope” and it saw “decay.” A thousand years after the words of Psalm 16:9-10 were written, Peter explained to Jews who had studied the Scriptures that the words of Psalm 16:9-10 were spoken by Jesus in heaven to His Father: “Men, brothers, it is necessary to speak boldly to you of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us this day. He was a prophet, and he . . . foresaw the resurrection of Christ and spoke of it, that he was not left in the grave, neither did his flesh see decay” (Acts 2:29-31).

Again, as in Psalm 49:15 and 86:13, the word *nephesh* in Psalm 16:10 cannot mean “soul,” for the soul, the spirit, of Jesus, did not enter the grave (*sheol*). Just before He died, Jesus prayed, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk. 23:46). Immediately His spirit, His soul, went to Paradise (Lk. 23:43). Only His corpse went to the grave.

We rejoice that David could write about Jesus’ resurrection (Psa. 16:9-10), as well as his own (Psa. 86:13), and we rejoice that the Old Testament gives promise of the resurrection of others: “Multitudes who

sleep in the dust will awake” (Dan. 12:2).

After that general resurrection God has planned a judgment day: “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl. 12:14). To some people, that day will be the beginning of “everlasting life,” during which “those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars ever and ever” (Dan. 12:2-3). But, to others that day will be the beginning of “shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:3).

An admirable prayer and purpose in life is: “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his” (Num. 23:10). Job asked, “If a man dies, will he live again?” (14:14), and then answered his own question: “But as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last he will stand upon the earth: and after my skin, even this body, is destroyed, then without my flesh shall I see God; whom I, even I, shall see, on my side, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger” (19:25-27, ASV).

Job could not have been referring to Jesus’ appearance on earth at His first advent, for Job did not see Him at that appearance. He must have been referring to the second coming of Christ. At Christ’s second coming, Job’s skin (where the boils had tormented him) would be no more, and Job would, without his fleshly body, lay eyes on Jesus, and not as a stranger, but like an old-time acquaintance!

But how can it be that Job will see Jesus standing “upon the earth” when actually Job will “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17)? First, one notices that the word “earth” (*ares*) is not in Job’s quotation. His word is “dust” (*aphar*), which all corpses become (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 12:7). Job used the word “dust” as a synonym for the “grave” (7:21; 20:11; 21:26). Likely Job meant that Jesus’ standing “on the dust” was simply a figurative way of saying that Jesus would be the conqueror of all graves.

Apparently God wanted His teaching, even in the Old Testament, about a future life beyond death to be much emphasized:

- “As for me, I will see your face in righteousness. I will be satisfied when I

- awake in your likeness" (Psa. 17:15).
- "Weeping lingers over night, but, in the morning, a shout of joy" (Psa. 30:5).
- "You lead me by your counsel, and afterwards you will receive me in glory" (Psa. 73:24).

- "In the path of the righteous is life, and in its way is no death" (Prov. 12:28).
- "[T]here is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off" (Prov. 23:18).
- "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from

all faces" (Isa. 25:8, NKJV).

- "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3:17, KJV). *WOT*

PAUL'S TEARS

Neil Richey, Greenville, South Carolina

The apostle Paul often gives his readers some insight into his tenderness of heart. He is mindful of the souls of men, and longs for the salvation of their souls. Notice three instances in which Paul mentioned his tears:

Paul served with many tears. When he sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church, they came to him. It was then that Paul reminded them of the fact that they had been co-workers together in Asia. While there, Paul served "the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews" (Acts 20:19). On this occasion Paul wept over the opposition of the Jews. Some have speculated that his weeping was for his personal danger. It seems better to understand that Paul was concerned for his *work's* sake. He was tearful over the Jews' commitment to slow his work to reach the lost with the saving message of the Christ.

Just like Paul, we need to be deeply mindful of the souls of men, seeking to serve them by bringing the good news to them. We will shed tears over their lost condition. In addition, when wicked man opposes us, we will shed tears because they are hindering the spreading of the good news.

Paul warned with many tears. "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). In expression of his deep

abiding interest in and love for their souls, Paul warned his brethren "with tears." These Christians were in danger of enemies from without and within. Paul told them that men, as "grievous wolves," would enter in among them "not sparing the flock"—*enemies from without*. Then he says, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them"—*enemies from within*.

On a differing occasion, Paul warned his brethren saying, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:18-19). The Judaizing teachers were enemies of the cross. They insisted on incorporating circumcision and other ordinances of the law of Moses with the gospel. According to Clarke's commentary, "They rather attribute justification to the Levitical sacrifices, than to the sacrificial death of Christ." This makes them enemies of the Lord, and these false ideas were creeping into the church.

Paul warned that there were some without and within the church that did not honor the religion of Christ. With many tears he warned the faithful not to follow their example.

Paul wrote with many tears. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that

ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2 Cor. 2:4). Did you ever stop and wonder if Paul's tears, shed while writing this epistle, actually fell on the paper upon which he wrote? Why were tears pouring from the apostle's eyes as he wrote this letter? Perhaps the answer is found in considering the recipients.

The city of Corinth was quite wicked, and its ungodliness eventually made its way into the church. Sons were committing adultery with their father's wives. Others were going to law with their brethren. There were idolaters in the city and the church. Homosexuality and many other sins were rampant in the city all around the Corinthian Christians.

Due to his abundant love for his brethren in Corinth, Paul shed many tears as he wrote to them. Barnes noted:

This was an instance of Paul's great tenderness of heart—a trait of character which he uniformly evinced. With all his strength of mind, and all his courage and readiness to face danger, Paul was not ashamed to weep; and especially if he had any occasion of censuring his Christian brethren, or administering discipline; . . .

The apostle Paul was a great man of God. He was a pillar of the faith. He was a soldier of the cross. He was a defender of the faith. He was a man who served, warned, and wrote in tenderness of heart.

WOT

NOTHING BUT NOISE

Allen Webster, Jacksonville, Alabama

John Gipson relates the following account:

It was a bad day for Humphrey Marshall and his Confederate soldiers. They had painfully hauled their artillery over the mountains from Virginia into Kentucky. At Sandy Valley they confronted James Garfield and the Union forces. On a peak ominously named Grave Yard Point, Garfield ordered two Kentucky infantry companies under Captain Frederick A. Williams across the valley to dislodge Marshall and his rebels.

Allan Peskin describes the action:

Holding cartridge boxes and rifles above their heads, they waded in an icy, waist-deep creek, and dashed towards the opposite ridge. This was the opportunity for which Marshall's artillery captain had been waiting. For a month he had nursed his precious guns, hauling them over the mountains, tugging them through mud, and delaying the advance of the entire brigade. Now, all of his work could be justified. He zeroed in on the charging federals, waiting until they reached point-blank range before pulling the lanyard. With a high-pitched scream a twelve pound shell lobbed high in the air, headed unerringly for William's advance guard and plopped harmlessly into the mud. Marshall's shells were all duds, and although his cannon boomed noisily away throughout the rest of the afternoon, they inflicted no damage other than splattering a few federals with mud.

I can well imagine the disgust the artillery captain must have felt. He had nothing but noise.

"Nothing but noise"—reminds us of some New Testament passages:

1. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1).

Christians might be generous with words and works (13:2-3), but acting from

selfishness or name-seeking can profit nothing. Only works constrained by love for God count to God (2 Cor. 2:14). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 Jn. 4:20). *Singing* "O How I Love Jesus" does not necessarily equal *living* "O How I Love Jesus."

The Christian life without love—nothing but noise.

(2) "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn. 3:17,18).

It is easy to talk about spreading the Word, helping the needy, and supporting good works, but when it comes down to doing it, we must be ready with sweatdrops on the brow, teardrops on the cheek, time on the hands, and wallets in pockets. Rubber must meet road. The Pharisees could talk a good game, but that was about it (Matt. 23:2-3). Schoolyard basketball players say, "Put up or shut up." Christians "put up" without needing to "speak up" (Matt. 6:1-5).

The Christian life without action—nothing but noise!

(3) "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (Jam. 2:15-17).

Christians rightly condemn the denominational doctrine "salvation by faith only," but sometimes wrongly practice it. It takes more than saying "be ye warmed and filled," to a lonely widow or a hungry orphan. They need more than, "I believe God will bless you." We, as God's people, must be God's instruments. Faith is more than assent, it is action. It is a verb of readiness, not rhetoric. It does not say,

"Sounds good, take care of that," but, "Great idea, I will do it."

The Christian life without faith—nothing but noise!

(4) "These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage" (Jude 16).

This describes too much preaching heard from our pulpits, great swelling words which gain admiration, but not genuine additions. If one speaks without Scripture, really, he is a noise-maker, not a preacher (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2). Paul's accusers thought he was "full of hot air." "For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). But Paul showed the power of God's Word contrasted with the emptiness of his enemies: "Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present" (10:11).

False teachers and religious entertainers—nothing but noise!

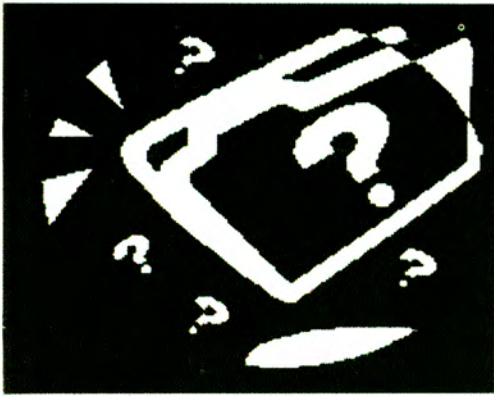
(5) "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15).

The scribes were known for long prayers, which reached no further than the rafters (Mk. 12:38). God gets sick of thoughtless, heartless (Matt. 15:9), ritualistic, vain worship (Isa. 1:12). What might be beautiful to man's ears might be blasphemy to God's. What teenagers listen to often is not music to parents—only noise. Would not it be a shame to offer something to God which He thought was noise?

Worship without sincerity— nothing but noise!

God wants more than noisy nuisances! Let us be careful never to offer out-of-tune lives, out-of-harmony voices, off-pitch attitudes, or out-of-time service. We can do better for He deserves better.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Note: This Q&A was taken from The Christian Courier's web site (www.christiancourier.com) and is one of scores of excellent responses to the hundreds of questions that the Courier receives each year. If you haven't yet done so, bookmark the site - it will bless your Bible study immensely.

Question: "My son was raised in the church. We taught him the Bible. As a youngster he sometimes helped to serve the Lord's supper. He even gave talks occasionally. After he was in college a while, something changed. He began to question the teaching of the Scriptures. Now, he professes no faith at all. What happened?"

Answer: This is a story that I have heard over and over again across the years. Many of our youngsters are losing their faith? Why is this? Perhaps there is no simple, single reason; however, it may be sufficient to observe that one of the causes of this growing defection among our young adults is the fact that for years they were operating on a *borrowed* faith. In too many instances they had superficial instruction from mediocre teachers in their church Bible classes. Added to this is the fact that they were given no substantial intellectual training at home. Accordingly, when they encountered the crass, humanistic environment of the university atmosphere, they were unable to survive.

It is time that we awaken to the reality that if we wish to preserve our children we must take more seriously our responsibility to educate them in the most important issues of life—that of the existence of our Creator and His inspired Word to humanity. Our work is cut out for us. Here is what we must do if we really care for our offspring—and the youth of the church in general.

Teach Them to Reason

First, we must teach our children how to logically reason. This will serve them all of their lives. For example, when they are asked as to why they believe in the existence of God, our youngsters should be able to call attention to the law of cause and effect. Wherever there is an effect (e.g., the Universe) there must be an adequate cause. Matter is not sufficient to

explain itself. There is no known process by which matter can create itself. Thus, one must look for a non-material origin of the Universe.

Children can be taught early, and drilled with information, concerning the fact that where there is design, there must be a designer. If the universe bears the marks of design—and it surely does—then it must have had a designer. The entire realm of nature is a classroom for the teaching of these principles.

Teach Them Their Origin

Second, we must educate our youth in the factual matter of human origin. From the time they are able to sit up and watch television, they are brainwashed with the ideas of evolution. They are taught evolution from their earliest days in school. They are indoctrinated with evolution through their toys, tee-shirts, etc. (witness the dinosaur mania and the common propaganda line that the dinosaurs lived millions of years before man arrived on earth).

It is not enough to simply say, "evolution is wrong." We must give them solid, factual data that expose the fallacy of evolutionary arguments (for example the false reasoning that simply because the human hand resembles the hand of a chimpanzee, this must indicate that we are related to the chimp! Similarities can as easily indicate a common designer, namely God.)

Teach Them to Revere the Bible

Third, it is imperative that our children be given mountains of evidence demonstrating that the Bible is a revelation from God. Its holy books were written by people whom Jehovah directed to reveal His message. The Bible's instruction must be diligently sought and its authority respected. We must introduce to their thinking arguments like the phenomenal unity that is characteristic of the biblical documents. This argument will not carry much weight, however, unless they know the basic message of each of the sixty-six books of the sacred volume.

We must show that predictive prophecy (history revealed in advance) is testimony to the divine origin of the Bible. Since only God knows the future, if the Bible gives evidence that its writers spoke of future events, which they could not possibly have known by natural insight, that will constitute support for its heavenly origin. We must expose our children to the exciting discoveries in the field of archaeology which strengthen our faith in the reliability of the Holy Scriptures.

With the items suggested above as representative of the type of instruction that is so necessary, we would make the following practical suggestions as well.

Practical Suggestions

1. We must take these truths, and others like them (e.g., the history concerning Christ, the rules of morality, etc.) and teach them emphatically and repeatedly to our children.

We must be factual and firm. We must stop capitulating to false science and take a confident, dogmatic stand for biblical truth.

