

THAT'S JUST HIS OPINION

Adam Faughn, Ninth Avenue Church of Christ, Haleyville, AL

Have you ever noticed that when people hear a sermon with which they whole-heartedly agree, they are very quick to point out many good things about the lesson? They can readily give you a “recap” of the main points. They can usually even tell you some of the Scriptures that were used. They will give information about how the sermon was organized. They will usually even tell you about how many Scripture references were used in the presentation.

However, have you ever noticed that when people hear a sermon with which they do not agree, none of those things really matters? The style of the sermon is not that important to them, nor is the length. They usually do not even care how many Scripture references were used to support the lesson.

Why is that? It is very simple when you listen to those same people talk after a sermon with which they do not agree. They justify their disagreement with one simple phrase: “That’s just *his* opinion.”

Is that not interesting to you? The same preacher using the same Bible and probably very much the same style of preaching can be 100 percent correct in the minds of listeners one Sunday and “just preaching opinion” the next. And this is despite the fact that both lessons can be completely Biblically sound. How are people able to differentiate between the two lessons and come to such a conclusion?

It goes back to one of the most famous verses in God’s Word about accepting a lesson. Acts 17:11 begins, “*These* (Jews in the city of Berea, A.F.) *were more noble than*

those in Thessalonica.” Why? Why were these listeners in one city more noble than in another? Keep reading the verse. “*They received the word with all readiness of mind.*” They what? They listened to the sermon with eagerness. How many of you who preach would enjoy saying that about people in your home congregation? But there is more: “. . . *and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*”

Before moving on, make one mental note. These were Jewish listeners. That being true, they were hearing a message that would have greatly challenged their beliefs passed on from generation to generation. While it is obvious they were open-minded, the words of Christians would have been extremely difficult to hear. What were they hearing? They were listening to Paul and Silas in the synagogue (a place of study) and were comparing their teaching with God’s Word.

Notice the two things these listeners did that made them “*noble.*” **First**, they listened, but more than that, they listened “*with all readiness of mind.*” They were ready to hear from God. How many of us show up on the Lord’s Day totally unprepared to hear a message from God? We show up tired, not mentally ready, and with a closed mind. We should not be this way! When we have the privilege (and it is a privilege) to listen to a sound Gospel sermon, we should be ready to do so, for it very well could (and should) change our lives.

Second, these in Berea also went one step further. They did not just listen, finish the worship service, and

walk out unchanged. Not these listeners! They did further investigation. When is the last time you studied a sermon further after the worship period was completed? You should! Why were these Jewish listeners doing this? They were checking to see if these things that Paul and Silas were teaching were so. They were checking out the preachers!

Notice, however, there is more to the story than this. We often forget the conclusion of the thought that is found in the next verse. After listening with an open mind, and studying further with an open Bible, the listeners were changed. Verse 12 puts it this way, "Therefore many of them believed." Did you notice the word, "therefore?" What caused this belief? Their listening coupled with their own examination of the Scriptures.

What does all this have to do with many people saying that some preachers are just "preaching opinion?" When is the last time you took time to check out that claim? It very well could be that the preacher has brought out something from God's Word that is a much-needed and long-overdue change in your life. Or, it could be that the preacher is mistaken. If that is the case, go to him. If he is truly trying to live a godly life, he will appreciate the opportunity to study and to better himself!

So, when we hear a message with which we do not agree,

instead of just assuming the preacher has decided to fill thirty minutes of worship to God with opinion, why not follow the example of these good listeners at Berea? Listen attentively to each sermon. Then, study further. You will begin to appreciate preaching more, and you might just find a mistake in your life that needs to be corrected. It could make an eternal difference. *W.O.T.*

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Why were the Bereans "more noble" (*noble-minded*) than those in Thessalonica? (Acts 17:11)
2. How did the Bereans receive the word? (Acts 17:11)
3. How often did the Bereans search the Scriptures? (Acts 17:11)
4. Why did the Bereans search (examine) the Scriptures? (Acts 17:11)
5. After receiving the word and searching the Scriptures, what did many of the Bereans do? (Acts 17:12)

"LET IT BEGIN WITH ME"

Robert Curry, Johnson Church of Christ, Johnson, AK

Renewal and goodness must start somewhere. Why not with you and me? The United States Army advertises itself as "An Army of one," emphasizing the importance of the individual soldier in that branch of the military. Of course, we are all familiar with the song that proclaims, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

The idea of taking the initiative is certainly biblical and can be seen in the narratives of Joseph, Moses, Esther, and Ruth and in the epistles of Paul, Peter, and John. These faith stories describe the courage and commitment of those who stood strong for the faith they nurtured and cherished. Change was needed, action was taken, and they cried out, "Let it begin with me!"

The church will benefit if all of us will cry out, "Let it begin with me!" Imagine the trouble that would be avoided. Imagine the spiritual growth that would be accomplished. Imagine the hope that would be felt. Imagine the work that could be done for the Lord.

Biblical Idea

The very idea of "Let it begin with me" finds its origin in the Bible. This is seen in Jesus' description of Himself as the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 22:13). The very point of the phrase explodes with "Let it begin

with me," for all things begin, as well as end with Him. You have heard of the phrase, "The buck stops here." With Jesus, all that is spiritually important and essential begins and stops with Him. Jesus also described Himself as the bread of life, the "living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:48), recalling the manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16). Yet, Jesus was and is much more, for He is the bread that gives life. Finally, He described Himself as the *Good Shepherd* (John 10:11). David was a shepherd, so the weight of his statement, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1) is immense, for he understood well the task of the shepherd and, knowing that, proclaimed the Lord as He who shepherds him. All that is implied in being a shepherd—care, protection, guidance—is fulfilled and perfected in Jesus Christ. He is the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11). The life and example of Jesus shouts aloud, "Let it begin with me!"

The idea of "Let it begin with me" is also seen in the apostles. At Pentecost, Peter, in essence, cried, "Let it begin with me!" (Acts 2). The gathered crowd needed to know the truth about their spiritual situation so Peter said, "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you... Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made

this Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:29, 36 NKJV). Peter was given the task of preaching the first sermon of the New Testament church and replied, "Let it begin with me!"

When Peter taught the truth to Cornelius and his household, he entered new territory (Acts 10). Cornelius was eager and willing, but Peter was not, but not because he did not want to teach, but because he had misconceptions of associating with a Gentile. He received a vision that changed everything Peter thought he knew. When Peter stood in the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and saw the evidence of the Spirit moving among them, he said, "*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*" (Acts 10:34-35). Peter, throughout his ministry said, "Let it begin me!"

The apostle Paul is another wonderful example of "Let it begin with me." So many churches were benefitted by the nurturing of Paul, such as Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13), Philippi (Acts 16), and Corinth (Acts 18). The world needed to hear the Gospel preached and Paul said, "Let it begin with me!" We all know the passage: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek*" (Romans 1:16). Paul took the gospel where it had not gone before by addressing issues never before addressed, confronting the unapproachable, and challenging what had before been unchallenged. Paul said, "Let it begin with me!"

So Let It Begin With Me

The idea, "Let it begin with me!" should be ours as well. The church has a lot of needs. For example, Sunday morning worship attendance is atrocious in most places and even worse for the Bible classes on Sunday morning and Wednesday night. Hebrews 10:25 condemns forsaking the assembly, but many do it nonetheless. Jesus promised that where two or more are gathered in His name, He would be there (Matthew 18:20), but many do not come. In a similar thought, Bible study is neglected in most congregations. Hosea 4:6 speaks of God's people being destroyed for a lack of knowledge, but few want to know God and His will. Since faithful attendance is a commandment of the Lord and Jesus is present in our worship, we need to say, "Let it begin with me!" Since the knowledge of the Lord is vital to our spiritual health and Bible study allows us to know His word, we need to cry out, "Let it begin with me!"

Worship has become something habitual, ritualistic, and mundane among too many of us. The thrill of worshiping God must be returned without the desire for spectacle and pageantry. Worship is the privilege of offering praise and honor to God, so David insisted that he was glad when it was said, "*Let us go into the house of the Lord*" (Psalm 122:1). That gladness needs to return, without the expectation of entertainment and pageantry. Worship must be about the commands of God and not about the desires of men. It is time for each of us to say, "The joy of worship as God expects it will return and it will begin with me!"

The place and function of the Lord's Supper has been lost in many churches. It has become something merely to be done and not something to lift and fill our hearts as we recall the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the world. Our minds are on everything else but Jesus and our hearts are anywhere else but at the base of the cross. The Lord's Supper is something Jesus specifically insisted was to be done for Him and because of Him (Luke 22:19). He specifically stated that it remembered His body and blood, and so then His sacrifice for the sins of the world (Matthew 26: 26-28; Mark 14: 22-24; Luke 22:19-20). The Lord's Supper needs to have the place and function Jesus intended: a memorial of the greatest gift ever given to humankind. That is why we need to say, "Let true commemoration begin with me."