2. We must make our Bible school departments stronger. Elders must insist that the classes have a strong apologetic emphasis. Preachers must stress from the pulpit the urgency of these matters and bring thrilling lessons supporting these fundamental truths. Local churches should be encouraged to bring in guest speakers who are specialists in these areas. Their messages will ignite a flame of interest that could sweep through the church.
3. Parents must talk of these issues constantly with their children—when they bring school assignments home, while watching TV, when traveling on vacation, etc. We must return to the concept set forth in Deuteronomy 6:7. Someone is teaching your children; if not you, then *who*?
4. We must build reliable libraries for our children. Buy them good, professionally-done books on creation, Bible inspiration, etc., from a strong, conservative vantagepoint. Stay away from compromising materials which attempt to harmonize the Bible with evolutionary premises, e.g., the notion that the "days" of the creation week in Genesis might represent millions of years.

I can guarantee you this. If we do not do a better job of fortifying the faith of our children, we will lose them by the thousands.

Finally, and regrettably, I cannot avoid adding this notation. It once was the case that parents needed only to guard their youth's education in *secular* environments. That is no longer the case. Some schools that promote themselves as "Christian" institutions are as bad (or worse) than secular universities. They are perhaps even more dangerous because they operate under the guise of being "Christian" in character. Youngsters, therefore, are disarmed in advance. Some of these so-called centers of "Christian" education are hot-beds of the rankest form of anti-biblical ideology. It is later than we think. Be careful where you send your children for their education

— Wayne Jackson, Stockton, California


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

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

Johnny Ramsey, Arlington, Texas

Nineteen centuries ago Christ and His apostles began a system of spiritual power that encompassed the earth and blessed the world. The pure religion of the Savior—once established—has never vanished from the human scene even though the darkness of the ages often has dimmed its pristine beauty. Daniel 2:44 affirmed the perpetual status of the Kingdom, and Matthew 16:18 promised its glorious establishment. In spite of persecution by Rome, jealousy of the Jews, economic poverty, and a startling message, the gospel of Jesus swept the ancient world by storm.

The ardent zeal of devoted servants of the Lord emblazoned a noble page in the volume of ancient history. The spiritual army of the Lord made many valiant conquests for the Captain of their salvation (Heb. 2:10). Shining as lights in the midst of a perverse generation (Phil. 2:15), early Christians took seriously the task of “living soberly, righteously, and godly” (Tit. 2:12). The simple organization of the Lord’s church made clear its autonomous government. Adhering strictly to divine principles of self governing procedures set forth in Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5-6, Acts 20:28-30, and 1 Peter 5:1-4, there was no need for earthly headquarters, bureaucracy, or hierarchy.

In Philippians 1:1 we read simply of elders, deacons, and all the saints. Worship in the first century church of our Lord was to be conducted in “spirit and in truth” as John 4:24 clearly stated. Reverently, as the Scriptures directed, the body of Christ “continued steadfastly” in the homage the apostles taught (Acts 2:42). The first day of the week was especially set aside for the Lord’s Supper and the contribution (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Nineteen centuries ago the church Christ established by His shed blood was strong in its exposure of error (2 Tim. 4:2-4), as well as its proclamation of truth (1 Tim. 3:15) and especially in ardent evangelism.

Acts 5:42, 8:4, and 12:24 tell us of the daily teaching that caused “the word of God to grow and multiply.” Christians of that era prayed boldly and fervently (Heb. 4:16; Jam. 5:16) even as they joyously sang praises unto God (Acts 16:25; Col. 3:15-17). Christianity was not a church house religion to them. It was not “a way of life”—it was life! Paul said: “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21).

Let us all study the Bible more!

WOT

The Words of Truth

**Sixth Avenue church of Christ
1501 Sixth Avenue
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Chuck Weisler, Editor

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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**

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THE MYTHS OF GRIEF

Ron Williams, Huntsville, Alabama

If It Is Not A Human Death, Then One Ought Not to Grieve!"

Many people mistakenly think and perceive that grief is only caused when a human death occurs in life. Even then, many people become quite impatient with people that are grieving and perceive them as "whining babies" if they are not "over" their grief within a few weeks or months. (A person getting "over" grief is another myth to be discussed some other time).

But alas, this common myth becomes a real obstacle to individuals that are seriously grieving over *other real losses* within their lives. Here is a list of just a few *real losses* that can produce an overwhelming amount of grief that may not be recognized and allowed by others that have no clue of what grief is and how powerful it can be in one's life.

- A person gets a pink slip from the plant they have worked at for eighteen years. You say, "Well, it's just a job!" No, it is a loss of a person's lifestyle, self-confidence, income, social status, and history of always having a job to go to and do well.
- A pet dies. This pet has perhaps taken the position of children running around the house since the children have grown up. This pet has become more than just a pet; it has become an integral part of your life. You say, "But it was just a pet!" No, it was a companion that gave warmth, love, comfort, and unconditional acceptance that one thinks cannot ever be regained.

A house is destroyed by wind, rain, fire, or some other disaster. You say, "But it was just a house!" No, it was a place where life was lived, where the kids grew up, a place that a person built with their own hands, a place that became home because of what occurred there for many years, and now it is gone and one is afraid the memories may go along

with the house as well.

- A member of one's family leaves the church. The Bible calls that apostasy. You say, "But they didn't die!" No, that person hasn't died but I can guarantee you that their faithful family members are dying a slow death of pain, shame, and guilt that maybe they didn't do enough teaching or failed in not living the Christian life before their fallen loved one. They continually pray (as should all who love them) that their loved one will come back to the teachings they had learned earlier in life before it is eternally too late.
- A person loses their health. It may be a mastectomy wherein a part of the body is surgically removed. It may be a stroke that causes a person to become homebound and immobile. It may be Alzheimer's or Dementia wherein the mental faculties are fading from a person's mind. Regardless of what it is, that person and all who love them know that something has changed. You say, "But at least they are still alive!" Yes, that is true, but something "life-changing" has occurred that will debilitate that person and all around them for years to come.

These are but a few of the *other kinds of losses* that can produce enormous amounts of grief and agony. Regardless of whether we can comprehend what a person is going through in these *other losses* or not, we need to avoid being judgmental as to whether we feel these losses are proper. Rather, as Christians, let us "*Rejoice with those that rejoice, and weep with those that weep,*" (Rom. 12:15). Those Christians that fall into these categories will be glad that we did simply that!

EMPOWERMENT TAKES MORE THAN A MINUTE*

Brandon Jackson, Editorial

Over the years there have been significant advancements in architecture and many congregations have taken advantage of these advancements to build better, prettier, more cost effective meeting places. Over the years technology has boomed and many congregations have taken advantage of that boom by using computers to publish newsletters, church material, and information in the office. Visual Technology has really grown, and now many congregations are able to afford a state of the art visual display to project announcements, songs, and lessons for the congregation.

I believe we have done a good job at taking these advancements in society/technology and implementing them in our favor to help accomplish the Lord's work. However, there are plenty of new thoughts and ideas that we might be missing out on. We don't have to limit ourselves to physical advancements. Each year scientists are working diligently to understand more about our bodies. Each year psychologists perform research to better understand our minds. Year after year business men reflect upon the business techniques that worked or failed in motivating employees are making businesses successful. Are we as quick to take advantage of these advancements? Can we?

I think we can, and in this article I would like to share with you some thoughts taken from a book by businessmen about business. As we consider some of the key assertions I would like to move them from the business realm to the realm of faith. It is interesting to note how these authors use present day psychiatry and business trends to achieve their goal, that goal being one of the present buzz phrases in business right now "Empowerment."

Empowerment is important to business but it is even more important to faith; that's why I believe that a look into *Empowerment Takes More than a Minute* will be beneficial.

The need for empowerment in the business world stems from four organizational attributes. Businesses today need to be:

1. Customer-driven
2. Cost Effective
3. Fast and flexible
4. Continually improving

In order to achieve these goals organizations must do away with the old standard hierarchy and empower employees to fill these needs.

My contention is that in the church we have these same needs.

1. We must be customer-driven. Who consumes our lives? Are we living our life for ourselves, by our rules, submitting only to our own wills? Or is there something more. As Christians we must live every day for Christ. Thereby God should consume our lives. "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37). Empowerment allows each of us to be driven not by what we want, but by what God wants. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

2. Our lives must be cost effective. Before we begin the Christian life we are told to consider the cost:

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Lk. 14:25-33)

Empowerment helps each of us make the decisions needed to be "cost-effective." We must decide how to put God first in our lives. As beings of free will we are faced with a great dilemma. "Are we willing to pay the price in order to become Children of God?" Many will choose the temporary pleasures that are present upon this earth. But the most cost effective life is one that pays the price now so that the eternal pleasures of heaven are theirs.

3. We as individuals must be fast and flexible in supplying God with that which He demands. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Gal. 1:15-17). We can't wait for the preacher or our elders to tell us every decision we must make in life. Faithful elders and Gospel

preaching will reprove, rebuke, and exhort us in order to show us what it is that God expects. Ultimately, however, we must be empowered to make fast and flexible decisions everyday about what expectations are most pressing at that time. For example, should we spend a free hour in our day in prayer, visiting the sick at the hospital, or in a study of God's word? We can't accomplish them all in that one hour alone. Therefore, we must be able to quickly determine what need is most pressing and take the appropriate action.

4. A Christian life is one that is continually improving. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 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. 3:12-14). We will never reach perfection but with each passing day we reach forward toward a mark that is set, a specific goal for that day, for that week, for that year, decade, or lifetime. Empowerment allows us to set that mark and improve toward reaching our goals. What are your strengths and weaknesses? In which areas do you excel and in which areas do you feel deficient? Take a moment and pinpoint each of these then set goals toward which you can work in order to continually improve. The interesting thing is that once you have focused upon improving your weaknesses they can become your strengths and your strengths your weaknesses and you begin the process over again, just flip-flopped.

As we look at how an advancement like this business model can be taken and applied to our own needs, I hope that it will get you thinking about how advancements in your office, hobby, or reading can be used to further religious discussion. Empowerment is a new way of doing business to meet these four needs. As we look to the Christian life we must be empowered to meet our religious obligations. In the next issue of *The Words of Truth* we will look at how one becomes Empowered.

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What God Can Do With You

Wendell Winkler, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Returning to Antioch upon the completion of Paul's first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas gathered the church together and "rehearsed all that God had done with them." (Acts 14:27)

Through time God has used human instrumentality to accomplish his plans. Consider how he used Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt. Remember how he used Joshua to conquer Canaan. Contemplate how he used Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Think how he used Esther to save the nation of Israel. Study how he used Jonah to turn the city of Nineveh. Read how he used Paul to evangelize continents.

In the twenty-first century, God is still using men, women, boys and girls to do his will and work. "We are labourers together with God." (1 Cor. 3: 9) God can use you to

(1) convert the lost. He used Paul thusly. (1 Cor. 9:22) God can use you to (2) do benevolent work. He used Dorcas to clothe the widows. (Acts 9: 36-43) God can use you to (3) administer to the sick. The good Samaritan will forever be remembered for his kindness to one who was ill. (Luke 10:30-37) God can use you to (4) comfort the bereaved. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:18) Also, God can use you to (5) encourage the faint-hearted, (1 Thess. 5:14), to (6) exhort the dilatory, (Heb 3:13), and to (7) restore the fallen, (Gal 6:1).

God can use your hands to do his work (Eccles. 9:10); your tongue to tell his story (Matt. 28:19); your feet to go into the world (Mark 16:16); and your back to bear the burdens of others (Gal 6:2).

"Christ has no hands but our hands
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men on His way;
He has no tongue but our tongues
To tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help
To bring them to His side."

—Annie Johnson Flint

May we as members of the Lord's church ever conceive of ourselves as instruments in the hands of God, as "labourers together with God." (1 Cor. 3:9) Let us ever resolve to let God work through us. Then, our challenges, which are great, will be met, and our possibilities, which are unlimited, will be attained.

WOT

WE NEED MORE BIBLE PREACHERS

Neil Richey, Greenville, South Carolina

At one time in this country, preachers were among the most respected of all people. However, this respect has "fallen upon hard times." Some consider the preachers and preaching to be at the height of drudgery. The Israelites of the Old Testament referred to preaching as "*what a weariness*" (Mal. 1:13).

Of preachers, one wrote

He is considered a scheming hypocrite . . . or a naïve nuisance, irrelevant and absurd. Once a crusader he has become a doubter; once a comforter, he is now an accommodator. Kids don't want to be preachers anymore. Adults think he is a "fuddy-duddy" who "goofs off." His credit rating is zero. Once the 'parson' he is now the joke, "a rather harmless laddie."

One of the biggest temptations that preachers are faced with today is the temptation to quit. It is an everyday battle that many lose. Tragically, we are finding

ourselves in a preaching shortage. We need more faithful gospel preachers who will stand fast while the storm blows. We need men who will not give in to the temptation to quit, come what may in the darkest day or night. We need more Bible preachers.

We need more Bible preachers: . . .

Who will stand shoulder to shoulder with the preachers of the past. Many of my heroes in the Bible were preachers. Noah was a preacher. "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:5). Jeremiah was a preacher who could not be kept down. "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20:9). Peter and John were preachers. "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God

to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). My Lord was a preacher. "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14).

Preachers of the gospel are in good company. This should tell us something about the tremendous work of preaching the gospel.

Who will follow God's plan for gospel preaching. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). He did not say to go into all the world replacing the gospel with dramatic presentation. He did not say to go into all the world repressing the gospel with a message of compromise. He did not say to go into all the world reshaping the gospel into "positive" speeches. He did not say to go into all the world reducing the gospel to a brief necessity. He said "Go ye into all the

world and preach **the gospel**." Paul referred to it as preaching "**the word**" (2 Tim. 4:2).

The temptation for preachers today is to preach a "positive" gospel. By a "positive" gospel I mean – "Don't preach on sin," "Don't preach on the plan of salvation," "Don't preach about the church," "Don't preach that man must obey God," "Don't preach about religious error," "Don't preach about worldliness," etc. While we agree that Christ must be preached in a positive way, we would do well to remember that gospel preaching includes reproving and rebuking, as well as exhorting (2 Tim. 4:2).

We need more Bible preachers – "speaking the truth in love" – those preachers who are more concerned about sound doctrine, than they are about job security. We need Bible preachers who will follow God's plan for gospel preaching.