Conclusion

The prophet Isaiah felt unfit for prophecy and service to the Lord. The Lord cleansed him and then asked, "*Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?*" (Isaiah 6: 8). Isaiah, freshly renewed and empowered, said, "*Here am I, send me!*" Renewal and restoration must begin somewhere, so why not with you and me? It is time for all of us to hear the instructions, requests, and commands of the Lord and reply, "Let it begin with me!" *W.O.T.*

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Jesus said, "*I am the Good Shepherd.*" For what does the Good Shepherd give His life? (John 10:11)
2. What did Peter say in his sermon on Pentecost that all the house of Israel should know about Jesus? (Acts 2:36)
3. What did Peter say that God is not? (Acts 10:34)
4. Of what was Paul not ashamed? (Romans 1:16)
5. According to Hebrews, some were in the habit of doing what? (Hebrews 10:25)

PLAYGROUNDS, PROGRAMS, AND PREACHING

Brad Harrub, Director of Scientific Information, Apologetics Press, Montgomery, AL

Most of us have been there at one point or another—looking for somewhere to eat on a busy street. It never fails, whenever adults are really craving something good, one of those fast food restaurants with a playground appears out of nowhere. With neon lights and giant slides beckoning, it immediately captures the attention of anyone under the age of twelve. Suddenly the backseat becomes a chorus of little voices begging to go to the restaurant with the playground. In fact, most children choose their favorite restaurant not for the food, but rather the presence and size of the playground and the type of toy that comes in the value meal. History will record that twenty-five years ago playgrounds in restaurants were almost as scarce as dinosaurs. Today, you can find two or three within the same city block. Kids love it because they get to play. Parents dread it because the food is not very healthy and is often less than appetizing, (and more than a few of us have had to bend and snake our way up through the tubes in order to rescue a crying child who made it to the top, but was too scared to come down!).

But the playgrounds work! They entice children (and their hesitant parents) by the millions. In fact, the majority of fast-food restaurants under construction today possess these colossal recreational areas. Interestingly, we find that this concept of attracting larger numbers through entertainment did not stop with fast-food restaurants. Churches now actively promote pleasure and amusement as a means to increase numbers. Coffee shops and fitness centers are now expected in many religious settings. In fact, a Methodist church near our building has contacted Walt Disney World designers in an effort to make the children's part of their new addition (currently called "Wacky World Studios") magical eye-candy for kids. Some New Testament Christians will be quick to follow their example.

If we look back in the church twenty-five years ago we find that people were content to come and sit through Bible class and worship without being entertained. Not so today. Today, entertainment is expected. Even many churches of Christ have abandoned gospel preaching and the Great Commission, and instead are trying to increase attendance using "playgrounds." One of the first questions many parents ask when visiting a new congregation is: "What programs do you have for my children?" Thus, the questions come: "Is there children's church?" "Is there a youth room with couches and video games?" "Do you all use drama or skits?" "Do you allow praise teams?" "Are there church league sports teams?" "Do your young people go on trips?" **"What do you have for me?"**

As more and more churches abandon God's original plan for evangelism for their own man-made gimmicks and

games, someone needs to ask the question: "What's really being served?" For you see, those restaurants with playgrounds are great for entertainment, but eating there consistently would quickly deteriorate the health of most individuals. During the mid-1980s, senior citizen actress Clara Peller played a crusty old lady who slapped the counters of neighborhood hamburger joints and loudly asked the probing question "Where's the beef?" Her point was that there was not much there. Likewise, many churches today have moved toward entertainment and have no "spiritual meat" to offer. It's all fluff and cotton candy. The Hebrews writer poignantly admonished: *"for though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe"* (Hebrews 5:12-13). Churches offering entertainment and "feel good" sermons may be appealing to the eye, and taste good at first, but man cannot live on cotton candy. Likewise, man cannot grow spiritually in a setting where the whole counsel of God has been replaced with sermons covering only the love and grace of Almighty God.

What is our priority in selecting a home to worship our Creator? If we are only interested in "playgrounds" and "what's in it for me?" then these entertaining buildings will serve the purpose. But if we are assembling to pay honor and praise to Almighty God, then we should be more concerned with the meat that is being served. It's high time we teach ourselves and our children that it's not about "I-Me" but rather the great I AM. Only when we have our priorities in the right place will we find ourselves walking into a worship assembly focused on God rather than ourselves. Paul, in his second epistle to young Timothy warned: *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry"* (2 Timothy 4:3-5, emphasis added). That time has come. People have completely forgotten why it is we gather together as a body of Christians. They enter a worship setting believing they are in the "audience," and they expect a "good show." John 4:23 states: *"But the hour is coming, and is now, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."* God is the audience. Therefore, everything done in worship should be in accordance with God's divine will, and always should be

done to glorify and praise Him. Has our desire for entertainment blinded us from true worship? Unfortunately, the abundance of new programs, games, and “playgrounds” tells me the answer in many cases is a resounding, “yes.”

Skip the playground and go find a steakhouse! Jesus, in speaking to the scribes observed: *“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength’* (Mark 12:29-30). May that love for the Lord burn in our hearts, creating a desire to please Him rather than constantly seeking to entertain ourselves. *W.O.T.*

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. What indication does the writer of Hebrews give of the lack of spiritual growth among his readers? (Hebrews 5:12, 13)
2. According to Paul, what happens prior to the time that people turn away their ears from the truth? (2 Timothy 4:3-5)
3. How do true worshipers worship the Father? (John 4:23)
4. The first (foremost) of all commandments is to love God with all what? (Mark 12:29, 30)

A SAD VISIT

Bruce Ligon, Church of Christ, Plain Dealing, LA

In 1988, I met a Christian family in a western state when I visited with a congregation concerning the possibility of working with them. After I began working with this congregation, I grew to appreciate the work and faithfulness of this family. Frequently they spoke complimentary words to me concerning sermons I preached, and my work.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit with this couple for about ninety minutes. I had been told that they no longer attended the services of the church. The purpose of my visit was to encourage them to attend the gospel meeting in which I was preaching, and to hopefully help them to realize their need to come back to the Lord and His church. I approached this visit in the attitude that the apostle Paul taught, *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you who also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1 NKJV).

After engaging in some “small talk,” the man told me that they were no longer attending the services of the church. Both the man and woman were quick to tell me of things, including an individual or two and an incident, that they did not like about the congregation. In the course of our conversation I related to them how much I appreciated the encouragement and support they had given me during the almost four years I had been their preacher. I also spoke of their faithfulness to the Lord and His church during that time. I believe it would be accurate to say that they still look back on this time in their lives with much happiness. The purpose of my approach in this visit was borrowed from what the Lord had told the church at Ephesus, who had left their first love, *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works”* (Revelation 2:5). Kindly, yet with emphasis, I encouraged them to come back to the Lord and His church. I told them that they knew what they needed to do, and for them to look beyond what had happened. I also expressed my desire that they respond to their need in a positive way.

Hopefully, this couple will act upon their need before it

is too late. A statement the woman said to me during the visit keeps coming back to me, “You start doing different things when you are no longer attending the services of the church.” I want to think that she was realizing with regret the turn their lives had taken in recent years.

Unfortunately, what happened to this couple occurs too often. Peter graphically described this spiritual state with these sobering words, *“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: A dog returns to his own vomit, and, a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire”* (2 Peter 2:20-22).

With love in our hearts, may we encourage erring children of God to return to the fold of safety. *W.O.T.*

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. According to Paul, who should restore a person who is overtaken (caught) in a fault (trespass)? (Galatians 6:1)
2. What caution to the spiritual did Paul add to his admonition to restore those who are overcome by sin? (Galatians 6:1)
3. The church in Ephesus was warned that her candlestick (lampstand) would be removed unless what happened? (Revelation 2:5)
4. For whom will the latter end (last state) be worse than the beginning (first)? (2 Peter 2:20)

A TRIBUTE TO PAUL M. WYLIE

1933-2004

A funeral service was conducted on December 24, 2004, at the building of the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama, for Paul M. Wylie.

The singers for the funeral service included some of the original members of the Gospel Anchors, a singing group that Paul Wylie organized and directed. Brother Wylie left behind a rich legacy of song. The singers, numbering around two dozen members and including some of brother Wylie's relatives, sang five beautiful, acappella selections to begin the service. Many of the singers were wiping their tears as they sang. The harmony of the blended voices filled the large auditorium. As the singers sang about longing for "Beulah Land," tears flowed among many of the 175 people in attendance on the cold Christmas Eve.

Brother Wylie's family filled the first three rows of the auditorium. His beloved wife, Carolyn, and his son, Mark, along with his two brothers and two grandchildren were in attendance. There were six pallbearers. Around a dozen gospel preachers were in attendance, some of whom were numbered among the singers. There was a keen sense of respect among the gathered mourners in the room before, during, and after the funeral service.

The first of the three speakers, William Tittle, the current preacher for the Goodsprings Church of Christ, where brother Wylie preached for forty-five years, read the obituary and told of being converted by brother Wylie in February 2000. Brother Tittle spoke respectfully regarding his mentor and how brother Wylie had trained him to preach. Brother Tittle closed his remarks with a reading of 2 John 1-3. The congregation then appropriately sang "When All of God's Singers Get Home" and "What a Day That Will Be."

Dr. Paul Wylie was born and reared in Walker County, Alabama, near the city of Cordova. The Goodsprings congregation hired brother Wylie as their preacher in 1957, after he returned from the army. Beginning in 1973, brother Wylie hosted a weekly radio program to promote the teaching of the gospel. He taught at various schools and earned his Ph.D. from the University of Alabama in 1973. He served as an

educator for forty-three years.

Brother Wylie loved people of all ages. He served on the board of directors at Indian Creek Youth Camp in Walker County. He was a well-known song leader and directed hundreds of singing schools, including some singing schools as far away as Colorado. His singing group, the Gospel Anchors, sang at hundreds of funerals and participated in at least two foreign mission efforts. Brother Wylie also authored poetry books.

The second speaker was brother David Courington, who began his remarks by telling of a childhood experience of attending a singing school conducted by brother Wylie. He asked, "How many funerals has Paul Wylie conducted?" "Hundreds," he answered. Brother Courington then read the written comments of several members of the family, including moving comments from brother Wylie's son, daughter-in-law, and the grandchildren, who mentioned their fond memories of their "Thursday visits" with their grandfather.