Who will recognize that one man can make a difference. I heard a faithful gospel

preacher make this statement –

Let me tell you a secret. All of the politicians in America put together; all of the soldiers in uniform around the world; all of the missiles, and bayonets, and fighter planes don't compare with the power of one devoted Christian, and the blessing that he can be to the kingdom of God and the world at large. Flavil Nichols tells the story about a young woman who obeyed the gospel back during the War Between the States. When her boyfriend returned from the war, they were married. She taught her husband the gospel, and he soon became a Christian. He was so impressed with the truth he obeyed that he began to teach, and he baptized many of his friends and neighbors. It wasn't long after that this man went to a preaching school taught by T.B. Larimore. Upon completing his studies he moved to Walker, Marion, Fayette, and Lamar counties in Alabama.

One of his converts was Charley Alexander Wheeler. Brother Wheeler began preaching, and started more than 100 congregations, and baptized more than 6,000 people. One of those 6,000 was Flavil's father, Gus Nichols. Some 12,000 were baptized under his preaching. One of those was Flavil Nichols.

The point of the story is - one person can make a difference. We need more Bible preachers who will recognize that one man can make a difference.

Bible preachers are men of God, who stand shoulder to shoulder with preachers of the past. Bible preachers are men who are following God's plan for gospel preaching. Bible preachers, as individuals, can make a tremendous impact on the lives of countless numbers. May God give us more Bible preachers!

WOT

WHEN CONVENTION TRUMPS CONVICTION

Todd Clippard, Hamilton, Alabama

Most of you are aware of the firestorm that has broken out in the American Episcopal Church. By a vote of 62-47, the Episcopalian convention of bishops voted to appoint Gene Robinson, an openly homosexual priest, as the bishop of New Hampshire. Numerous bishops rose and spoke in protest after the vote, some raised black flags over their buildings, and there is talk about a formal division among that body.

I don't understand why anyone is surprised at this turn of events among Episcopalians; they have been moving steadily toward this position for decades. If one is willing to surrender Bible authority in one matter, what difference does it make to surrender it in any other? It is no secret among those who follow societal trends that the homosexual movement always follows on the heels of the feminist movement. The Episcopal leadership ordained their first female priest in 1976 and their first female bishop in 1989. That same year, homosexual bishop John Shelby Spong ordained an openly homosexual man as priest, and another homosexual was ordained the following year by Bishop Walter Righter.

Charges of heresy brought against Righter were dismissed in May of 1996. Is it any wonder they are now embroiled in this present controversy?

One thing I found interesting was the response of several after the vote. When questioned about the Bible's teaching concerning homosexuality, one bishop who voted in favor of appointing said, "You have to understand that we don't accept the Scriptures as the final authority. We believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit within our community." In other words, this bishop claimed the decision was directly influenced by the Holy Spirit. However, a bishop from Birmingham (a black flag flyer) contended the decision as flying in the face of Scripture.

I cannot help but ask the question, "If the Holy Spirit was indeed guiding this process, why wasn't the vote unanimous?" When questions about the influence of Judaizing teachers in Antioch arose in **Acts 15**, the matter was presented to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. In their reply is found this statement, "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us

have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled **with one accord**, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, **who shall also tell you the same things by mouth**" (Acts 15:24-27). Note the absence of, "We decided by a vote of 62-47" or dissent of any kind. Though the matter was hotly disputed (Acts 15:5-7), when the time came to make a decision, there was **unanimity**.

Lest there be any doubt or question, the decision of the Episcopal bishops would have still been wrong if they had voted 109-0 in favor of Robinson's ordination. The main point to consider is that difficulties will be encountered when one disregards the Bible plan for the organization and life of the church. In truth, this same problem plagues every false religious body. The Presbyterians, Methodists, and others are currently debating this same issue (the

acceptance of homosexual behavior). The Convention of the Assemblies of God recently changed that body's teaching on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, particularly as it applies to their clergy.

Finally, we should be aware of the trends among our own fellowship. As surely as day follows night, the homosexual issue will follow on the heels of the expanded role of women in worship. We must continue to be

a "people of the book" if we are going to avoid these same pitfalls.

[Editor's note: Ultimately, this issue is irrelevant as the Episcopal Church has no scriptural foundation for its existence. It was founded in 1534 when Pope Clement VII would not grant Henry VIII a divorce from Catherine of Aragon so he could marry Anne Boleyn. Henry divorced Catherine anyway, married Boleyn, and was subsequently

excommunicated by the Catholic Church. In response, Henry established the Church of England, naming himself as head and began a ruthless reign of terror against all who opposed his actions. I'd rather be a member of the church for which Jesus died than the one Henry VIII established so he could divorce his wife. *TC*]

WOT

INTEGRITY

Mike Benson, Evansville, Indiana

Rudolf was the product of a very religious home. As an adult, he was a quiet, mild-mannered family man.

History records that he was also an adept farmer. Much of his success in agriculture was due to a strict emphasis to detail, and not just his prowess with seed and soil. An acquaintance in government took note of Rudolf's proficiency in the field and offered him a position in the current administration. As expected, he proved himself to be a capable leader. In staccato-like fashion, Rudolf enjoyed a rapid series of promotions up the political hierarchy.

He was a man bound by habit. Each morning began with breakfast with his wife and five children. On his way to work, he would stop momentarily and enjoy the sweet fragrance of the blooms in his well-tended flower garden. He followed a strict work ethic; his days were filled with a routine of staff meetings, decisions, gathering information and issuing directives to his subordinates. At the close of his shift, Rudolf would return home to the warm embrace of his adoring helpmate. His children happily greeted him upon his arrival, because he often brought them little gifts from work.

His loyalty and dedication earned him the trust of the highest ranking official in the party. In 1940, he was assigned to a post 37 miles west of Krakow at the largest factory of its kind in southern Poland. Despite the relentless demands of his employer, Rudolf was able to meet his daily quota of ten thousand units. In fact, he performed his job so well that he was

commended in a report that called him "a true pioneer...because of his new ideas and educational methods."

From the bedroom window of his cozy home in the country, Rudolf could see the smoke stacks where he worked. The dark plumes that filled the air day in and day out served as silent testimony to his efficiency and diligence as a plant manager. Under his watchful eye (and the incessant prodding of his boss—Adolph Hitler), the Auschwitz death camp systematically exterminated somewhere in upwards of 2.5—3 million lives.

That's right. Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Hoess—"Death Dealer". The hard-working "business" manager. The loving husband. The gracious father who tucked his kids into bed each night. The man whose father had brought him up to be a Catholic priest. And the chief architect and SS Commandant of the largest killing center ever perpetrated against mankind.

In May 1941, SS Commander Heinrich Himmler informed Hoess that the Fuhrer had given orders for "the final solution to the Jewish question" (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1946_hoess.html). Hoess understood and installed huge gas chambers and a crematoria. Within a short time, mass murder was conducted on an industrial scale. Hundreds of thousands were poisoned with cyanide gas Zyklon B. Hundreds of thousands were tortured, shot, or burned to death. A half million or more died from starvation and disease. Still others, including children, were handed

over to so-called camp doctors. "Patients" were forced into pressure chambers, injected with experimental drugs, castrated, frozen to death and exposed to hosts of other agonizing traumas.

How could Hoess not see the blatant inconsistencies in his life? How could he overlook the glaring moral contradictions? How could he count mountains of ghastly corpses, and then go home to the tender affections of his wife and five children? How could he be so incredibly brutal one moment, and yet so genteel the next?

The answer to these questions is profound. Are you ready for this...? Rudolf Hoess "compartmentalized" his soul (Jas. 1:8; cf. Prov. 19:1). He separated his home life from his "vocational" life. He mentally differentiated between the inferno of Auschwitz and the quiet refuge of his residence in the country. He somehow embraced the intellectual dogmas of his religious upbringing as well as the rabid inhumanity of Nazism. In short, Rudolf Hoess lacked *integrity*.

Dear brethren, we cannot sub-divide our souls. We cannot and must not partition our inner beings. Christian men are the same in every circumstance. We are authentic in either darkness or light. Whether under the discriminating eye of our family and peers, or alone in a quiet room, our actions are consistent, uniform and submissive to the revealed will of God. We harbor no duplicity within. There is no hypocrisy (1 Kgs. 9:4; Job 2:3, 9; 27:5; 31:6; Psm. 7:8; 26:1, 11; Prov. 10:9; Tit. 2:7):

- We can't condemn beverage alcohol and then "join in" with our business associates at a local restaurant over dinner.
- We can't sing "Purer in heart, O God, help me to be" and then surf the internet to indulge in lustful fantasy.
- We can't appear cool and collected in the office and then be volatile and explosive with our family.
- We can't tell our children to be fair and honest, and then cheat on our own income taxes.
- We can't offer a warm handshake to our brethren before worship and then verbally berate our spouses on the way home in the car.
- We can't speak caring tones on Sunday and then fire off a string of profanity on Monday.
- We can't support elders and preachers in public prayer and then verbally pick them apart when they are out of earshot.
- We can't talk about the need for zeal

and spiritual direction in the church, but then fail to offer long-term, legitimate effort on behalf of the church ourselves.

The Bible says, "*The righteous man walks in his integrity...*" (Prov. 20:7). Think for just a moment, what are you really like "behind the scenes" (Psm. 139:23)? Are you sincere (1 Tim. 1:5; Phil. 1:10; cf. Phil. 1:16; 2:20; 2 Cor. 6:6)? Are you genuine?

WOT

SMALL THINGS

Hugo McCord, 1911-2004

In a biology class of yesteryears the professor asked a student, "What is life?" The student replied, "I did know, but I have forgotten." Then the professor remarked, "What a pity! The only person who has ever known what life is in this room, and he has forgotten!"

In the 21st century scientists still do not know what life is. All they can say is that life is:

that property of plants and animals which makes it possible for them to take in food, get energy from it, grow, adapt themselves to their surroundings, and reproduce their kind (Webster).

However, on December 10, 1998, came a startling announcement:

In a big advance in the race to understand the blueprint of life, scientists announced Thursday that they have, for the first time, mapped the complete genetic instructions for making a living animal (THE OREGONIAN, 12-11-1998).

Thousands of dead animals have been made, especially the teddy bear, "a stuffed toy for children resembling a bear in miniature" (Webster). But is it possible for scientists to make a "living animal"? They believe that they have learned how to make a living animal by studying a very small animal:

I. THE ROUNDWORM

A tiny roundworm (c. *elegans*) is by

far the most complex creature to have virtually all the components of its DNA ["an essential component of all living matter," Webster] mapped. Although it would take 25 of the worms lined up end to end to fill an inch, it has a nervous system, eats, grows, reproduces sexually, ages and dies (THE OREGONIAN, 12-11-1998).

Unbelievable! One twenty-fifth of an inch long with amazing abilities! How did the roundworm obtain a nervous system? How did it learn to eat? What makes it grow? Who or what installed sexual reproduction in that tiny creature? With all those marvelous qualities, why does it grow old and die?

Those are questions which neither a non-talking roundworm nor a well-trained scientist can answer. But, three thousand years ago, a man wrote, "The Spirit of Yahweh spoke by me, and his word was upon my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2), a statement that gives a complete answer:

How great are your works, O Yahweh! In wisdom you made all of them. The earth is full of your creatures (Psalm 104:24).

Zechariah was not writing about earthworms when he asked, "[W]ho has despised the day of small things?" (4:10), but a tiny roundworm silently tells us about the Creator's "eternal power and divine nature," being "understood by the things

that are made" (Romans 1:20).

II. TWO LITTLE FEET

A small thing was handed to me in Portland, Oregon, by Walter Masters, a visiting elder of the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ in Moundsville, West Virginia. He took the small thing from his coat lapel: a tiny piece of yellow brass in the form of two human feet, with ten toes, only three-eighths of an inch long.

I was told that these "feet are the exact size and shape of an unborn baby's feet at ten weeks after conception"! Unbelievable! I was told that "The International Pro-Life Symbol" is "Precious Feet." If, at ten weeks, they are three-eighths of an inch long, how small were they at the day of conception!

If you would like a meaningful lapel ornament called "Precious Feet," write to Heritage House, 919 S. Main, Snowflake, AZ 85937, or call their toll-free number: 1-800-858-3040. Along with the attention-getting pin, Heritage House will send you a card with these words:

When people see your Precious Feet pin you have the opportunity to share about the humanity of the unborn. At 10 weeks an unborn baby is perfectly formed--right down to his toes! All that is needed is time to grow. The unborn cannot speak for themselves: You speak for them by wearing Precious Feet.

WOT

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Question: *How is conflict resolved among brethren?*

"When one has a difficulty with another person, the Bible teaches (where?) that we should go to them with our issue. If we find no satisfaction, no justice, we are called to go with a friend or two. If that does not work, we are called to go to the church. Is this correct? How does this process work?"

Answer: I believe the passage in question is Matthew 18:15-17 . . .

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

This is the God-given procedure for conflict resolution in matters pertaining to private sins between two brethren. Unfortunately, this passage is one of the most ignored among all the commands of the New Testament. In most cases, the offended one tells everyone else what the offender has done before trying to correct the

problem as Jesus commands.

Take note how the three steps are to be followed:

1) If my brother sins against me, I am to go to him and explain, or convince him of his error. It may be the brother is unaware of his sin. Therefore, it behooves me to speak to him in such a way as to help him to "hear me." Remember! "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness" (Prov 15:1). The attitude of the offended may be the most vital element in conflict resolution.

2) If your brother will not hear you when you plead your cause, then you are to take two or three witnesses, (not friends as noted in your inquiry), that every word may be established. What is meant in this latter phrase is not that they are witnesses to the offense in question, but that they are present to hear the case before them, and are able render an unbiased judgment as to whom, if anyone, has been wronged. Taking one's friends gives the appearance of bias and "ganging up on" the offending brother. An elder, deacon, or preacher may make appropriate witnesses, and I would always advise that at least one witness be an elder (if possible). Perhaps an older brother or sister who is highly respected by the offending one should be included.

3) But if the offender will not hear these brethren, then the matter must be brought to the attention of the church. It then becomes the responsibility of every church member to seek out the offending brother and plead with him to repent and correct the situation. This

may take several days, perhaps a few weeks. If the offender will not hear the church, then the church is to shun that brother; they must withdraw themselves from the disorderly member (2 Thes 3:6, 14). He is not to be treated as an enemy, but to be admonished as a brother (2 Thes 3:15). With such an one, we are commanded not even to eat with them (1 Cor 5:11).

Withdrawing fellowship from an unrepentant brother is the last step in a series of loving admonitions to convert the sinner from the error of his way to save his soul from death (Jam 5:19-20).

Tragically, most churches do not practice any form of discipline today. Because of this, members feel no shame about their sin and no responsibility to live lives of holiness (Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:15-16; 2 Cor 7:1). Undoubtedly many Christians will lose their souls because the church has failed to practice that which is clearly and unequivocally commanded by our Lord and His apostles. Godly elders must rise up and lead the local flock in the ways of God, "taking the oversight thereof" (1 Pet 5:2), not allowing the sheep to "come and go as they please," and certainly not ignoring them as they live like goats (Matt 25:21-46).

--Todd Clippard, Hamilton, Alabama


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

JESUS GIVES “CHURCH” MEANING

Eric Lyons, Montgomery, Alabama

The Greek word ekklesia, translated as “church” in most English Bibles, simply means “assembly.” In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, “I will build my church (ekklesia).” Hence, we could read this verse, “I (Jesus) will build my assembly.” Paul wrote, “The churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16). Again, this word translated “churches” could be translated “assemblies.”

Interestingly, the same term used in the two verses above (ekklesia) also is used at times in reference to secular assemblies. For example, in Acts 19:32 the term ekklesia is used to speak of the mob at Ephesus. The text reads: “Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly (ekklesia) was confused.”

One might ask, “How do I know if the text is speaking about a secular assembly or the church?” Answer: The modifying words in the context of a particular passage are what make it possible to distinguish the kind of assembly to which the Bible writers were referring. We know that the assemblies Paul mentioned in Romans 16:16 are churches because ekklesia is modified by the phrase “of Christ.” Likewise, in Acts 20:28, we know the assembly mentioned is the church because it is modified by the phrase, “of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (emp. added). The word “assembly” is set apart from secular assemblies in these passages because the context points to a group of people owned by Christ.

The religious world needs to understand that Jesus is the one who gives ekklesia meaning. When mere human names and terms are placed alongside “church,” then the name no longer possesses the meaning that God intended for it to have. Christians should wear the name of Christ (and Christ only) because He purchased the church (Acts 20:28) and said it was His (Matthew 16:18).

Without the work of Jesus, nothing would separate us from man-made assemblies. He gave ekklesia a new meaning in the first century, and continues to give it meaning today when we wear His name.

The Words of Truth

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

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WOT

The words of *Truth*

CHUCK WEBSTER, EDITOR

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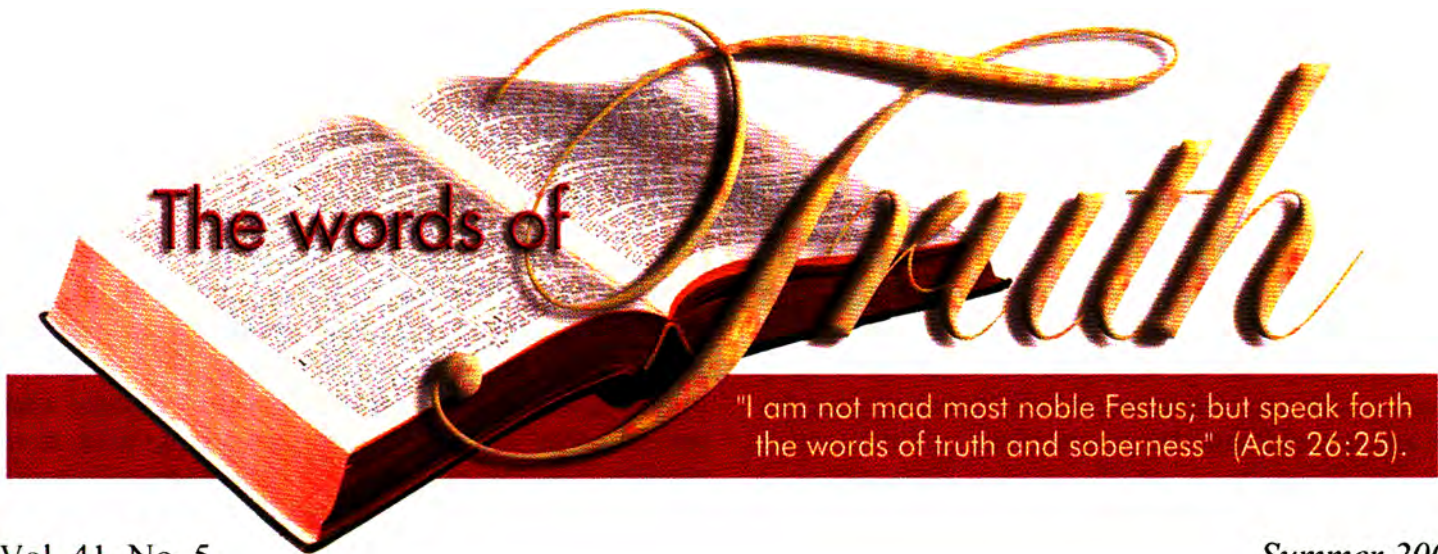
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Please send all correspondence to:

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

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Summer 2004

WHAT DO YOU WANT ON YOUR TOMBSTONE?

Doug Burluson, Goodwood Blvd. Church of Christ, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Everybody leaves some kind of legacy. We will all be remembered for something. We live in a world that strives to be remembered for great accomplishments that are forever memorialized in the history books, huge estates, or perhaps even a statue or building dedicated in our honor. As I think about leaving a legacy I cannot help but remember the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:26-35. As we think about the kind of legacies we want to leave, notice five things Paul said that he had accomplished in his life.

First, Paul was compassionate (Acts 20:26). Through his tears Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he was "*pure from the blood of all men.*" People had tried to kill him on numerous occasions, yet Paul was patient and always sought the good of others, even when it came at his own expense.

Second, Paul was truthful (Acts 20:27). Paul had not "*shunned to declare all the counsel of God.*" We all know that some lessons are easier to teach or preach than others. A good test of integrity comes when we are faced with a real challenge and we choose to follow and proclaim God's will rather than our own will.

Third, Paul was an encourager (Acts 20:31). Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that for three years he did not cease to "*warn every one night and day with tears.*" Of all the people gathered on the shores of

Miletus that day, Paul had more of a reason to ask for encouragement than anyone else. He had suffered more and worked harder than most of us ever even consider and yet he continued giving. Through the imprisonments, beatings, trials, shipwreck, rejection, and general suffering he always had an encouraging word.

Fourth, Paul was content (Acts 20:33). He reminds us that he had "*coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.*" Paul had sacrificed much to be an evangelist and yet he found contentment by focusing on things above. Instead of trying to climb the social ladder, Paul was content to put others before himself.

Finally, Paul reminds us that he was a hard worker (Acts 20:34-35). He worked hard with his own hands to build up others and emulate the life of the Lord. I am sure there were many days when Paul was tempted to sit back and take it easy and yet he was driven by his passion to reach the lost with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I would remind you that this picture we get near the end of his life is a far cry from where we see Paul in Acts 9, as a Christian-killer. This is the power that God can have in our lives. His word transforms us. I pray that we will all seek this kind of epitaph and live lives that give God the glory!

WOT

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Ted D. Burleson, Editorial

Peter has left the imprint of his personality on the world in such a way that it cannot be forgotten. He has helped spread a kingdom that will endure forever. But along the way he lost many battles and made many blunders. His spiritual maturity did not come in a day nor was it accidental. He was human.

Two Views of Peter

There are indicators of inward, spiritual maturity just as there are indications of outward, physical maturity. By observing life we can note the development of spiritual maturity. There are two views of Peter presented in the New Testament. First, we get to know Peter as a young Christian. There were few noteworthy characteristics in his life yet the Lord said of his possibilities, *"Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone"* (John 1:42).

The second view of Peter is from the close of his life after he had matured spiritually. Peter, an older man who was facing death wrote, *"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance"* (2 Peter 1:14, 15). Peter looked for a better life beyond the grave. *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:13).

Peter's Eyes Were Opened with a New Vision for Life

Jesus called Peter to serve Him (Mark 1:16, 18). Before this call, Peter's highest ambition was to catch more fish than the day before. But when Christ called him, his eyes were opened with a new vision for life.

Life was more than working, catching fish, and mending nets. He left all to follow Christ and that hour marked the start of his spiritual maturity.

The new vision for living that Peter found in following Christ is the same discovery we make when we find that life is more than working in a store, keeping house, selling products or manufacturing goods. It is to see that life is a divine vocation (Ephesians 4:1) and that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15).

Peter's Big Step

The story of Peter's big step is found in Matthew 16:13-19. Peter had matured enough to understand that Christ is God's Son and is more than a mere man. His doubt was replaced with faith.

Peter's Lesson on Love

The record of Peter learning a valuable lesson on love is found in John 21:1-17. While this part of his life was marked by some of the oddest and most humiliating experiences of his life, Peter learned about love. He had blundered, denied Christ, and given up in despair. Peter learned that Christ still loved him and had plans for his life. He learned that love equips one for service (cf. John 21:16, "Lovest thou me?"). For spiritual maturity to develop there must be love in the heart.

Conclusion

We see how Peter lived and grew out of ignorance, weakness and prejudice into a life of joy and peace. He was soon to be put to death but he evidently had no fear for he was living in accordance with God's divine will.

WOT

Editor's Note: Thanks to brother Brandon Jackson for doing such a splendid job editing the previous (Spring) issue of *Words of Truth*. Readers will note that this issue is dated "Summer 2004." The Lord willing, we will be back on schedule with an October edition in the near future. Thank you for your patience.

CHILDREN NEED PARENTS—NOT PALS

Sellers S. Crain, Jr., Rivergate Church of Christ, Madison, Tennessee

A few weeks ago a national politician in a public address advocated allowing states to decide the issue of “homosexual marriage” instead of endorsing a constitutional amendment which would prevent such unions from taking place. He also openly voiced his support for his daughter’s lesbian lifestyle. She currently has a leading role in his political campaign.

It is my hope that no Bible believing Christian would support “homosexual marriages,” since the Bible plainly condemns homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). While my convictions on this matter have been clearly stated on a number of occasions, it is not that issue which disturbed me most about the politician’s speech. It was endorsing a sinful lifestyle simply because his daughter chooses to live that way.

It is a common occurrence today to hear parents say, “I support my child no matter what they do!” I have heard this expression from parents whose child is living in an ungodly sexual relationship, or were not a Christian. I love my children as much as any parent could, but I will not make a statement such as that. I cannot and will not support my children in anything that is sinful. They know this, and I don’t believe they would expect me to make such a claim to love them—absolutely—, and I will no matter what they do. That will never stop, but I will not support them in any sinful conduct or actions. There is a vast difference in loving my child and supporting them in sinful behavior.

In contrast to this politician’s support of his daughter’s homosexual lifestyle is the Utah family of the confessed killer of his pregnant wife and unborn child. They love their son too, that is clear, but they are not supporting his ungodly actions. Instead they are supporting the grieving family of their deceased daughter-in-law. It had to be hard for them to admit to themselves that their son committed this horrible act. Can you even imagine the pain and heartbreak that revelation brought? Yet it was his own family who convinced him to tell the painful truth and to confess what he had done. Their actions took real love, both for him, and for their daughter-in-law and her family.

Many parents today have stopped being parents. They are afraid they will lose their children’s love or respect if they tell them “No,” or if they refuse them their heart’s desire. We are not to be our children’s pals; we are commanded to be their parents (Deuteronomy 6:6-25; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20, 21). This means holding them to a high moral standard, imparting spiritual values, expecting them to respect your values, training them, correcting them, disciplining them when necessary, and being the right kind of example for them to follow. When those children are grown, they will love you more for having done these things than they will if you failed to provide for them the guidance and instruction they needed. WCF

WILL YOUR CHILDREN GO TO HEAVEN?

Daniel Whitworth, 1960-2004

Elders all over the nation are concerned about the “drop- out rate” of our young people. And well they ought to be. It is a tragic thing to see these precious boys and girls, who are so thrilled with Bible study as little people, grow cold and uninterested in the Lord’s work as they grow older. Lately, several congregations have made in-depth studies of all the factors available concerning all their young people, with an eye to learning what might be done to help solve this problem. What do we need? More youth programs? More youth rallies?

From the material that has been published on these studies, it seems to me that one great central truth has begun to emerge. Faithfulness of the young person to Jesus doesn’t have anything to do with special programs or teachers. It is not dependent on whether they are

members of a large congregation or a small one. The single most important value is their own family.

One congregation found that where both parents were faithful to the Lord, 93% of the kids remained faithful. On the other hand, if only one of the parents was faithful, that figure dropped to 73%. Where parents were only what we call reasonably active in the Lord’s work, only 53% of the young people maintained their faith.

Now comes the shocker. In those cases where both parents attended only infrequently, the percentage of their children remaining faithful to the Lord dropped to 6%. Do you want your children to go to heaven? Make sure you are leading them by your faithful example.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Our brother Daniel Whitworth went to be with the Lord on September 16, 2004. WCF

TUESDAYS (& THURSDAYS) WITH DOWELL

Joey Sparks, Jasper, Alabama, Student at Freed-Hardeman University

A little over a year ago, I lost my favorite teacher, Dr. Dowell Flatt. I offer this small tribute to him because of the great deal that he gave to me. The similarities to Mith Albom's Tuesdays with Morrie are intended.