Several phrases kept recurring over and over in the family's and the preacher's comments: "passing the torch," "pillar in the church," "asset to the community," "a life of hope," and "heaven is now richer." Brother Courington ended his comments with a reading of Psalm 116:15.

Brother Levi Sides, a Walker County native and noted gospel preacher, spoke lastly. Brother Sides kept his comments to a very brief seven minutes, perhaps realizing that a whole hour had almost passed since the funeral began. In his inspiring comments, brother Sides imagined brother Wylie talking with various biblical characters in heaven about their areas of special experience. A touching poem written by sister Luajuana Brasfield, another of the people brother Wylie helped to mentor, was read and the service was closed with a prayer.

This writer observed the funeral service as one who never met Paul Wylie before his illness grew very severe. This article closes with this observation: the funeral service for Paul Wylie was so inspiring that it is a shame that more of us did not have the privilege of knowing him. His time here was far too short.

Editor

Questions Regarding Christian Fellowship

Please take time to study your Bible and answer the following questions regarding Christian fellowship:

Psalm 119:63 - *"I am a companion of all who fear You, And of those who keep Your precepts."*

- Are those who "fear" the Lord and those who "keep" His precepts one and the same?
- Who are the psalmist's companions?
- Is fellowship contingent on agreement in doctrinal matters?

Romans 16:17 - *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them."*

- Who is to be avoided?
- Are Christians to fellowship brethren who are in error in doctrine or practice and who will not repent?
- Are Christians to mark those who divide the church with unscriptural doctrines and practices?

1 Corinthians 1:9, 10 - *"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

- Are Christians called into the fellowship of Christ?
- Are Christians to speak the same things?

2 Corinthians 6:14-17 - *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God. And they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."*

- Does God want His children to fellowship those who believe and teach error?

Galatians 1:8 - *"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have*

preached to you, let him be accursed."

- Have Christians ever been challenged to draw the line of fellowship?

Ephesians 5:11 - *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."*

- Are Christians to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness?

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15 - *"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."*

- Are false teachers and false doctrine to be fellowshipped?
- Are the grounds for fellowship given?
- Are the limits of fellowship given?

1 John 1:6, 7 - *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."*

- Are we given a guideline for extending fellowship?
- How do we determine if one is walking in the light?
- Before we can fellowship someone, must we determine whether their work is a work of light or darkness?
- Before we can fellowship someone must we determine whether the person is walking in the light or in the darkness?
- Must we make this determination the basis of our personal subjective feelings?

2 John 9-11 - *"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."*

- Is it a sin to fellowship those who practice that which is not found in the doctrine of Christ? W.O.T.

“HOW DO I ATTAIN INTERNAL PEACE”

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

The internal peace that Christians have comes as a result of maintaining our faith in Jesus as He is depicted in the Bible. This quest for inner peace is a life-time struggle because all of Satan's demonic forces will work against your faith development. However, you are not alone in this struggle for believers everywhere are your fellow strugglers. Always remember the words of 1 John 4:4, "... *He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (i.e. the devil).

In addition to studying your Bible for faith development (see Romans 10:17), consider carefully the lives of the people you know that have been changed as a result of knowing and following Jesus. Consider the persecutor of Christians whose contact with Jesus Christ resulted in his becoming a believer himself (Saul of Tarsus).

In his book, The Christian Story, Gabriel Fackre suggests that the Old Testament word, *Shalom*, describes the inner peace that God intends for nature and the divine to share together. In this peace between God, nature, and humankind comes liberation (Luke 4:18; Galatians 5:1) and reconciliation (Romans 5:8-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). *Shalom* includes freedom from sin, evil, and death and gives us life together with God. Only when Jesus comes again will the internal peace (*Shalom*) that we seek be fully realized (Colossians 2:9).

Understand that the only source of internal peace is Jesus. He is our Peace, our Liberator, and our Reconciler. Only in Him will we find the escape from captivity and be liberated from sin, evil, and death. To forfeit that peace and victory that Jesus offers is to miss the internal peace that Jesus intends for you to have (Mark 3:27; 10:45; Ephesians 2:14-16; 6:14; Philippians 2:9-10; Colossians 2:15).

A war torn veteran told me of being in a foxhole with bombs dropping all around him. His ears were filled with the sounds of explosions, of course, but he also could hear the prayers uttered by his fellow soldiers scattered in the foxholes around him. He said, "I had an inner peace. I knew that if the next bomb landed directly in my foxhole that I had a better place to go." In heaven there will be no need for foxholes or bombs. The inner peace that we have prayerfully sought will be eternal peace. Our faith will become sight. *W.O.T.*

The Words of Truth

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TED BURLISON, EDITOR

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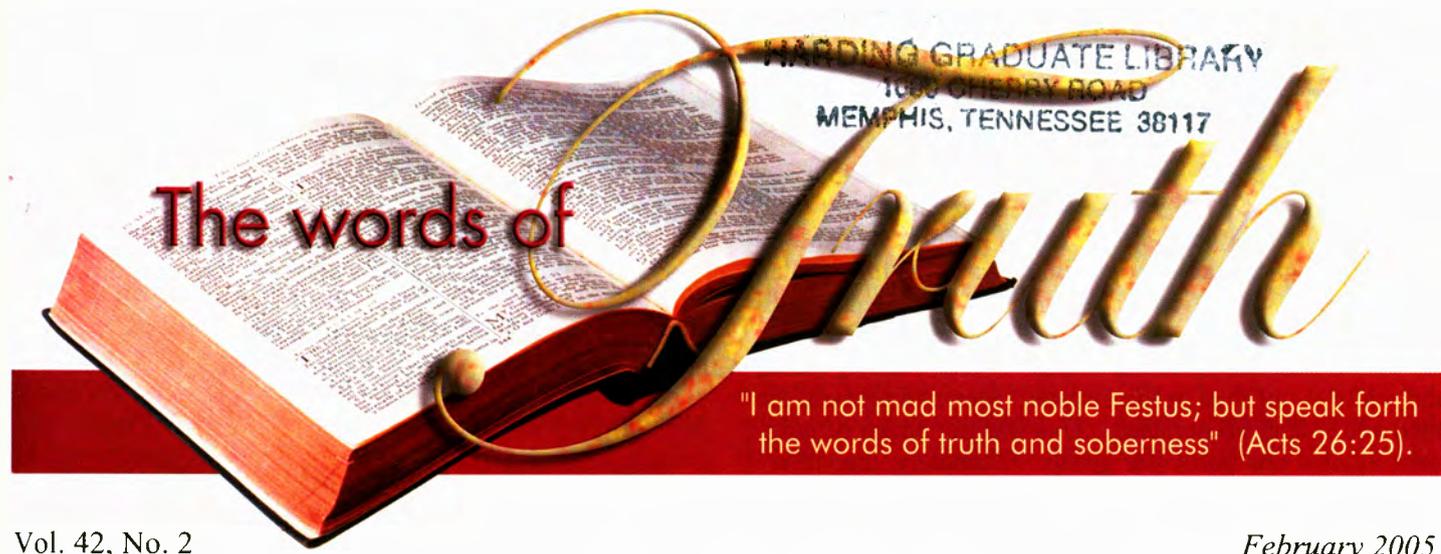
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TRAGEDY NEVER TRUMPS GOD

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Tragedies strike often. Terrorists' attacks, natural disasters, crime, disease, and relationship problems hurt humanity. In the aftermath of tragedies many of us begin to ask familiar questions: Why did this happen? Why did innocent people have to die? By now many of us have seen the news coverage of the disaster in the nations on the rim of the Indian Ocean. Over an estimated 150,000 people thus far have been presumed dead and the number is continually on the rise. Hundreds of children are either dead or have been left orphaned in the wake of this awful tragedy. Villages and resorts in more than ten nations were decimated by the destructive waves and flooding that came to shore from the powerful earthquake that struck the region. Many nations and organizations have flooded the region with benevolent aid, demonstrating great love and support for their fellow man.

There are a number of ways people have responded to this disaster. Some have immediately blamed God and wondered why He would allow such a thing to happen, or perhaps have stated that He was punishing worldly religions that are prominent in the region. Israeli chief rabbi Shlomo Amar told Reuters Press that, "This is an expression of God's great ire with the world...the world is being punished for wrongdoing — be it people's needless hatred of each other, lack of charity, [or] moral turpitude." Others point to science and explain the disaster from a wholly secular understanding. Secularist Martin Kettle in a recent interview in Britain stated that the tsunami should "ask if the God can exist that can do such things?"

There are no easy answers to these questions of accusations and yet they are not new. With suffering these questions inevitably surface. First, we must acknowledge that God is in control of all things, including natural events. He flooded the world (Genesis 6-8), sent the

plagues (Exodus 7-12), and performed all sorts of natural wonders in Scripture. God allowed the tsunami that struck Asia to happen. But why? Trying to scientifically analyze the mind of God with human logic is impossible. In faith we acknowledge that He is sovereign and has our best interest in mind (Romans 8:28). It is true that at times God does pour out His wrath in judgment, but it is not good to assume that anytime something bad happens it is because of the sins of the ones suffering (cf. Luke 13:1-5). This is what the Book of Job is all about. Why was Job suffering? His friends and Elihu argued for over thirty chapters that it was because of Job's sin. Job was angry that he was suffering because he felt he had done nothing to deserve it. These assumptions were the problem. Sometimes suffering has no logical explanation. Once sin entered the world in Genesis 3, the order of creation was turned to chaos. In the Garden there was harmony, unity, and order. After the fall of humankind there was treachery, hatred, and chaos. Because of sinfulness, sometimes bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. That is the reality of a fallen world. In dealing with disaster we must remember and teach others:

1. God is in control and seeks what ultimately is best for us and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:28, 35-39).
2. Death is inevitable. Death and judgment are appointments that we must all keep (Hebrews 9:27). Humanity is sometimes reminded of this fact on a large scale and it is difficult for a world who does not know Christ to handle.
3. Through Christ we can conquer death (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-58). Christ gave us the opportunity through faith to overcome the world.