There are times in our daily lives when we just can't help but think. Think about life; think about death; think about good; think about bad; sometimes we just think. Everyone has his or her own times and places that trigger memories. For me, as a sophomore at Freed-Hardeman University, that time to think lasted from 7:30 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Beginning with my walk from Benson Dorm to Garner Center, Room 210, that hour and a half was my "think zone." Even though as a 20-year-old I would rather be in bed at 7:30 a.m. on most mornings, in this case I didn't mind the fact that I was awake; I didn't mind thinking either. Why was I awake at 7:30, yet didn't mind? It was New Testament Greek IV. During this class time, I would think more about the Bible, about Greek, about God, about life than I would during any part of the rest of the day. I spent my Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:30 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. with Dr. Dowell Flatt.

Dr. Flatt was 62 years old, but seemed older. Maybe it was his failing health, maybe it was his unmatched wisdom, maybe it was his deep knowledge, or maybe it was his hunched back, glasses, balding head, and soft eyes (several students lovingly nicknamed him "Yoda" from the Star Wars movies). Whatever it was, he seemed like a man who had been through it all, witnessed it all, had it all figured out, and thanked God for it all. He had noticeably fought many battles. He fought battles against false doctrine and denominationalism. He fought against departures from the truth that came from within. He fought for Christian education. He fought for the hearts and souls of the lost. He fought the good fight of faith. However, I am convinced that his toughest battle was against Depression. For almost two decades he had dealt with intense headaches, loneliness, confusion, criticisms, and unanswered questions about his debilitating condition. He was proud to say that in his time of dealing with the disease, he had only spent two periods of time in the hospital. Once at the time of diagnosis and once again in December of 2002—right before I was to have him for class again (I had previously had him for NT Greek I and II in 2001-2002).

Those of us who were privileged to have been around him knew that he was fighting this battle and that he was

fighting it hard. Not long after leaving the hospital in December, he began selling his tract, "Dealing with Depression" (available from Hester Publications in Henderson, TN). In this tract and in his speaking engagements related to the topic, he cleared up many myths about Depression: he established that it is not related to faithfulness to God, that it is a disease, that it can be treated, and that it can be defeated at the end of this life with God's help. The emotional conclusion to his presentation ended with him looking forward to standing in heaven with his cousin Lester Flatt (yes, the Flatt in Flatt and Scruggs), who also suffered many health problems, and proclaiming, "Depression is ancient history!" His tract sold like wild fire. He kept us informed in class about how well it was selling. It was helping people who suffered from Depression as well as those who didn't suffer from it. I always told myself that I needed to buy one. I never got around to it. Luckily, I had the real thing—I had the man who had dealt with this crippling disease, looked it in the eyes, come to grips with many of its perils, and looked to Jesus on the other side. He wasn't living proof that Depression could be cured, for it couldn't. However, he was living proof that it could be dealt with while remaining faithful to God.

I thought a lot at 7:30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays that semester. Sure, I thought about New Testament Koine Greek, James, Colossians, and Textual Criticism. But I also thought about the many life lessons imparted to us by Dr. Flatt. He emphasized simple things like loving your wife, respecting authority, saying "thank you," saying "you're welcome," remembering your family heritage, taking your medicine properly, being honest, printing clearly, and taking time to do things well. He also displayed many deeper character traits that we all should strive for: humility in prayer (he led the best prayers of anyone I have known), accountability for assigned work, meditation on the words of songs, and many others. Of the many times I learned something from Dr. Flatt outside the classroom, two events stand out from the rest:

The first occurred when he changed my "B" in NT Greek II to an "A" (that kept my GPA at 4.0). He called me one Wednesday morning and told me that he had just arrived back home from Africa and that "a man does a lot of thinking when he's flying over the ocean." He told me that because of my perfect attendance and good attitude, he was changing my grade. I had never fully understood

grace until that morning—I know I deserved a “B.”

The second of those two events occurred on August 4, 2004. On this warm summer day, Dr. Flatt tragically took his own life. Among all of us who loved him so dearly—mental and physical health professions, his family, and friends—no one knows what he was thinking that day. Chances are, because of Depression, he wasn’t thinking clearly and certainly wasn’t himself. Of all the thoughts that have raced through my head since that August day, the most comforting have come from the dear gentleman himself. He taught me to cherish the Bible. In times like these where answers are not to be found, it offers the constant reminder that Jesus is the ultimate answer and everything will be alright with him. The Bible has comforted me like no other. He had also encouraged us students heavily in February of that year to attend FHU’s Annual Bible Lectureship. That year’s title was, “When We Hurt: Triumph and Tragedy in Job.” Today, those lectures that he encouraged me to attend will help me to deal with his untimely passing. One of the most memorable things I learned from those lectures was the fact that Job, while he was on the earth, never got an answer to why he was suffering. Like Job, we may never get answers, but we still have God, and he is more than enough to see us through. He also taught us that

Philippians 4:13 is better translated, “*I can endure all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” Through Christ, I know that his wife, Mrs. Della, Dr. Flatt’s family, his many beloved students, his fellow faculty members, and even, I, myself, can endure the pain and unanswered questions that have been left in the wake of his death.

On August 7, 2003, I was at it again. I was thinking. I was thinking about life, about death, about good, about bad. Mostly I was thinking about my friend, Dr. Flatt. It was the day of his funeral in Henderson and I was traveling three hours to say goodbye with the hundreds of others who were gathered there. It was not the ideal way to say goodbye to such a loved one, and it was not the ideal way I would have like to spend that morning right before I went back to school for my Junior year. But for some reason, I was at peace. For some reason, I was in my “think zone.” For some reason, everything seemed to make sense, even if it were but for a moment. Then, I looked at the clock in the car and realized why: it was 7:30 a.m.—on a Thursday.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Those of us who have been privileged to sit at the feet of brother Flatt can greatly appreciate this fine article by brother Sparks. WOT

JESUS KNOWS, JESUS CARES

Todd Clippard, Burlison Church of Christ, Hamilton, Alabama

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Hebrews 2:17, 18 KJV).

The primary purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ was to die for the sins of all mankind (cf. 1 John 2:1-2). “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift (that which is unearned/unmerited) of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6:23). Because of the absolute holiness of God, sin is an affront to the very nature and essence of God (Habakkuk 1:13). The only suitable punishment for sin is eternal separation from God. Thus, there is no work we may perform in our bodies to atone or pay for our sin.

From the days immediately following the creation,

animal sacrifices were offered for sins in accordance with the word of God (Genesis 4:3-5; Hebrews 11:4; Romans 10:17). But until the coming of Jesus Christ, there was no way to obtain the absolute remission of sins: “*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins*” (Hebrews 10:4).

A secondary purpose of the coming of Jesus was to experience firsthand the manifold trials and temptations of man. Jesus “*was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). Having successfully overcome all temptations such as are common to man, Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sins (1 Peter 1:18-22; 2 Cor. 5:21).

In addition to being the perfect, spotless sacrifice for sins, Jesus also serves as our Advocate (1 John 2:1, 2). Now seated at the right hand of God, Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). If I were ever to need a lawyer in matters pertaining to this life, I would

certainly want someone who had shared many of my life experiences, particularly those pertaining to matters requiring mediation. I would want someone who understood my feelings and appreciated my place in life. This experience, combined with training in matters of law, makes for a sympathetic and most effective mediator.

As being both the Son of God (John 9:35-37) and the Son of Man (John 8:28), there is none more qualified to serve as our spiritual Mediator than Jesus. In matters pertaining to sin and spirituality, no angel understands the plight of man: *"For unto which of the angels said he*

at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" (Hebrews 1:5). Jesus, as both Divine and human (John 1:1-4, 14), is uniquely qualified to serve as our Advocate and Intercessor before God: *"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted"* (Hebrews 2:18). What a wonderful and comforting thought! No temptation is beyond his understanding; no problem we face is beneath his concern; no heartache we feel is beyond the scope of his care: *"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). WCT

MISTAKES WE SHOULD NOT MAKE

Johnny Ramsey, Weatherford, Texas

Romans 15:4 tells us to profit from the miscues of the past, but, sadly, history often repeats itself because folk 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 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 (Romans 5:12) and separated man from God (Isaiah 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 is greater (1 Corinthians 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 who thought he could fool God (Galatians 6:7). Many today live and act as though they can fool the Creator—but they are mistaken (Numbers 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 folk 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 Corinthians 9:6-11) we remove much of the joy and adventure from our relationship with the One who gave all for us (2 Corinthians 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 (Galatians 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 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 defiantly wrong and say: "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 folk 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" (Romans 15:4). WCT

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Andy Kizer, 9th Avenue Church of Christ, Haleyville, Alabama



Question: Are there biblical principles which condemn gambling?

Answer: Gambling is not just playing a game of chance. One has a chance of winning or losing in any competition. One also takes a risk when he rides in an airplane or car. However, gambling involves the taking of chance specifically for money or another stake, and here it comes to variance with the word of God. Gambling, from betting on horses to matching coins for soft drinks, is morally wrong. It is wrong because it violates many biblical principles, but space will allow me to mention only four. That should be enough for anyone who really wants to do what pleases God to make a decision.

1. Gambling is morally wrong because the Bible condemns covetousness (Romans 13:9). That other equally covetous persons enter a gambling agreement (which is a mutual agreement to steal from one another) does not keep it from being motivated by a strong

sense of covetousness. To covet is "to desire earnestly (and inordinately) to obtain or possess."

2. Gambling is morally wrong because it violates the principle of work (cf. Ephesians 4:28). "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor...."
3. Gambling is wrong because it, without need, risks our possessions which are a trust or stewardship from God (cf. 1 Peter 4:10), and of which we will some day give full account (cf. Eccl. 12:14).
4. Gambling is morally wrong because it violates the biblical principle of love (Matthew 7:12) when we seek to gain something from another at his expense without giving anything in return (Also, cf. 1 Corinthians 5:11; 10:24; 1 Timothy 6:10f).



Question: Can a woman be an elder of the Lord's Church?

Answer: God inspired Paul to list the qualifications of elders twice. These are qualities, attributes, and conditions that must be found in individuals before they can serve God and his church in the extremely important office of a bishop (elder). To Timothy, Paul wrote that the overseer must be

"the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2). This implies (and we necessarily infer) that elders must be men, for men are husbands who have women as wives. To make this even clearer, the original Greek New Testament gives the word for "husband" in the masculine gender, and all the following adjectives (e.g., "temperate," "sensible," "orderly," "hospitable," etc.) are also in the masculine gender. Moreover, the "overseer" (NASV) or "bishop" (KJV, ASV) whom the qualifications describe, is also masculine in gender. There is definitely a reason that as you read through this list of things necessary to qualify one for the eldership, you see the pronoun "he" some six times.

This same list of qualifications is found again in the letter to Titus. This time Paul said the list refers to "elders" (Titus 1:5), and the word he used is definitely in the masculine gender. In verse seven, he called them "bishops" or "overseers." Though a different Greek word is used it is still in the masculine gender. As in Timothy's letter, so it is in the letter to Titus, that the elder (overseer or bishop) must be the husband (male gender) of one wife (female gender).

When we are led by the word of God, we understand that a woman cannot possibly be an elder in the Lord's church. Such practice would be anti-Scriptural and a mockery of true religion. *WOT*

WHAT HAS THE WORLD COME TO?

*Garvis Semore, Lehman Avenue Church of Christ,
Bowling Green, KY*

If I'm not careful I can find myself looking at the world around me and asking the question, "What has this world come to?" When looking at this great nation, especially in light of the apparent loss of morality, I ask a similar question. I can even be guilty of looking at the church with its flaws, feuds, and fights, and asking, "What has the Church come to?"

Perhaps I (and many others just like me) am asking the wrong question. E. Stanley Jones published a devotional book called Abundant Living in 1942. Jones reminds us of the early church. "The early Christians did not say in dismay, 'Look what the world has come to,' but in delight, 'Look what has come to the world.' They saw not merely the ruin, but the Resource for the reconstruction from that ruin. They saw not merely that sin did abound, but that grace did much more abound. On that assurance the pivot of history swung from blank despair, loss of moral nerve, and fatalism, to faith and confidence that at last sin had met its match."

Look what has come to the world! Are any of my problems, concerns, complaints, or fears too big for the One who has come into the world? The early disciples were accused of turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6) because they understood the One who had come into the world. Today we tend to be more interested in conforming and fitting into the world than turning it upside down. Have we lost our zeal? Have we forgotten what has come into the world?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God has come into the world. I can do all things through Him (Philippians 4:13). He continues to be the head of the church and all things remain under his feet (Ephesians 1:22). What am I worried about? Look what has come into the world!

WOT

The Words of Truth

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BUCK WEBSTER, EDITOR

The Words of Truth

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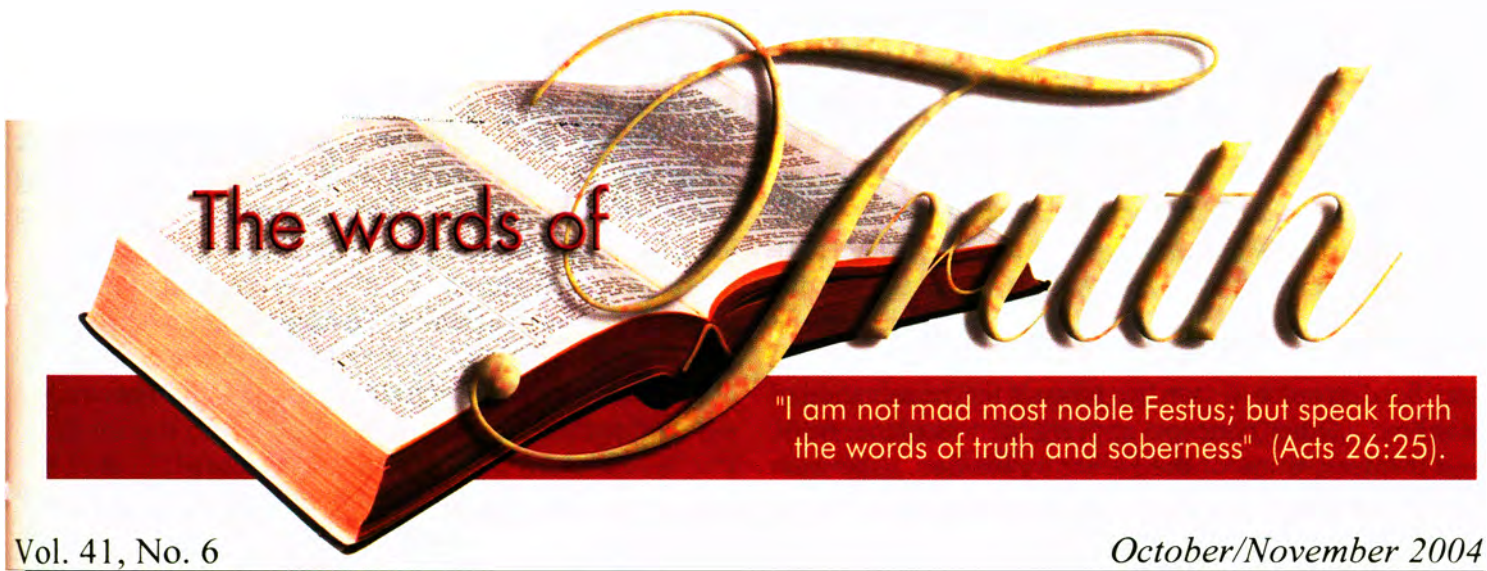
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The Words of Truth

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

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JESUS IS THE WORD

Jeremy T. Butt, West Seventh Street Church of Christ, Columbia, Tennessee

In John's account of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we have a beginning chapter that is unlike any of the three synoptic accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Jesus is depicted as the Word in the prologue, and it is in these eighteen verses that we find a simple outline that is easy to follow.

The Word Was... (1:1-5)

There are basically four things taught in these first five verses. First, the Word was always. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God"* (1:1-2). The writer lets us know that Jesus has always been around. He was not created. Second, the Word was deity. *"...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (1:1b). When Christ is linked with the Father in a unified relationship how could anyone say that Jesus was just a man? Third, the Word was creation. *"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made"* (1:3). Most of us probably were not taught that Jesus had a hand in the act of creation, but it is taught in this passage. Fourth, the Word was enlightening. *"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness*

comprehended it not" (1:4, 5). Here we see the light of Jesus contrasted with the darkness of the world.

The Word Witnessed (1:6-8)

In this short passage, John the Baptist's identity and purpose are clarified. Yes, his name was John, but he was sent from God (1:6). No, he was not the light, but he is later called *"a lamp"* by Christ in 5:35 (1:8). His purpose was *"to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe"* (1:7).

The Word Illuminated (1:9-13)

In contrast with the Baptist, the Word (Jesus) is the true Light (1:9). Even though the thought in verse ten carries us back to the creative participation of Jesus, John says that *"the world knew him not"* (1:10b). The true Light grants us special rights as the children of God if we receive him and are born again (1:12-13). The true Light, despite the fact that the darkness did not comprehend it (1:5), still shined to enlighten every person (1:9). Those that have received him have taken advantage of the benefits of his kingdom (1:12), but those that do not accept him like the Jews (1:11) cannot experience these benefits.

(Continued on next page)

Jesus is the Word (continued from page one)

The Word Incarnate (1:14-18)

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (1:14). Jesus left the comforts and royalties of being with the Father in order to come to earth and die on the cross for us. Many people do not understand what Christ sacrificed in order to sacrifice himself for the salvation of mankind. Other concepts appear, such as grace, truth, and the declaration of the Father by the Son. *“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”* (1:18).

It is in these eighteen verses that John sets up the rest

of his gospel account, not so much in continuing to refer to Jesus as the Word, but to discuss what Jesus was, what the witness did, what the light does, and the whole meaning of Jesus coming in the flesh. The following series of articles aims at addressing some of the issues in John's Gospel account. WOT

Follow-up Questions

1. What does it mean that the darkness did not comprehend the light?
2. What does it mean to be born of God in John 1:13?
3. What was the purpose of John the Baptist? (John 1:7).

EDITOR'S NOTE: Thanks to brother Jeremy T. Butt for accepting my invitation to write most of the articles for this edition of *Words of Truth*. Brother Butt serves as one of the preachers for the West Seventh Street Church of Christ in Columbia, Tennessee, where I was privileged to serve as an evangelist for the past sixteen years. Jeremy was raised in Portland, Tennessee, and is a humble servant of the Lord that has a bright future in the kingdom. We have added questions at the end of most of the articles so they can be used in Bible classes and study groups. Please give us feedback on the use of such questions.

AN OUTLINE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

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THE “I AM” STATEMENTS OF JESUS

Jeremy T. Butt

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus makes several metaphorical statements about Himself. In fact, there are seven instances in which He makes these bold self-proclamations about His character and work. The following “I am” statements made by Jesus will be the basis for our discussion: “*I am the bread of life*”; “*I am the light of the world*”; “*I am the door of the sheep*”; “*I am the good shepherd*”; “*I am the resurrection and the life*”; “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*”; and “*I am the true vine.*”

“I am the bread of life” (John 6:35)

The people started a discussion about the bread that God provided from Heaven in the desert during their wandering in the wilderness, attesting that they are thinking about physical food. Jesus focused not on physical food, but on spiritual food when He says “*I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst*” (6:35). This bread came from Heaven also, but it was no kind of culinary delight; rather, it was a Heavenly one (6:33). The bread that Jesus is talking about is the spiritual food we have through life in Christ Jesus.

“I am the light of the world”(John 8:12)

The next “I am” statement of Jesus takes us back to the concept of light that John discussed in the prologue in 1:4-9. In a world of darkness where Satan thrives, people need a light. According to this text, Jesus is that light. What is interesting is that this conversation takes place after the story of the woman caught in adultery in 8:1-11. Is there a connection between them? It is hard to say, but a sinful lifestyle is one lived in darkness. Those in the dark need a light to guide their way so they do not stumble. If Jesus makes us an offer to provide us with this light, why would we choose to walk around in the dark?

“I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7)

Closely tied in with the next “I am” statement, Jesus talks about the only way to get into His fold. We know that the church is His fold, and we become a part of it when we are obedient believers. He says “*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*” (1:9). We know the only way into the Lord’s church is through Jesus Christ.

“I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11)

Still on the sheep theme, Jesus stresses His role as the shepherd. “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*” (1:11). Christ made the ultimate sacrifice by dying on the cross for the remission of our sins once for all (Hebrews 10:10). Jesus said to his disciples, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). He has taken the necessary steps to protect His fold as the good shepherd.

“I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)

Amidst the story of Lazarus, Jesus makes a comment to Martha, “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*” (John 11:25). Shortly, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, even after he had been dead about four days. On a similar note, if we have become baptized believers in Christ, we encounter our own death, burial, and resurrection in a newness of life (Romans 6:3-5).

“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)

Jesus has just told his disciples of the glories that await them in Heaven, and He assured them that He is coming back for them (John 14:2-3). He says “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (14:6). The point here is simple; unless we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we will by no means have access to God the Father.

“I am the true vine” (John 15:1)

Jesus makes it plain to His disciples that the only way for us to bear fruit is to abide in Him. “*I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing*” (Jn. 15:5). Similarly, a song says “without Him I could do nothing; without Him I’d surely fail.” Those that don’t have Christ in their lives aren’t connected to the vine. WOT

Follow-up Questions

1. Why does Jesus make these “I am” statements?
2. How is Jesus a light to the world of darkness?
3. In what ways is Jesus our good shepherd?

WHAT DID JESUS WRITE ON THE GROUND?

Jeremy T. Butt

In John 8:1-11, we have the narrative of the woman taken in adultery. The scribes and Pharisees brought her to Jesus after catching her in the act. Wanting to see what sentence Jesus pronounced upon the woman, the scribes and Pharisees watched as Jesus did something very unusual. He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Those of us who read this today ask, "What did Jesus write on the ground?"

Some people try to answer this perplexing question by thinking about what had just happened. Let us be clear: it does not matter what Jesus wrote on the ground. The point of the story is how Jesus handled the situation. The woman was obviously guilty, and she made no attempt to claim innocence. So why wasn't she given her due penalty?

Jesus knew when they brought her to him that it was a trap. Though not verified as true, some have even suggested that the reason there was no man found guilty was that the man involved in the sexual act was a part of the trap. Jesus, knowing she was guilty, would have to be careful how he replied. *"They said unto him, Master, this very woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?"* (8:4, 5)

Leon Morris suggests some possible scenarios. "If he said, 'Stone her,' he would lay himself open to the charge of counseling action contrary to Roman law, which did not provide for a death penalty in such cases. If he said, 'Do not stone her,' he could be charged with offending against the law of God." On the other hand, Morris says that Jesus could not have said anything, but then the woman would probably have been killed. These are things that Jesus probably took into consideration as He was preparing to answer them.

Was Jesus writing on the ground to give him extra time to think about his response? It is hard to say. We do know that his reply was profound. *"So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her"* (8:8). Whatever he wrote, and why he wrote it, we do not know. We do know that he avoided all the traps that were set for him by his reply to them. As

they left the scene, agreeing that they were sinners, Jesus did not condemn the woman, but told her to go and sin no more (8:11). This is what matters in this story, not what Jesus wrote on the ground. *WOT*

Follow-up Questions

1. What does it mean to be caught in the "very act" of adultery?
2. Why do the scribes and Pharisees mention Moses?
3. Why did Jesus not condemn the woman?

Research Questions

1. Was Judas really going to give the money from the selling of the spikenard (if it had been sold) to the poor? (John 12:5-6).
2. What did Jesus mean when he said he is to be lifted up? (John 3:14).
3. Which disciples accompanied Jesus to the wedding in Cana? (John 1:35-51).
4. Who was the high priest's servant whose ear Peter cut off with a sword? (John 18:10).
5. To what did the chief priests tell Pilate to change the inscription on the cross? (John 19:21).
6. Did Jesus perform other signs that are not recorded in John? (John 20:30).
7. Why are these signs recorded in John? (John 20:31).
8. How many angels did Mary see where the body of Jesus had laid? (John 20:12).
9. Why does a hireling run away when trouble comes to the sheep? (John 10:12-13).
10. Who is the devil that Jesus is talking about in John 6:70? (John 6:71).

WOT

JOHN'S BAPTISM VS. JESUS' BAPTISM

Jeremy T. Butt

In John 1:19-34, we find a discourse between John the Baptist and the priests and Levites. John proceeds to tell them about Jesus, even though they want to know, "*Who art thou?*" (1:19). The conversation eventually worked its way to a statement by John about baptism. John alluded several times to his baptizing in water, but he moved on to his baptism of Jesus. He says that Jesus is the one who will baptize with the Holy Ghost (1:33). Therefore, a definite contrast is seen in the two baptisms that needs to be clarified. Let us begin by looking at similarities and differences in the baptism of John versus the baptism of Jesus.

Similarities

Luke 3:3 says "*and he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*" There are basically two elements to John's baptism according to this verse: repentance and remission of sins. Likewise, the baptism of Jesus contains the same elements. Peter told the multitude on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38, "*...repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" They repented and received remission of sins, but there was an added bonus for they received the Holy Spirit.

Differences

Now that this extra element of Jesus' baptism was in the picture, we see something this baptism accomplished that John's did not. The Holy Spirit was attainable only through the baptism of Jesus Christ. Those who were baptized by John did not have this gift.

There are examples in Acts of those acquainted only with John's baptism. Apollos was taught more accurately by Priscilla and Aquila in 18:26, and Paul taught some disciples in Ephesus who were baptized with John's baptism and were not aware of the Holy Spirit, which led to them being baptized into Christ (19:1-5).

Repentance and remission of sins were the two elements that were the same in both baptisms. Does that mean that those who were baptized by John had truly obeyed if they knew about the baptism of Christ? No. That is why we have the previously mentioned examples in Acts. Those baptized by John did repent, so they changed their lifestyle and turned around. They did receive remission of sins but this baptism could not accomplish what Christ's baptism could since he shed his blood for the remission of sins. Could somebody that was baptized by John be saved? Only if they were baptized while John's baptism was still valid or died before they could be acquainted with the baptism of Jesus.

WOT

Follow-up Questions

1. What is the major difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ?
2. If the baptism of Christ was to come about three years later, why did John baptize?
3. If John's baptism was for the remission of sins, why did he baptize Jesus?

THE HOUR IS COME

Jeremy T. Butt

The author of John writes that Jesus' hour had not yet come (7:30; 8:20). In John 12:23, Jesus is quoted as saying, "...*the hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.*" Jesus knew when his time was coming to an end in the flesh, and he told his disciples that the time was near. To get a better understanding on the situation, note John 7:30 and 8:20, the previous two passages where we are told that Jesus' hour had not yet come.

John 7:30

Jesus was asked by his brothers in the flesh to go up to the Feast of Booths. He declined to accept their invitation by saying that his time had not yet come, but he eventually went to the feast in disguise. During the feast, Jesus went into the temple to teach. While he was teaching, some of the people wanted to take Jesus by force. However, it was not the time that the Father had appointed. "*Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come*" (7:30).

John 8:20

After the account of the woman taken in adultery, Jesus proceeded to teach the Pharisees about the Father bearing witness of him. Again, like chapter seven, Jesus' teaching brought about controversy to them. They evidently wanted to take him by force again. "*These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come*" (8:20).

John 12:23

Going back to our original text, Jesus proceeded to tell the disciples that the time was at hand. "*And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified*" (12:23). Why did he say this? He made a statement that is recorded

in verse 27, "*now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.*" Why was his soul troubled? If you read John 13, you find the answer. "*Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end*" (13:1).

Jesus said his hour is come because his passion was looming in the distance. It was evidently five days before the Passover, based on verses 1 and 12. Anytime an event is planned the organizers anticipate that event as it draws near. No doubt, that was the way it was with Jesus. However, the event in question, was not an event to which anyone would look forward. Jesus surely considered the fury of the trial, the pain and suffering of the scourging, and the agony and humiliation of the crucifixion.