4. Faith can lead us through the sufferings of life. True wisdom and purposeful living come from knowing God (Job 28; Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

Here are a couple of things to consider about this disaster specifically. God wants everyone, regardless of race, age, nationality, or gender to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). Many people died in this disaster. Indonesian, Muslims, Indian Hindus, Buddhists from Thailand and Sri Lanka, and Christian and Jewish tourists all died in the disaster. People of various ethnic backgrounds — red, yellow, black, and white — all died in the disaster. Men and women, the aged and infant, all perished. This was not an act of judgment against one particular group. Ultimately, the sufferings of this world — death, disease, and divorce — should cause us to do two things. First, suffering should cause us to long even more for the place that Christ is preparing for us (John 14:1-4). A place where there is no suffering, heartache, or inexplicable loss and tragedy (Revelation 21:1-4). Jesus reminds us in Luke 13:1-5 that we ultimately avoid true death through repentance. That is how we ultimately prepare for all tragedies. Secondly, suffering should lead us to thank God. We thank Him for His providence. He provides for us and sustains us and offers us an unshakeable hope that will never fade away. On the difficult days we have a blessed assurance. Let us live differently. Let us be resources for those who struggle to find purpose and relevance in life. Because of God's in-

spired Word we have a divine insight to all things that we must share with the world. No tragic event has ever trumped God. Let us commit to trust in Him and His un-failing love.

Sources:

Peter Graff. "Faith Asks of Quake: 'Why Did You Do This God?'" London: Reuters Press. Thursday, December 30, 2004.

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FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. What can separate us from the love of God? (Romans 8:35-39)
2. What is appointed for men [each person]? (Hebrews 9:27)
3. What is the "whole duty" of man [each person]? (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14)
4. Why should we not allow our hearts to be troubled? (John 14:1-4)
5. Does the fact that some suffer more than others prove that they were greater sinners than the rest? (Luke 13:1-5) W.O.T.

EDUCATED LOVE

Mike Benson, Oak Hill Church of Christ, Evansville, IN

From our twenty-first century perspective, Christian love is a sensate quality

It is something experiential; it is something that we *feel* internally. Love is a warm, affectionate, reciprocal bond that is shared by brethren.

When Paul petitioned God on behalf of the Philippian saints, he wrote, "*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment*" (Philippians 1:9 NKJV). Did you catch that? "*That your love*" (Greek, *agape*) "*may abound . . . in knowledge and discernment*" (emphasis mine—mb). Arthur Pink, in his work, *Gleanings from Paul*, made the following observation about this passage:

"The apostle longed that their love might be so informed and their understanding so guided by spiritual judgment and sense that on all occasions they would be able to distinguish between truth and error in doctrine" (209).

His point merits our attention. The modern concept of love, in at least some segments of the church today, is more of an *emotional sentimentality* (cf. Romans 10:2), as opposed to the informed, judicial *agape* which Paul desired for his brethren in Philippi.¹ For many, love is an

unconditional, familial acceptance that overlooks, and even ignores, objective truth. In fact, it is frequently viewed as an acceptable *substitute* for soundness of doctrine (cf. 1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). Brethren are afraid to offend anyone—under any circumstance, and so their relationship to a brother, family member or friend supersedes their allegiance to divine will (cf. Luke 14:26).

While there is certainly nothing wrong with enjoying warm feelings toward another child of God (cf. Philippians 1:3-8, 13, 14), the real basis of any tie must be something much more tangible than the fleeting whims of emotion. Our love must not be a blind, unguided affection for any personality (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12), but one that is spiritually discriminating—i.e., an "educated" devotion (cf. Hebrews 5:14).

¹It was a "knowing" (Greek—*epignosis*) love that enabled them to become better acquainted with the truth of Scripture (Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, 1098), and it was a "judicial" (Greek—*aesthesis*) love that helped them make proper moral decisions "in the vast array of differing and difficult choices" (Hawthorne, as quoted by Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, 448). W.O.T.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Gus Nichols, 1892-1975

So much is being said and written about human denominations called "churches" that many seem never to have learned that Christ has a church at all. Some time after the death of John the Baptist, Christ asked His disciples who they said He was. Peter said, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16; 14:1-12). Peter thus confessed the rock-bed, fundamental truth of Christianity.

"Upon This Rock"

Christ said: "*Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). Christ is, therefore, the foundation of the church. "*Other foundations can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Catholics are wrong in teaching that Peter is the foundation of the church. Hence, we must dig "deep" through the rubbish of human tradition and doctrines of men in order to build on Christ, the "Rock" (Luke 6:47, 48). To build upon any other is to build on the sand (Matthew 7:24-26). We build upon Christ by hearing and doing what he says do (Luke 6:46-48). This also puts one in the church built upon Christ, the Rock. No one can build upon Christ and not be part of the church, the superstructure built on Him. The foundation is not too large for the church. Hence, there is not even a toe hold for one to rest on Christ outside of the building, or church, erected upon Christ, the Rock.

Christ, the Builder

Any church not built by Christ is not His church. He said, "*I will build my church*" (Matthew 16:18). Any church built by some man would be in competition with the church built by Christ. No man has any divine authority to build a church. And it is a presumptuous sin for any man to think he could build a better church than the Lord. Neither can any man improve upon the church which the Lord built. The prophet said that Christ, the "*Branch*," would "*build the temple*" of the Lord, which is called the church (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:20-22). We can take the seed, the word of God, and reproduce congregations like those in the New Testament (Luke 8:11; Mark 4:14). But no man has any right to start a religious body. Christ prayed for the unity of all who believe on Him (John 17:20-22). Certainly He did not want us to start the more than two hundred sects and parties called churches in our country. There is a call to return to the church built by Christ and unite in it (Ephesians 4:3-6).

"Will Build" in Future

"*I will build*" my church is future tense (Matthew 16:18). This promise to build His church was during His personal ministry, and after the death of John the Baptist

(Matthew 14:1-12; 16:18). Hence John was never a member of the church of Christ. He lived and died before Christ built His church. The church was only in preparation before the cross. It was not built in the days of the Old Testament saints. Christ did not say, "*I have built my church*," He said, "*I will build my church*." He did not even say, "*I am building my church*" (present tense); but He said, "*I will build my church*" (Matthew 16:18). Hence, the church was not built during the personal ministry of Christ, before the cross. Christ as the foundation stone had to become a "*tried stone*" before He could be laid in Zion (Isaiah 28:16). Hence, the foundation was not laid until Christ stood the supreme test in His death and resurrection and was proved to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4). The stone had to be rejected before being laid (Acts 4:11, 12; Mark 8:31). Peter calls Pentecost the "*beginning*" (Acts 11:15; 2:1-4). This is when the Lord began to add to the church such as were being saved (Acts 2:36-47). To preach Christ is to lay the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:8-11). But they were not permitted to preach Christ before the cross (Matthew 16:20). This brings us to the Great Commission, and the execution thereof to find the church in operation as such. The old law lasted to the cross (Colossians 2:14). The true church began in A.D. 33, in Jerusalem, after the New Testament went into force (Hebrews 9:15-17; 10:9, 10).

"Build"—Not Merely Edify

When the Lord said He would build His church, He did not mean to merely edify or enlarge it. His reference to the foundation shows that He meant to build His church from the foundation. He said, "*Upon this rock I will build my church*" (Matthew 16:18). No one would have been so foolish as to think He would have to take it off the foundation to merely edify it. Also He would have used the past and present tenses if He meant to merely edify it, for He had edified His disciples by His teaching, and was right then doing so. But this was not building the church. He said I "*will*" build my church. Hence, He meant He would establish His church.

"My Church"

Christ did not build a church for John the Baptist, nor any other man. He said, "*I will build MY church*" (Matthew 16:18). It is therefore the church of Christ. "*Feed the church of the Lord which He purchased with His own blood*" (Acts 26:28, ASV). The church is called "His" body (Ephesians 1:22; 1 Corinthians 11:16). Congregations of this church are called "*churches of Christ*" and "*churches of God*" (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 11:16). It belongs to both. Christ said to the Father, "*Mine are thine and thine are mine*" (John 17:10).

Church Not Denomination

Christ did not build the sects, religious parties, and denominations called churches in our country. Certainly He did not thus cause all such confusion after having prayed for the unity of all who believe (John 17:20-22). "*God is not the author of confusion*" (1 Corinthians 14:33). Christ built only one church, and men built the denominations. He said He would build his "*church*," singular in number (Matthew 16:18). The church is called "*His body*," and He certainly did not have a plurality of bodies over which to be head. Paul wrote, "*There is one body*" and "*but one body*" (Ephesians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 12:20). To be a church of Christ a congregation must be identical with "*churches of Christ*" in the New Testament, in name, doctrine, and practice.