With all of this in his mind, the phrase "*the hour is come,*" takes on a deeper meaning. All of this shows that everything happens in God's appointed time. Jesus was on earth to carry out the will of the Father (John 6:38). Thanks be to God that He loved us enough to let Christ make the sacrifice when His hour had come. WOT

Follow-up Questions

1. Is there any relationship between these statements of Jesus and similar statements in John 2:4; 7:6?
2. What verse in Luke is a parallel to John 12:27? (Hint: Jesus was praying in the garden).
3. Why did no one lay hands on Jesus when His hour had not yet come?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Andy Kizer, 9th Avenue Church of Christ, Haleyville, Alabama



QUESTION: I have a friend who I study with that is a member of a denominational church. He tells me their “pastor” is a woman. Now I know this is wrong on both accounts. Could you please give me more than 1 Corinthians 14:34 to share with him to show him this is wrong?

Byron Brooks
Midland, TX

Answer: Jesus is called “the shepherd” in Hebrews 13:20 and 1 Peter 2:25 and “the chief shepherd” in 1 Peter 5:4. In all three cases, the original word translated “shepherd” refers to “one who leads flocks or herds, a shepherd, herdsman...a pastor, superintendent, guardian” (*The Analytical Greek Lexicon*). Elders in the New Testament church are not called “pastors” directly, but the responsibility the Holy Spirit gives them is “to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). The “overseers” to whom this work is given are also the elders of the church (cf. Acts 20:17). Keeping the metaphor of “shepherd and sheep,” the church is also called “the flock.” The word

translated “to feed” may be translated “to direct” or “to superintend.” Therefore, we may call elders “pastors.”

Elders of New Testament churches are always mentioned in the plural (cf. Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1), and these are not references to preachers. So, a congregation may have a preacher and more than one elder. In Philippians 1:1, elders, deacons, and preachers (Paul and Timothy) are mentioned separately.

An elder (pastor) who serves with other elders in a local church can also be a preacher. Or, he can serve as a preacher and become an elder (pastor). Peter preached on the day the church was established (Acts 2) and later served as an elder (cf. 1 Peter 5:1).

Elders (pastors) cannot be women, for an elder is required to be “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2), and each elder (or pastor) “*must manage his own household well*” (1 Timothy 3:4, emphasis mine, AK). Moreover, in the church, women are not allowed by God to preach to men nor to oversee them. Paul was inspired to write, “*Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence*” (1 Timothy 2:11, 12).



Question: 1 John 4:8 says, “God is love,” but Malachi 1:3 and Romans 9:13 say that God hated Esau. How can this be?

Answer: Because of sin and sinfulness, God favored (or loved) Esau and his descendants less than Jacob and his descendants. Edom (or Esau) was not despised as we often think when we hear the word “hate.”

Perhaps a word study and an examination of the way the word is used in the Scriptures will be of some help to us.

In the Old Testament, when Malachi said, “Esau I hated,” he used a Hebrew word which expresses an emotional attitude toward persons and things which are opposed, detested, despised, and with which one wishes to have no contact or relationship. The word, then, is simply an opposite to love. Whereas love draws and unites, hate separates and keeps distant.

In the New Testament, when Paul wrote, “Esau I hated,” he used a Greek word which often means “to regard with less affection, love less, or esteem less.” The same is that which the Lord demanded of his followers in Luke 14:26. That is, we are asked to love Him more than father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters. Use of the word “hate” does not necessarily imply malice toward anyone.

Notice Genesis 29:31: “When the Lord saw that Leah was hated....” Jacob did not hate Leah as we sometimes use the word “hate.” What really is being said is that Jacob loved Leah less than he did Rachel. He held no malice toward Leah.

DID JESUS USE ARTIFICIAL LURES OR LIVE BAIT?

Jeremy T. Butt

As a fisherman myself, I wonder what it would have been like to be with some of the disciples who were fishermen. I think about Peter taking some of the others fishing in John 21. They had fished all night long with nothing to show for it. Many a day I have gone fishing without catching anything. In the morning they saw Jesus, but they did not know it was Him. Upon learning that they had caught nothing, he told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. Do you think they were a little reluctant to do so, since they had not caught anything all night long?

I use artificial lures about 99 percent of the time, with the exception of the occasional spring lizard for smallmouth bass. Sometimes when the fish aren't biting, you find yourself changing baits to find what they will bite. It can be very frustrating, as those of you know who fish on a regular basis. I can only imagine what Peter and the others were thinking when Jesus gives them a suggestion. Truth be known, they had probably cast their nets on the right side of the boat in the same spot on many occasions that night.

Nonetheless, they listen to Jesus, and they basically struck gold! Verse 6 tells us that the net was so full of fish that they couldn't pull it in. Upon coming to shore and counting the fish, we are told that there were 153 fish in the net. I've been fishing many times, but I've never caught that many fish. What was used to catch them: artificial lures or live bait?

The fact is that Jesus provided these fish with miraculous powers. It was nothing the disciples did on their own, but rather that they listened to the words of the Master. Are you listening to Jesus?

WOT

Follow-up questions

1. How were the fish caught? (John 21:6).
2. Did the disciples listen to Jesus?
3. Who were the disciples who were there? (John 21:2)

The Words of Truth

**Sixth Avenue church of Christ
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TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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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

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FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

Glenn A. Posey, Natural Bridge Church of Christ, Natural Bridge, AL

"There's a great day coming," are the words to a familiar and favorite song. Christ's return is a reality. It is not some riddle to be solved nor a code to be broken, but a day to be anticipated. When that day will occur however, remains a mystery to all except God (Matthew 24:36). Therefore, it should not be WHEN that day will come that concerns us the most, but HOW we live until that day arrives. That was Peter's concern. He asked, "How should we live from here to eternity?" Consider the following:

We should live a Christ-like life. Christ is our example. We should consider His "steps" (1 Peter 2:21), mind (Philippians 2:5), and His deeds (Acts 10:38). Jesus' life and teaching were in perfect harmony. He cared enough to die. He loves unconditionally. He did the Father's will. We will walk in the "paths of righteousness" by living like Christ.

We should strive to save our family. One man said, "I've gone the world over saving souls and lost my own son." Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), and yet he saved only his wife, three sons and three daughters-in-law (1 Peter 3:20). Joshua was a busy leader, but he said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). The world needs more fathers like Noah and Joshua (cf. Genesis 18:19; Ephesians 6:4).

We should be supremely committed to the church of Christ. Brethren, never be ashamed of the CHURCH OF CHRIST! It is the church of the New Testament. Christ

died for it (Acts 20:28) and He reigns over it (1 Corinthians 15:25). When He returns the church will be delivered unto God (1 Corinthians 15:24).

We should strive for unity, peace, and harmony within the church. In Ephesians 4:1-6, we find the dispositions and doctrines for Christian unity. The pulse of the church must beat in unison. With the Bible as our guide in faith and practice, we should never allow false doctrine, opinion, or supposition to lead the church into error, liberalism, or legalism. Let us stand foursquare upon the Bible, not swaying to the left or right (Acts 5:29).

We should live so that our name is always in the Book of life. Right now in heaven there is a Book of Life. Moses was aware of this book (Exodus 32:32), so was Paul (Philippians 4:3). Jesus told the disciples, "Rejoice because your name is written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). In the Book of Life are written the names of the redeemed. Is your name in that book right now? Your name is placed there when you become a Christian. Your name remains there by living a faithful life. When the Book of Life is opened (Revelation 20:11-15), will your name be there? Life's most important thing is having your name in heaven!

The way you live will determine where you spend eternity. Be faithful until death and receive a crown of life (Revelation 2:10).
W.O.T.

“FOLLOW ME”

Ted D. Burlison, Editorial

On a recent trip my wife and I had to stop for a while due to road construction. We saw a compact pick-up truck zipping down the side of the road with a large yellow sign attached to the back. The sign read, “Pilot Truck: Follow Me.” When the person holding an orange flag waved for us to continue our travels, the “Pilot Truck” led us safely through the construction zone. Like other preachers who constantly have sermon or article ideas during life experiences, I thought, when we follow someone or something, we need to make sure that the one we’re following is leading us in the right direction.

Satan doesn’t have to use flashing signs that say, “follow me,” yet many have followed him down the road to destruction. Thankfully, there is another “Follow Me” invitation that will never lead us astray; the invitation to follow Jesus. Note some of the invitations that Jesus gave for people to follow Him.

An Invitation for Peter to Follow Jesus

When Peter heard that Jesus was going away he asked about going with the Lord (John 13:36-38). The next day Jesus was dead and Peter probably replayed that conversation over in his mind several times. Later, Peter is in his boat and fishing again. He has fished all night and has caught nothing. Suddenly a voice from the shore yells, “Do you have any food?”

“No,” comes the reply.

“Fish on the other side of the boat,” the seashore voice shouts.

Why not? Peter casts out the net and it suddenly fills with 153 fish. Peter remembers that the only time things like these occur is when Jesus is around. Feeling unworthy and ashamed, Peter jumps into the water.

Jesus has prepared breakfast. “Come and eat,” He tells Peter.

Note Jesus’ next two words. Jesus says, “*Follow Me*” (John 21:19).

A Scribe Who Promised to Follow Jesus

A scribe told Jesus, “*I will follow wherever you go*” (Luke 9:57, 58). Following Jesus evidently means some things to this scribe for which he had not planned. When Jesus tells him that he doesn’t even have a place to sleep the scribe’s desires change. Can you imagine giving up a lucrative writing position to follow a homeless man around for the rest of your life? To the scribe, Jesus was probably just another homeless man. To true followers of Jesus, He is the Son of God.

A Loyal Son Is Invited to Follow Jesus

Another disciple was invited to follow Jesus but wouldn’t

follow because of a custom that said he couldn’t leave until his father passed away and had received a proper burial. This could have been twenty years later. Jesus repeated the invitation, “*Follow Me*” (Luke 9:59).

A Family Man Is Invited to Follow Jesus

Still another follower told Jesus that he would follow him, but first he had to go bid his family farewell. Family is important! I certainly do not intend to belittle families and the strength a family can give. However, if we put our family traditions or family ties above our ties with Jesus, what kind of answer do we give when Jesus says, “Follow Me?”

A Rich Young Ruler Is Invited to Follow Jesus

One of the more famous stories of one struggling with the decision to follow Jesus is the saga of the “rich young ruler.” His mouth said, “Yes, I will follow Jesus,” but his heart said no when he realized it would mean sharing that which is most precious to him, his money. Jesus said, “*Come and follow me,*” but the young man walked sadly away. What do you think this rich young ruler would give to have that moment of rejection back when he stands before Jesus and hears him say, “*Depart from Me, for I never knew you*”?

Conclusion

We can draw conclusions from these followers and would-be followers. First, following Jesus means that some of our plans might have to be altered. Second, following Jesus means that we can no longer make decisions based on customs or traditions but must make them as Jesus would have us decide. Third, following Jesus might mean giving up the things that are precious to us like prized possessions and personal habits.

W.O.T.

Things to Remember about Following Jesus

- Remember that following Jesus means that you believe with all your heart that He is the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29, 36).
- Remember that following Jesus means that you will listen to His words. When the disciples heard Him speak they followed Him (John 1:27).
- Remember that following Jesus means that you must always know what you’re seeking and want to be with Him (cf. John 1:38).
- Remember that following Jesus means that you will want to tell others about Him (cf. John 1:40-43; 43-46).
- Remember that following Jesus means that He knows you more than anyone else (cf. John 1:47-49). He is your best friend.

W.O.T.

FOUR MARKS OF GODLY ELDERS

Neal Pollard, Cold Harbor Church of Christ, Mechanicsville, VA

No member, even a deacons or a preacher has a more grave or important task than God's elder. He is a "shepherd," tasked with leading a flock of spiritual sheep to heavenly pasture (1 Peter 5:2-3). He is an "overseer," responsible for the direction of the entire congregation as well as the individual Christians who constitute it (Philippians 1:1). He is an "elder," a man who by reason of age and the attending growth, maturity, experience, and wisdom that should accompany years of faithful, active Christian service is naturally admired and respected by the members whose souls are in his charge (1 Timothy 5:17). Wendell Winkler has called church leadership "the crisis of our time." Ultimately, the blame for the influx of false teaching, extremism, listless activity, lack of direction among members, and poor planning falls upon the broad shoulders of the church's elders. Consider four leadership traits that help elders lead in a godly way.

Godly elders "level." They communicate. They inform the congregation on several levels. They tell the church about brotherhood issues, though they do not constantly bombard them with these. They tell the church their thoughts about both short-term and long-term plans. They bring members into the loop as soon and as much as they possibly can, even on thorny issues like church discipline, decisions regarding the preacher, or moral or doctrinal problems within the local church. As elders have a right to expect a strong commitment from members, members have a right to hear the voice of the shepherds they follow.

Godly elders "evangelize." I recently saw one brother refine the old adage that the church's work is three-fold (edification, benevolence, and evangelism) by saying we have the main objective of evangelism and everything we do should be with soul-winning in mind. That being the case, an elders' main emphasis should never be finances, church buildings, elders' or business meetings, or deacons' work. His main objective should be "one more soul." This includes helping preserve the souls of the saved, through ensuring the truth is preached and taught, special means of edification (lectureships, gospel meetings, seminars, etc.), and especially personal contact with the saints. It also means having the ability to teach a lost soul the good news. This "tone-setting" will most greatly affect the mindset of members and build the strongest church.

Godly elders "agonize." Certainly they are made to agonize unnecessarily and unfairly. Often, they receive the brunt of the criticism leveled at the church, they are too often the object of sinful gossip and slander, and are the subject of mild to severe criticism from the "Monday morning" and

"armchair" elders. Never be the cause of such hurt and heartache. In addition to these pains, godly elders spend countless time on their knees in prayer and study over things with eternal implications, they wrestle with decisions having far-reaching impact, and they mightily contend with an adversary who would certainly, especially delight in devouring one of God's leaders.

Godly elders "delegate." They are capable, competent men who know how to get church work done, but they do not assume that if "you want a job done right, do it yourself." They know this deprives members the opportunity to serve (the flip side of this is that many elders plead for help and get none, so dejectedly they do it so it gets done at all). They give the deacons the freedom and vote of confidence to do, without the ridiculous pressures of micro-management, the work assigned to them. They personally ask and solicit members' time and involvement. While they can do most everything at a highly effective level, they are more interested in "equipping the saints" (Ephesians 4:12) to the fullest degree possible.

When elders level, evangelize, agonize, and delegate, they optimize their ability to L-E-A-D. Alexander Strauch, in a 1995 book, *Biblical Eldership*, concludes that, "Elders, then, lead, direct, govern, manage, and care for the flock of God" (25). Please honor that principle and properly respond to it (cf. Hebrews 13:7, 17). Remember, however, that "Becoming a leader is a lot like investing in the stock market. If your hope is to make a fortune in a day, you're not going to be successful. What matters most is what you do day by day over the long haul" (Maxwell, *Leadership 101*, 12). Elders are Christians, and, as healthy Christians, are continuing to grow (cf. 2 Peter 3:18). They are fallible and not impervious to mistakes. Pray for elders, vocally encourage them, and support the things they enlist the church to do. *W.O.T.*

Questions to Consider

1. Brother Pollard refers to brother Wendell Winkler's observation that leadership is the "crisis of our time." Do you agree? If so, what can be done to address the crisis?
2. Consider the acronym L-E-A-D presented in this article. Which is the strongest of these traits among the elders in the congregation where you a member?
3. Consider the text brother Pollard mentioned under the "delegate" section, Ephesians 4:12. In what ways do elders in the Lord's church "equip" the saints?

FOREMOST FEARS

Ashley Kizer, Church of Christ, Adamsville, AL

Birds of prey, such as falcons, do not fear what they cannot see. For this reason, falconers have learned that they can calm a bird down by placing a hood over its eyes to block out the light. The bird is fooled into thinking that it is nighttime and tends to become more calm. Incidentally, this is where the term “hoodwink” comes from.

Christians should not be as easily duped. For we have learned from the Scriptures to “*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 Corinthians 4:18). As a matter of fact, these unseen things are apparently the most dangerous. Paul told the Ephesians, “*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Ephesians 6:12). Add to that Jesus’ admonition to us about God Himself: “*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28).

You can be certain that God requires us to be more afraid of Him than any opposition we might find here on earth. In Revelation 21:8, we read that those who are cowardly will receive the same fate as those who are murderers and immoral persons: “. . . *shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*” However, this is one situation which knowing the truth can make us free (cf. John 8:32). Consider these encouraging words by King Hezekiah of Judah to his military before going to war: “*Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that*

is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah” (2 Chronicles 32:7, 8).

Too often, we become like grasshoppers in our own sight when we face formidable temptations or challenging moral dilemmas (cf. Numbers 13:33). Instead of trusting in the Lord with a dedicated heart and being strong in the Lord and the power of His might, we allow ourselves to be intimidated by those flimsy, temporal, earthly distractions that cause us to become entangled in the affairs of everyday life (cf. Proverbs 3:5; Ephesians 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:3). We need more leaders today that will rise up and encourage us as Joshua and Caleb did to the Israelites, saying, “*Only rebel not ye against the LORD: neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread of life to us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not*” (Numbers 14:9).

What is your greatest fear? Could it be sickness or death? Embarrassment? Humiliation? Are you afraid of losing your job and financial security? Perhaps you fear for your family and their safety. Many people are afraid that they will lose their souls and spend an eternity in hell. However, there is no reason for Christians to have any of these fears. God offers peace to His children and the remedy for all fear. John wrote: “*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love*” (1 John 4:18). The Lord still says to us through His word the same as He once spoke personally to Paul, “*Be not afraid, but speak . . . For I am with thee*” (Acts 18:9, 10).

W.O.T.

ON THE SUBJECT OF GIVING

Neil Richey, Augusta Rd. Church of Christ, Greenville, SC

By its very nature, the topic of giving is the least popular, and the most popular of subjects. It is the least popular because it deals with a man’s wallet, and it is the most popular because everyone wants to know, “Exactly how much should I give?” I want to briefly make three observations on the subject of giving.

People Who Gave

God was and is a giver. Consider the “Golden Text” of the Bible: “For God [the greatest being] so loved [the greatest thing] the world [the greatest number], that he gave his only begotten Son [the greatest gift], that whosoever believeth in him [the greatest faith] should not perish [the greatest

tragedy], but have everlasting life [the greatest reward]” (John 3:16).

The widow was a giver. Read Mark 12:35-44. This widow gave out of her extreme poverty. She gave all her living and all that she had to live on. She trusted in God to supply her wants, and devoted her little property entirely to him. Do we truly deny ourselves in giving? Most give out of an abundance. Does it hurt us to give?

Barnabas was a giver. Read Mark 12:35-44. Oh to be like the Christians in the first century. They gave out of love. They looked after their brethren. They even sold their homes to help the church. It is possible that the land Barnabas

gave constituted his whole estate, having no dependents, he gave of himself and his possessions for the ministry.

The Macedonians were givers. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-19. Paul is writing to Christians who have struggled in the area under consideration in this essay. He was encouraging Christians in Corinth to follow the example of those in Macedonia. The Christians in Macedonia: gave while under affliction (v. 2); gave with abounding joy (v. 2); gave with abundant liberality even in "deep poverty" (v. 2); gave as they were able, "according to their power" (v. 3); gave more than they were able, "and beyond their power" (v. 3); "gave willingly of themselves" (v. 3); begged Paul to receive and administer their gift (v. 4); surprised Paul by their giving (v. 5); "First gave their own selves to the Lord" (v. 5); gave liberally so their giving might be like their other gifts (v. 7); were moved to liberality by the example of others and to prove their love (vv. 8,9); made commitments to give liberally (v. 10); gave out of a willing mind (vv. 11,12); gave that there might be equality (vv. 13-15); considered those who urged them to give as one who really cared (vv. 16,17); realized their giving would bring glory to God and meet the needs of the poor (v. 19).

Particulars about Giving

Giving is obligatory. The text says, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order" (1 Corinthians 16:1). This phrase is equivalent to a command. It is just as much a command as, "Go into all the world" and, "Repent and be baptized." The Greek word employed here, *liatasso*, is not only used in reference to a command, but it means command plus arrangement. God has given a definite plan, order, and arrangement for the financing of his own work.

Giving is specific, relative to time. The text says, "Upon the first day of the week" (1 Corinthians 16:2). The KJV and ASV leave out a very important word, "every." Why, I do not know. The Greek phrase is *kata mian sabbatou*, and means "on the first day of every week." The day is significant for several reasons. It's the day the Lord arose from the dead (Mark 16:9). It's the day the church of our Lord was established the first day of Pentecost after our Lord's resurrection (Acts 2). It's the "Lord's Day", and the early church regularly assembled on that day (Acts 20:7). Paul explains that when Christians come together in regular assembly upon the first day of every week, they are to give of their means. God, through Paul, said it, and that settles it.

Giving is to be personal. The text says, "let every one of you" (1 Corinthians 16:2). By principle and application, this refers to every member of every congregation of God's people—young, old, and in between. Every Christian has as much responsibility to give upon the first day of every week as they do to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Giving is to be deliberate. The text says, "lay by him in store" (1 Corinthians 16:2). The Greek word employed here is *titheto*, which is the present active imperative, and means, "I set, or I place." The imperative mood signifies the obligatory

nature of the matter, and the present tense stresses the continuous action prescribed. So, a liberal rendering might be: "keep on setting aside." Let him set it apart; let him designate a certain portion; let him do this by himself, when he is at home, when he can calmly look at the evidence of his prosperity. Let him do it, not under the influence of pathetic appeals, or for the sake of display when he is with others; but let him do it as a matter of principle, and when he is by himself.

Giving is to be proportionate. The text says, "as God hath prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Our giving should be properly proportionate to our blessings—our income. This sacred principle is set in the following passages: "Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Corinthians 8:11-12). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). Yet someone still asks, "Exactly how much should I give?" "Is ten percent enough?" The only kind of giving that God accepts is "liberal giving". Every passage with reference to the amount I am to give says "liberal". Every example of giving is "liberal". Whenever you have direct teaching and example, then you have strong evidence to support the position. Liberal giving always does two things: It is always sacrificial. It will always equal or exceed the giving of past dispensations. Patriarchs gave 10% of their monies. Jews gave 10% of their monies, add to that an additional 23% when you consider their gifts of possessions, every seven years they gave equivalent to one year's salary. Christians, can we do any less?

Practical Point of Giving

If we fail to give as we have prospered, then we are robbing God. Malachi wrote it down this way, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (Mal. 3:8-9). Ill: Suppose I said to you, "You have come to the church building today from your stolen house, driving a stolen car, wearing stolen clothes, and adorned with stolen jewelry." You would not like this, and neither would I. Yet, if we pay for these things with the money we withheld from God on Sunday, and spent it upon ourselves, then we have robbed God. When we rob God, we are making several value statements about ourselves. I am saying, to God, "I am ungrateful for what You have done for me." I am saying, "I just don't understand how important it is to my soul and to the church to give as I have prospered." I am saying, "I'm greedy." When we rob God we rob the church of progress. We rob the church of respect. We rob the church of salvation, of our own soul.

W.O.T.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Ted Burlison, Sixth Avenue Church of Christ, Jasper, AL



QUESTION: Could you please tell me if a preacher should go to college and obtain a degree, go to a preaching school, or should he just really know God and the Bible?

Answer: There are as many viewpoints on this question as there are readers who will read this response to the question. There have been many well-known, outstanding evangelists who had very little formal education. The founding editor of this publication, brother Gus Nichols, was a brilliant preacher, editor, author, debater, and teacher among other excellent attributes, yet he had very little formal education. His education was the best kind that any preacher can have; a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, the Bible. There are many among us who have earned multiple advanced degrees that do not know the Bible as well as some who have had no formal training.

With that being stated, however, let me advise the questioner that a preacher should take advantage of training opportunities available to him. For example, a preacher is blessed if he lives near a sound Bible college or preacher training school or if he can move closer to such a school. Those who are not near such a source of training might look into the possibility of taking advantage of extension

courses or distant learning courses.

I sometimes teach graduate classes where students have driven four hours, one way, to be in attendance. Other students from foreign countries have moved halfway around the world to be trained to better proclaim God's word.

Most, if not all of our schools of preaching charge no tuition fee. This gives men who desire to preach a wonderful opportunity to train under wise, experienced preachers who follow Paul's admonition to Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

I cannot answer as to whether someone aspiring to become a gospel preacher should attend a college and obtain a degree or attend a preaching school. There are brothers in Christ that I love and trust very much who take different viewpoints on this matter. Brother Earl Edwards, the director of the graduate Bible program at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, does an excellent job advising preachers in additional training. I have not asked brother Edwards but I believe he would advise those who have an opportunity and can afford to do so, to enroll in a sound, biblical training program such as his. Indeed, several faithful gospel preachers have been trained in brother Edwards' program or in similar programs.

That being said, brother Paul Sain of Pulaski, Tennessee, a brother who is also sound in the faith, advised one of my sons who was about to begin preacher training to attend the Memphis School of Preaching in Memphis, Tennessee. As I recall, brother Sain stated at that time (1996), "If I had a son that wanted to preach, I'd send him to the Memphis School of

Preaching." Indeed, some of the best preachers I know are graduates of preacher training schools.

We have several young preachers here in Walker County, Alabama, who do not have college degrees, and who have not yet attended a preacher school, but who preach excellent lessons each Lord's Day morning. Several of them do take advantage of a local training class taught by brother L. T. Gurganus and brother Levi Sides. This may be all the training that some of these brethren ever receive. I believe, God will still be pleased with them as long as they lovingly preach the truth.

In summary, looking back over the past twenty-eight years of training to preach that I have enjoyed, I attended whatever training opportunities that I could afford and that were available to me. The Lord blessed me with the opportunity to be near training schools and to have brethren who would pay for my training. The Lord has blessed us with several sound preacher training schools and some sound Christian colleges that can aid the preacher in improving his preaching skills.

As an illustration, of the 27 writers of articles that appear in the *Words of Truth* 2004 Index, there are six who attended preaching schools, several of whom also had college degrees. Twelve of the writers had at least a master's degree, and at least six have earned doctorates. This goes to show that there is no "best answer" to your question. **Knowing God and the Bible is possible without any additional training, but additional training proves to be very helpful.**

Regardless of the training or education, the part of the question that asks, "Should he just really know God and the Bible?" This should be the true goal of all preacher training. *W.O.T.*

"AFTER SHE DIES"

Glenn Colley, West Huntsville Church of Christ, Huntsville, AL

I recently spoke with someone who has grieved for many years because her aged father stubbornly refuses to obey the gospel. He knows the truth—that isn't the problem. He is not tied to some kind of mind-altering immorality. He is not a mean-spirited man. According to the lady, it simply boils down to this: he will obey Christ in baptism as soon as his wife dies. You see, to his wife, not obeying the Gospel with baptism is very important, and she is determined, because of her religious misunderstandings, to see that he doesn't obey either. He feels he's been with her too long to offend her this much, so there you are.

I bring this up because I don't think such cases are rare, and because they are extremely and eternally dangerous. First, because naturally the man may die first and his good intentions die with him. But secondly, suppose he doesn't, and things go as planned. His determined wife passes away and he declares, "Now I'm ready." I am not at all convinced that the Lord will readily accept that.

Listen to Jesus on the subject: *"For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it"* (Matthew 10:35-39).

The point is, when I learn the truth and how to obey the Gospel of Christ, I must do it NOW, or explain to my Lord why not. Service to Christ Jesus is not designed for convenience but for conviction. I must love Him supremely. To be right, the man in question would have to repent of his sins, including the sin of respecting his wife more than respecting God. Eternal life is a gift of God (Romans 6:23), but not an unconditional gift, and it is not something to be tossed about cheaply. My sins will be forgiven at Calvary or faced at the judgment, but they will not be overlooked. May God bless us with wisdom as we work to teach and encourage our loved ones who are outside the fold of safety.
W.O.T.

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1501 Sixth Avenue
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TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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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

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