Gates of Hell Not Prevail

The Lord said, "*The gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). The word "hell" here means Hades, the abode of departed spirits. The "gates" of hell meant death—the way into Hades. Hence, death could not prevail against building the church. Though He would be crucified, God would not leave His soul in Hades. He would rise and build His church. Or, if this be not the idea, then death would never render the church extinct. Part of the family of God, the church, exists in heaven (Ephesians 3:14, 15; 1 Timothy 3:15). We do not cease to be members of the church at death, like they do in the denominations and sects of men, the lodges, and suchlike.

"Give Thee the Keys"

Christ pictured the church as a house when He said, "*Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). Then with the door, or the way of entrance, in mind, He said, "*And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom*" (Matthew 16:19). Christ gave the apostles the keys,

or power, to open the way or make known the terms of membership in the church. This He did on Pentecost (Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-4). Peter, being a charter member of the church when the Spirit came, preached Christ, or laid the foundation (Acts 2:22-36). When a sinner asked what to do, Peter turned the key and you can almost hear it "click" as He said, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38). Then we read that "*the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*" (Acts 2:41, 47). This is the church of Christ. Those who do likewise now are added to the same church. All such should continue in the truth (Acts 2:42; 2 John 9).

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. To build upon any other foundation than Christ, the "Rock," is to build on what? (Luke 6:47, 48)
2. What "seed" is required to reproduce congregations like those of the New Testament? (Luke 8:11; Mark 4:14)
3. How do we know that John the Baptist was not a member of the church of Christ? (Matthew 14:1-12; 16:18).
4. Whose church did Jesus promise to build? (Matthew 16:18) How many bodies, or churches, did Jesus promise to build? (Ephesians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 12:20)
5. Who was added to the church that Christ built? (Acts 2:47)

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article by brother Nichols is reprinted with permission of his family. It first appeared in the Mountain Eagle, the local paper in Jasper, Alabama, in 1947.

W. O. T.

THE PARABLE OF TWO DEBTORS

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

Why did Jesus speak in parables? The disciples wondered just that (Matthew 13:10). The Holy Spirit records four answers. First, Jesus used parables because not all would receive the mysteries of the Kingdom by direct revelation (13:11). Further, He did so because many hearts were dull and eyes and ears were closed (13:13-16). Those with faith would accept His teaching, but unbelievers would not understand. Then, He used parables because the prophets foretold that He would (13:34, 35). Finally, He did because there were things hidden from the foundation of the world that He must reveal (13:35).

What relevance, then, do the parables have for the modern Bible reader? Now, the parables exist as part of that written revelation. Through them, one can see proph-

ecy fulfilled. The mystery that has been kept secret for long ages past (cf. Romans 16:25) can now be known. Thus, the parables are of paramount importance as practical instruction today.

Jesus' parables come out of many settings. He spoke them during private talks with the disciples, in public sermons, and on the occasion of miracles and healings, but maybe the most effective parables were borne out of situations where His enemies tested him. The parable in Luke 7:41-42 is such a one. Consider four key words that aid one to better understand the so-called "Parable of Two Debtors."

Continued on the next page

Content

The actual parable is two verses in length, as man has divided scripture. Jesus expended a total of thirty Greek words (43—NIV; 40—KJV; 34—NAS). The parable is filled with simple images that are easily comprehended. He presents *the characters*, a moneylender and two debtors. He presents *the situation*, that one owes about 500 days wages while another owes 50. He presents *the predicament*, namely that neither had the ability to repay their debt. He presents *the lender's response*, who graciously forgives both of them. He presents *the debtors' reactions*, which is left for the hearers to interpret but is easily discerned.

Two men in debt needed help beyond their ability to resolve. The lender is also the forgiver. Jesus uses financial problems to illustrate spiritual problems. How appropriate, since most people, regardless of time or geography, have suffered financial reverses. One national survey found that seventy percent of all worries involve money (Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 531). Suppose a person owed a single creditor \$100,000 and the creditor called in the entire debt at once. The debtor is unable to pay, and the creditor sends back news that the entire debt is totally expunged from the record. How would that person feel toward the creditor, compared, say, with one who owed \$1000 but whose debt was also forgiven. The parable teaches the principle of greater debt, greater appreciation, and lesser debt, lesser appreciation.

Context

The setting of the parable gives it its meaning. Jesus uses the parable to illustrate two very different people before His eyes. Consider them.

The **first** person is a Pharisee named Simon. One scholar points out that:

The Pharisees were the largest sect of the Jews. They grew out of an older party, the Chasidim, the Pious ones, and became the "Separatists" of ancient times. They took the name "Pharisee" probably during the rule of John Hyrcanus, BC 135-110. They favored a narrow religio-political policy, in distinction to the Sadducees who wished to see the Jews a nation among the Nations (Robertson, na).

If the Jews labeled themselves "conservatives" and "liberals," it could be commonly agreed that the Pharisees were the former and the Sadducees the latter. While Jesus had no quarrel with their strict interpretation of the Law (cf. Matthew 23:3), He often rebuked their heart and attitude (Matthew 23:3-5). Simon the Pharisee apparently had no glaring, outward sin problems, but was guilty in Luke seven of some severe heart problems.

The **second** person is a woman of the city and a known sinner. Some have theorized that she was a prostitute, but nonetheless not likely to have been on Simon's "A" List. She brings an alabaster vial of perfume, a long

neck bottle Jewish women wore as an accessory around the neck and broken when festive occasions called for its use. Simon had invited Jesus for a meal, but she had "crashed" the party. It took a lot of courage for her to come where she was obviously not welcome.

When Jews ate their meals at dinner parties, they would have reclined on low couches. They leaned on their left arm with the head toward the table and the body stretched out away from it. They removed their sandals before taking this position. This is the way the woman would have found Jesus. Her emotions seemingly overcome her and her tears fall on His feet. She wiped His feet with her hair, which means she would have had to unbind her hair. This was a social taboo for Jewish women. By this point, one sees that she cared more about honoring Jesus than pleasing the crowd. She performs a slave's task, tending to His feet.

After the parable, Jesus asks a remarkable question: "Do you see this woman?" Obviously, Simon knew she was there, but he did not see her properly. G. Campbell Morgan writes, "Simon could not see the woman as she then was, for looking at her as she had been." There are a lot of Simons in the world who refuse to let those who become Christians forget what they once were (cf. 1 Peter 4:4). Yet, the worst Simons can be in the church, refusing to let penitent, forgiven brothers and sisters forget their past.

The story ends with Jesus informing Simon that He had forgiven the woman's sins. In Matthew 9:3, when He forgave the paralytic's sins, the scribes thought Jesus a blasphemer. Yet, He does not gloss over the woman's apparent immorality. He calls them her "many sins" (Luke 7:47). In this, He rebukes Simon for "loving little" and implies that He stood unforgiven.

Contrast

One owed much and one owed less. Both of them, however, are sinners and are in a greater debt than they can repay. Such has always been the case, as it is today (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:10; Romans 3:10,23; 1 John 5:19). Yet, the difference between the two debts is obvious.

One was forgiven much and one was forgiven less. The word "forgave" (Luke 7:42) is different from "forgiven" in verse forty-eight. "Forgave" (7:42) is from the same word family as the word translated "grace" throughout the New Testament. The word "forgiven" means "let go" or "release," and when used in legal terms meant to be freed from an office, marriage, debt or obligation. The forgiveness Jesus offered was an act rather than a nebulous concept. It was a conditional gift she could enjoy eternally. She sought forgiveness, while Simon did not. She received it, but he did not.

One was humble and one was proud. Jesus praises the sinner and condemns the religious leader. Why? In a word, "Attitude." The parable in Luke eighteen illustrates this well, verse fourteen pronouncing the sinful tax collector justified and the pompous Pharisee not justified. Jesus

saw great potential in a "Big S" sinner who knew it than in a "little s" sinner who did not.

One loved much and one loved little. Jesus implies this in the parable and makes Simon explicitly admit it. The natural response of every forgiven person should be "much love" (cf. 1 John 4:19).

Conclusions

Consider some practical lessons one can glean from that parable for today.

No one is worthy of forgiveness. Both debtors in the parable did nothing to merit forgiveness. No one today is worthy (cf. Titus 3:5). To understand God's grace, one must see himself as a sinner in need of it.

Not all sinners grasp the seriousness of their sinfulness. Simon was no less a sinner, but he acted like he was. Likewise, some of the hardest people to win to Christ are good, moral, but unsaved people (cf. Matthew 7:21-23).

No one can repay his debt. Not just the two fictional characters in the parable. Not just Simon and the woman. Everybody needs Jesus (Micah 6:7).

Sins of attitude are as deadly as sins of action. Ask the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). Among the lusts of the flesh, wherein is listed mur-

der, adultery, and fornication, one also finds outbursts of anger, disputes, and envy. Sins of attitude will keep one out of heaven as surely as will sins of action (cf. Romans 6:23).

Jesus freely forgives those who seek it. That is the good news and bottom line of this parable. Jesus' forgiveness is available to everyone (Titus 2:11; 1 Timothy 2:6). Yet, one must seek it like the sinful woman did!

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Why did Jesus often speak to the people in parables? (Matthew 13:13-15)
2. The parable of the two debtors was told to what person? What was this person? (Luke 7:39, 40)
3. What person, other than Simon and Jesus, were present when Jesus told the parable of the two debtors? (Luke 7:37-42)
4. For what attitudes and actions had Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees? (Matthew 23:2-5)
5. What word or phrase did Jesus use to indicate the quantity of the sins of the woman that Simon considered a sinner? (Luke 7:42)

W.O.T.

LESSONS FROM A WEARY SNOW TRAVELER

Tim Childs, Hillcrest Church of Christ, Baldwyn, MS

The snow fell (and fell some more). The freezing rain and sleet came down for hours. What a "beautiful" mess. What a perilous hazard for travelers during the busy Holiday Season. There are spiritual lessons that may be drawn from nature and our physical experiences in the aftermath of a snowstorm.

Some people are bound to drive at breakneck speed regardless of the driving conditions. Common sense and caution have been thrown to the wind. As a result, drivers risk their own lives, the lives of their families and the people they meet (or pass). Some travel through life at such a pace they neglect their souls, the souls of their families, and the souls of individuals they meet. Apparently for so many, there is something out there that is far more important than taking time out for God, for Bible reading, study, meditation and prayer. As they race through life, either unaware or uncaring of their destination, by their indifference to the Kingdom of Heaven and spiritual matters, they risk it all and put the ones they profess to love so much in danger of losing their souls, too. Consider Luke 9:25 and what is at stake.

From time to time there are hazards in our path, like snow and ice. The sign on the parkway may read "65" as the limit, but that does not mean it is always expedient to

drive at that speed (or faster). The devil delights in placing hazards in the pathway of the Christian. We know his motivation and we are sure of his goal. He wants to see you and me get off track. He wants to see us trip up, to stumble and fall. If he is successful, he realizes we may never be the same again. We may lose heart. We may lose our ardor and devotion to Christ. Our misstep may just be the first step in our departure from the true, living God we love (Hebrews 3:12).

As Christians, you and I must move ahead, but we must move forward with caution as we, like Abraham before us, pursue that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). The Holy Scriptures gives you and me keen insight and great awareness to the type of hazards Satan, the deceiver, employs. We, like Paul, cannot afford to be ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11) thereby allowing Satan to gain the upper hand. Through His amazing love, grace and power, God has "given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who has called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life will always cause us to veer off the straight and narrow road that leads to heaven above (1 John 2:15-17). Travel on Home! W.O.T.

QUESTIONS REGARDING WORSHIP

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

Please take time to study your Bible and answer the following questions regarding worship:

Acts 10:25—*“And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.”*

- When Cornelius fell down at Peter’s feet and worshipped him, was his worship inappropriate? How do you know?
- What was the reason given for not allowing Cornelius to worship him? (10:26).

Revelation 19:10; 22:8, 9—*“And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” “And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.”*

- What was the angel’s response to John when he fell down at the feet of the angel to worship him?
- Whom did the angel direct John to worship?
- Was John’s worship of the angel inappropriate?

The word most frequently translated “worship” is the Greek word proskuneo (pros-koo-neh’-o) which means to “kiss toward” or “prostrate oneself” in worship. We have examples of four kinds of worship after this manner:

- **Worship directed toward God** — Jesus told the Samaritan woman that *“true worshipers”* shall *“worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him”* (John 4:21-24).
- **Worship directed toward Jesus** — The wise men (magi in the Greek) sought the one born King of the Jews for they had seen His star in the east and had *“come to worship him”* (Matthew 2:2).

- **Worship directed toward Satan or his representatives** — Satan tempted Jesus to worship him (Matthew 4:9).
- **directed toward an idol**—Stephen, in his address to the Sanhedrin Council, recalled the history of Israel and reminded them of a time that their ancestors *“took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them”* (Acts 7:43).

One of the benefits of worshipping the Lord together is the edification such activity gives the worshipers. The concept of the action of the church as a whole is understood through the phrase, *“gathering together,”* and the word, *“assembly,”* although these gatherings do not always involve worship situations. Study the following words and passages:

Sunago, (soon-ag’-o) - to cause to come together (Strong’s #4863)

- Acts 12:12—many were gathered together at Mary’s house to do what?
- Acts 14:27—the church was gathered together to hear what?
- Acts 20:7, 8—the disciples came together on the first day of the week to do what? What did Paul do while they were assembled?
- 1 Corinthians 5:4—Paul instructed the Corinthians to do what with his spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Sunerchomai, (soon-er’-khom-ahee) - to come together with others as a group (Strong’s #4905)

- 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34—The Corinthians were coming together in an inappropriate manner. What corrections did Paul instruct them to make together?
- 1 Corinthians 14:23—Who was coming together in one place?

Episunagoge, (ep-ee-soon-ag’-o) - a gathering together, meeting of a Christian group

- Hebrews 10:25—What does the writer of Hebrews instruct his readers not to forsake?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Andy Kizer, Ninth Avenue Church of Christ, Haleyville, AL

Question: Are fund raisers appropriate? I mean, can we use car washes, bazaars, and bingo to raise money for the Lord's work?

Answer: The Lord's work does cost money. That is a fact we cannot escape, but from where should that money come? We find no authority in the New Testament for the use of car washes, raffles, bazaars, candle sales, pie suppers, or cake walks to raise funds. What we do find are the free will offerings of generous saints.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that they should "*put aside and save*" "*on the first day of every week*" (1 Corinthians 16:2 NASV). He had already given this order to the churches of Galatia (cf. 16:1).

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be liberal and sacrificial in their giving. He used the Macedonian Christians to do that. Earlier, he had encouraged the Macedonians to be liberal by boasting of the giving of the saints in Achaia (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:1, 2), and added, "*God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Corinthians 9:7). The funds were needed for "*the relief of the saints*" (2 Corinthians 8:4).

Just as the Old Testament tabernacle was built with the gifts of the Jews (cf. Exodus 35:4-29), so is the Lord's work today to be financed by the saints. God wants His children to pay for His work, not someone unrelated to Him.

In the book of Philippians we find that the preaching of the gospel was supported by the giving of Christians (Philippians 4:14-18). Such giving is also called "*a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*" (Philippians 4:18). Only priests are allowed to offer up sacrifices in worship to God, but all Christians are members of a holy and royal priesthood (1 Peter. 2:5, 9).

W.O.T.

The Words of Truth

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TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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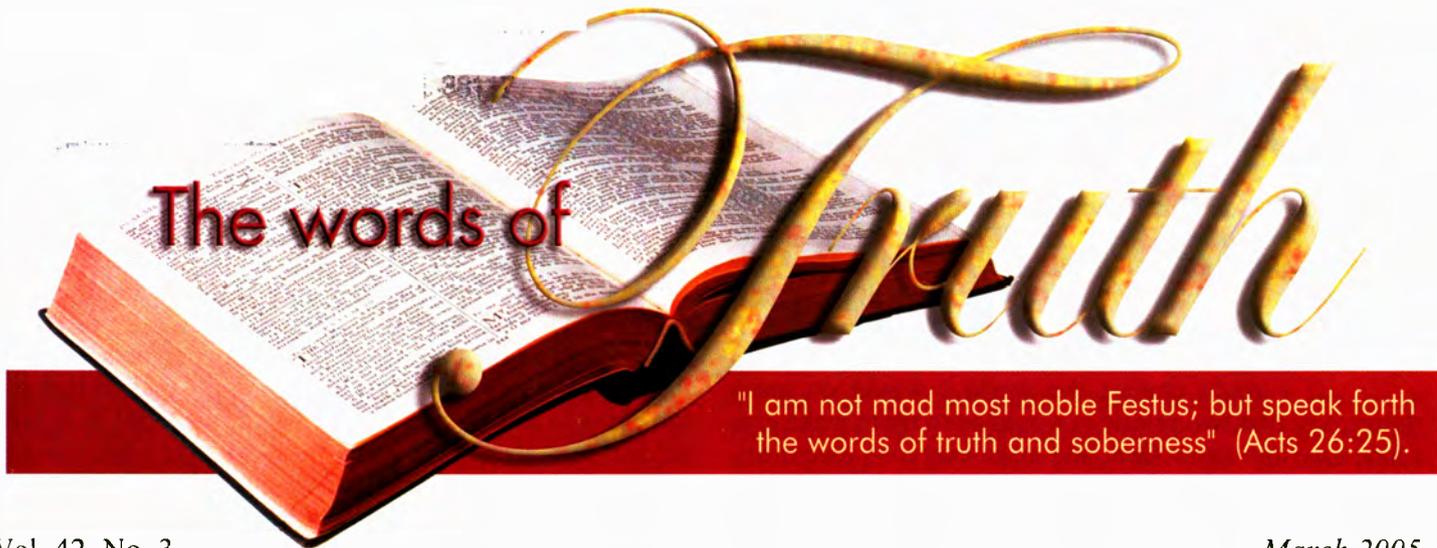
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"I am not mad most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

FAITHFUL LOVE

Todd Clippard, Burleson Church of Christ, Hamilton, AL

What comes to mind when you hear the word "love?" In the English language, we have numerous uses for and nuances of this wonderful word. We may speak of loving God, family, food, pets, sports, or country. All of these types of "love" differ in some way from all the others. This article will address three types of love: fickle love, false love, and faithful love.

Fickle love comes in many forms. "Fickle" means to be flighty, lacking constancy or stability. Some have a fickle love for others. Their "love" is based upon what someone else can do for them. Therefore, if the benefits cease to exist, or greater benefits may be found elsewhere, then their "love" is abandoned and directed to someone or something else. One might think of the friends of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Where were they when the money ran out?

Unfortunately, a lot of people "love" God with a fickle love. If things are going well, or if God is perceived to be blessing folks materially, or so long as they can serve God on their terms, then love for God is shown. However, if things turn south, or if "something better" comes along (other activities, etc), then God is jettisoned and other things are pursued.

False love is based upon false premises. It has no basis in reality or truth. For example, some love others based upon a false idea of who they really are. This happens to both men and women, particularly those who have been in abusive relationships and those who have lost their mate. How many women fall in love with a man based upon a false perception of who the man is? Perhaps in their desire to love and be loved, they are blind to the realities of the man's character and intent. Disappointment and disaster await at the end of such relationships.

As with fickle love, some people love a Jesus who does not exist. They have a false perception of God, of Christ, and of religion in general. All they want is the positive. They want the God of love and grace, but forget about the God of judgment and the Jesus who demands we bear our cross daily (Luke 9:23). Think about the three identifications given to Jesus in Acts 2:36. He is called "Jesus," "Lord," and "Christ." "Jesus" means, "savior" (Matthew 1:21), "Lord" means, "master," and "Christ" means "anointed one," and has reference to His kingship. Everyone wants to have Jesus as their savior, but how many are willing to truly accept Him as their master and king? (cf. Luke 6:46). If Jesus is our Master and King, we must be willing to submit to His will in everything.

Faithful love is just that...it is founded in FAITH. It is based in FACT. It is FIRM in its resolve, reflecting maturity and unwavering trust. It can withstand the storms and setbacks of life. Best of all, it is love with a FUTURE. It looks forward to what can be instead of to the past and what was. This is the kind of love that is typified in marriage. It is not so blind as to see (or expect) perfection, but strives for it in every way. It recognizes the potential for growth and greatness in the days ahead. It is also the kind of love Christians must have toward God. It is based on the reality of God's truth (John 17:17). It is grounded in the promises of a faithful God (1 Corinthians 10:13; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 11:8-11). It looks to a great and glorious future. As children of God, we need to love this world and the things herein less and be committed to loving God more everyday. The more we know God, the more we will love and appreciate Him (Psalm 116).

IF I COULD CHANGE THE WORLD

Lauren Nichols, Eighth Grader, Jasper, AL

If you asked someone on the street what they would do if they could change the world, I think most people would say, "feed the hungry, stop the wars, and make world peace." Not that those are not important things that the world needs, but the world needs so much more than those three things.

If I could change the world I would do many things. My first two priorities would be to try to make everyone love and know God, and make everyone love themselves and each other for who they are.

So many people in this world don't love or know God. If it weren't for Him we wouldn't even be here right now. Everything we do needs to glorify God's name. I know for a fact that some of the things that are happening in this world are not bringing glory to God's name. This is evident in television shows and in movies. The first thing that comes to my mind is the language. It is disgusting to me how many people are taking God's name in vain. We now have to have a rating system on our television shows and movies because the language is so bad. Every television show and movie should be suitable for all ages. There is no reason for all of the cursing and sexual content that is in them.

The second thing that comes to my mind is the explicit showing of a lack of clothing on so many of the teenage girls. The clothing issue hasn't become a bad problem until about the last five years or so. I don't understand why so many girls would want to dress like that. The other thing I don't understand is why their parents would even let them walk out of the house dressed like that. I know the girls probably think it looks good to be wearing short, tight tops and shorts, but I can tell them that it looks horrendous. I wish girls would stop dressing in such an improper way. God did not make this world for us to be walking around cursing and wearing improper

clothing.

Also, if I could change the world I would try to teach the world the gospel so everyone could go to heaven. I know it would probably be impossible for just me to try to teach the world, but I am sure a lot of Christians would be willing to help. So many people are caught up in their earthly things that they don't realize that it's not going to matter in heaven if they drove a BMW in high school, or if they were voted most popular. So, I would try to help them all realize that. While on earth, God commanded us to teach the gospel to every creature. As a Christian, I am going to try to fulfill His commandments.

Another change I would make if I could change the world would be to make everyone love themselves and each other for who they are. There is no need for women or men to be having cosmetic surgery to make themselves look better. Some people are dying because of this. The women don't need nose jobs because their nose is too big, a breast enhancement because their breasts are too small, or a facelift because they are getting older and starting to see wrinkles. Those are all things that these women could live without. God made us this way for a reason; He does not want us to tamper with what He has given us. Also, women and men are starving themselves on diets because they are not the ideal size. I am not saying we need to over eat and kill ourselves. I am just saying we need to take care of our bodies.

In conclusion, there are many things that I would do if I could change the world. I would try to make everyone love and know God, and make everyone love themselves and each other for who they are. In the future if all these things happen, the world will be a better place.

EDITOR'S NOTE: When I first read Lauren's essay, I knew it needed to be shared. Lauren is a fine Christian

THINGS THAT DIFFER

Gus Nichols, 1892-1975

Many things are not what they seem. Truth and error, right and wrong, good and bad have been scrambled by the world. (Isaiah 5:20). It should be our desire and prayer to be able to discriminate between things which differ (1 Kings 3:9; Hebrews 5:12-14). It requires no little wisdom and knowledge to discern between things which are not identical. Few people are close observers of the promises given or logical in their reasoning and deductions. God calls upon men to reason with him, and we are to pray to be delivered from "unreasonable" men (2 Thes-

salonians 3:2). God holds men responsible for not reasoning correctly (Mark 2:8). False reasoning is often the fruit of a wicked heart. When men do not care to see the difference between truth or from good and bad, or right and wrong, they are not likely to see it. The devil blinds the minds of men when permitted by them to do so (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). We should strive to see the difference in all things which really differ. But we should not make a difference where there is none.

FAITH AND BELIEF

I once heard a sermon in which the speaker tried to show that faith is not the same thing as belief. But before he finished, he forgot his own contention and quoted the statement to the jailer: "*BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*" (Acts 16:31). Jesus said "*These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*" (John 20:31). Here the faith that brings "life" is called, "Believing." Abraham "*BELIEVED GOD*" and "*IT*" was "*counted unto him for righteousness*" (Romans 4:3). Of course, the word "faith" is a noun, while "believe" is a verb, but both mean the same thing, and are used interchangeably. "*But without FAITH it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must BELIEVE*" (Hebrews 11:6). "*Be not faithless, but believing*" (John 20:27). According to the quibblers, the apostle should have said, "FAITH ON the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" but he, of course, properly used the verb form of the word and said, "*Believe on the Lord,*" etc. Think of the absurdity of saying, "Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh of God must have FAITH THAT HE IS," etc. (Hebrews 11:6). The difference between obedient FAITH and BELIEVING obediently, is the difference between "tweedledum" and "tweedledee." And the very people who see a distinction where there is none, are first to ignore differences where they do exist.

SAVED BY FAITH VS. SAVED BY FAITH ONLY

When the Bible says we are saved by faith, many scramble this by adding the word, "Only" to the Lord's word, and teach that we are saved by faith, "Only," or faith, "Alone." Now, here is a real difference as wide as the poles. The Bible actually denies their idea by saying it is, "*Not by faith only*" (James 2:24, 14). When the Bible says a thing was accomplished, "By faith," it does not mean faith only, or faith unexpressed by obedience to God. For example, Paul says, "*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days*" (Hebrews 11:30). Here they marched around the walls of the city seven days before they fell, "*By faith.*" When the inspired apostle says they fell down, "*By faith,*" he means faith which included obedience to the conditions upon which the walls were to be thrown down. Hence, the faith which brings the blessings of God upon his creatures, is faith which includes obedience. Paul speaks of the gospel being preached unto all nations, "*For the obedience of faith*" (Romans 16:26). We are saved "*BY FAITH,*" but it is not by faith "*ONLY.*" In the great Commission, Christ said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:15-16). And, of course, he was speaking of how to be saved by faith. Hence, we are saved by faith, after faith has led us to be baptized (Colossians 2:12). "*Without faith it is impossible to please him.*"

Hence, if baptism is not an act of faith, it does not please God. Baptism being a part of the faith that saves, the fact that we are saved by faith does not exclude baptism from the conditions of salvation. It is pitiable to see some partisan try to get rid of what the Bible says about the necessity of baptism by quoting scriptures which say we are saved "*By faith*" as though they excluded baptism from the plan. A hundred passages saying we are saved "*By faith*" would not come in a million miles of teaching that we are saved by faith "*Alone.*" Does the fact that the Bible says, "*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down*" exclude the fact they did not fall by faith until "*After they were compassed about seven days?*" (Hebrews 11:30). Of course, the walls fell "*By faith.*" The Bible says that. But the Bible does not say they fell by faith alone, or the very moment they believed and started to obey.

FAITH ALONE NOT ENOUGH

There are two classes of believers referred to in the Holy Book. First, there are those who believe, but did not have enough faith to obey the gospel (John 8:30-44; 12:42-43). Second, there were those whose faith led them to be "*Baptized into Christ.*" They had the degree of faith which had forsaken the world and moved them to actually trust in Christ by obeying his gospel and relying upon his promise. Faithful Christians are often called "*believers*" (1 Timothy 4:12). Believers who are saved are "*baptized,*" or "*obedient believers.*" Paul says, "*Ye are (Present tense) all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been (Past tense) baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:26, 27). The apostle did not say these people were saved out of Christ, by faith alone. But he said they were children of God at the time he wrote these words concerning them. Then he uses the past tense and says it was by a faith which led them to be baptized into Christ. Note the order of the items emphasized. "*Ye are...children of God*" (present tense). Next he says "*YE ARE*" children of God "*By faith in Christ Jesus.*" He says, "*For as many of you as HAVE BEEN baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:26, 27). Then he says, "*Ye are all one in Christ Jesus*" (3:28.). They are the children of God by faith because it was by faith that they had been baptized into Christ when they obeyed the gospel. Yes, there is a difference in faith that saves, and in faith "*only.*"

W.O.T.

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Those who are of full age and have matured spiritually should have exercised their senses well enough to do what? (Hebrews 5:14)
2. Not all people have what? (2 Thessalonians 3:2)
3. What must one who comes to God believe about Him? (Hebrews 11:6)
4. Can a person be justified by faith only? (James 2:24)

LEARNING HOW TO THINK

David Anguish, Southwind Church of Christ, Memphis, TN

From the early 1980s through the mid 90s, I taught Bible courses in a Christian school. Near the end of that period, our administrators initiated ongoing training sessions to help us learn how to teach critical thinking skills. They were responding to both research and anecdotal evidence that showed students were mastering a myriad of facts, but were not able to properly apply them to new situations.

After one meeting, I turned to an older colleague and asked, "How did you and I learn to think critically without all these methods?" My point was not that we had *not* learned to think critically. Rather, my intent was to point out that, as our culture had moved from a more literary focus to one driven by visual and emotional stimuli, we were required to actually teach what had once been learned within the give and take of living in a different world. In other words, while the method used to teach critical thinking when he and I were in school was not as overt as that which is demanded today, there had been a method.

There's a good reason for that. Both then and now, there is a general recognition that, if people will experience the best life has to offer, they must learn *how* to think (which is the not the same as being told *what* to think). That is something the Bible consistently emphasizes. For example, the problem in the days of Noah was that "*every intent of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually*" (Genesis 6:5, NASB). According to Paul, the difference between the old pagan life and the life of Christians is that pagans were "*darkened in their understanding*" whereas Christians had "*learned Christ*" and so had been "*renewed in the spirit of [their] mind*" (Ephesians 4:18, 20, 23). No wonder he stressed that the key to not being like the world is found in the metamorphosis that comes through "*the renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2). Philippians 4:8-9, our text for this study, emphasizes the same thing.

Goal: Why We Must Learn How To Think

Two phrases in verse 8 show us why we must learn how to think. First, it is necessary if there is to be "*any excellence*." The Greek word here is *aretē*, "moral excellence, goodness" (A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament, prepared by Barclay M. Newman, Jr., Bible Works 6 Computer Edition). In Greek culture, it was the most comprehensive term for moral excellence and the central theme of Greek ethics. In the New Testament, it is used only four other times, all in the writings of Peter (1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3, 5), where the idea is that we will imitate a trait of God himself (notice especially the connection between 2 Peter 1:3 and 5), the same point

Paul has in mind in our text.

Second, learning how to think is necessary if there is to be "*anything worthy of praise*." "*Worthy of praise*" translates one word, *epainos*, "praise, commendation, approval" (Newman). It appears eleven times in the New Testament. Sometimes, it refers to the praise that is to be given to God (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14; Philippians 1:11), but more often it refers to the commendation or approval that comes to those who follow God (Romans 2:29; 13:3; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 8:18; 1 Peter 1:7; 2:14). It is in the latter sense that Paul uses it in our text.

Important as these words are for understanding why we must learn how to think, they are not all this text teaches about the matter. In verse 9, Paul expresses his hope that "*the God of peace will be with you*." Peace (*eirēnē*) is an important term in the context (see verse 7) and can rightly be considered the goal to which "*excellence*" and "*praise*" point. Since it is an important concept throughout the Bible, we will do well to study this word in more detail.

"Peace" is used throughout the Old Testament (about 280 times) in the sense of a religious idea, a gift from God (e.g., Isaiah 45:7; Psalm 125:5; Numbers 6:26). It is especially important in the prophetic writings, where prophets sent by God are messengers of peace who bear good news that make peace "synonymous with salvation and victory", an emphasis that is often "messianic in character" (see Isaiah 52:7; 32:17-18) (Ceslas Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, trans. James D. Ernest, 1:428-429). That messianic emphasis makes Jesus' use of the term all the more significant (see e.g., Matthew 10:12-13; Luke 7:50; 8:48; John 20:21).

That understanding helps us see why peace would be important in the teaching of those who follow the Christ, but we still have not determined what the Hebrews meant by the word. Spicq explains:

"... it is always synonymous with tranquility. [In the LXX] [*e*]irēnē almost always translates the Hebrew *š-lōm*; the sense of the root is 'be well, complete, safe and sound,' and *šālōm* expresses 'the state of a being who lacks nothing and has no fear of being troubled in its quietude; it is euphoria with security. Nothing better can be desired for oneself and for others'" (Spicq, 427).

In practical terms, the Hebrews thought of peace in much the same way as the Greeks, as "the state of a person who is not troubled or disturbed, who is tranquil" (Spicq, 426) (see Phil 4.7).

When we add the idea of peace to excellence and praise, we understand that it is when we learn how to think that we imitate the moral excellence of God, are commended to him, and thus experience the tranquility of soul

that sustains us no matter our circumstances (see Phil 4:10-13).

Process: The Effort We Must Invest in Thinking

This peace-filled imitation of God that leads to our commendation does not come about by accident, but only as we "*think on these things*" (ASV). The word is *logizomai*, translated "*meditate*" in the NKJV. This is helpful for our understanding, but is insufficient for really seeing Paul's point. As Frank Stagg put it, "Paul means more than meditation. '*Think about it*' is really to reckon or take into account, not just reflecting upon, but allowing the things considered to affect one's course of action" (Frank Stagg, *Philippians*, Broadman Bible Commentary, 11:214). The NASB helps with its rendering, " *dwell on.*"

Beyond this definition, notice the grammar here. The verb is an imperative, a command to be obeyed. It is in the present tense, suggestive of a habit of life. Paul intended for his readers to make a purposeful, sustained effort to think good thoughts. This is vital for experiencing the excellence, praises and peace already discussed.

Verse 9 reinforces the point, stressing that this thinking is active, i.e., we are to do the things envisioned with the goal of getting them right. The behavior envisioned had been modeled by Paul, something the Philippians had "*learned and received and heard and seen.*" Furthermore, it was behavior they were to "*practice*" repeatedly (the word is *prassete*, another present imperative verb). All of this serves to show us that we will not learn how to think by "drifting into it," but by serious devotion to consistently thinking the right things.

Content: The Best Things for Our Thoughts

It is in light of Paul's goal and the process for learning how to think that we must consider his list of the kind of thoughts that lead to excellence, praises and peace. As we do so, we are reminded that the reason so many evil things happen in our world is because the thoughts of so many are evil. In other cases, it is because their thoughts are trivial and empty, incapable of developing the kind of character that pleases and imitates God. In contrast, Paul teaches us to be proactive by thinking positive thoughts.

First, our thoughts should be "*true*" (*alēthē*), referring to that which is real or genuine. These are the things

that can deliver on their promises, not those that are illusory and deceptive.

Second, they should be "*honorable*" (*semna*), serious, of good character, worthy, respectable. These are things that are majestic and awe-inspiring, things that have about them a holiness and dignity, unlike the things that are flip-pant and attractive to the light-minded.

Third, our thoughts should be "*right*" (*dikaia*), conforming to the character and will of God, things that are concerned with being in a right relationship with God.

Fourth, they should be "*pure*" (*hagna*), holy, chaste, innocent. The word was used in the LXX to refer to ceremonial purity and later to that which is morally undefiled.

Fifth, our thoughts should be "*lovely*" (*prospilē*), or pleasing. These are thoughts that are the opposite of those that focus on the bitter, vengeance or criticism (in other words, what sells papers and yields strong ratings!). Instead, Paul would have us focus on things that are naturally attractive and good.

Sixth, our thoughts should be of "good repute" (*euphēma*), well-sounding, praiseworthy, attractive. The word literally means "fair-speaking" and so is a good word to remind us to focus on things that are positive.

Conclusion

A preacher friend had a poster in his study, given to him by a military aviator, that said, "Keep looking up. That's where the Lord is." That is essentially what Paul says as he tells us how to think. What is accomplished by such thinking is the development of life that imitates and draws praise from God, a life that allows us to experience the quiet tranquility of soul that comes from being right with Him. That happens only as we allow Him to teach us how to think.

FOR FUTHER RESEARCH

1. Did Paul direct the Philippian Christians as to how they should think? (Philippians 4:8, 9)
2. Rather than being conformed to the world, the Christian is transformed in what way? (Romans 12:2)
3. Ignorance and a lack of understanding lead people to be alienated from what? (Ephesians 4:18) *W.O.T.*

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WISE DECISIONS

Johnny Ramsey, Weatherford, TX

When we come to the end of life, and look back, we will finally realize that our choices along the pathway spelled success or failure. Decisions made, day by day, will determine our destiny. So many people overlook the importance of monumental moments when everlasting repercussions take center stage. We often allow blockbuster decisions to be taken lightly as we nonchalantly tend to forget that we will after awhile certainly reap what we sow! How Christians need to pray for wisdom to discern properly and perceptively what we are building for eternity.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy (James 3:17).

Too many times we pitch our tent toward Sodom when we think we are really being sharp enough to choose an easy road to prosperity. We often double our troubles looking for gold at the end of a rainbow that actually proved to be a mirage of our own vanity.

“Don’t wait for something to turn up; get a spade and dig for it.”

There have been tremendous decisions and choices in my own life that totally changed and blessed the course of my sojourn on earth. Certainly this is true of all of us. Let me share a few of mine with you as we take a little journey down memory lane.

Great Moments

(1) The Day I decided to be a gospel preacher.

Fifty years ago when I committed the rest of my life to proclaim the glad tidings was of monumental importance. For half a century this divine romance has been a joy beyond description.

(2) The Day I began to read and study the Bible

personally was one of the best times of my entire existence. The adventure of going through the Scriptures made a profound change in my thinking and allegiance. I learned truths that demanded loyalty and change. New courage burned in my soul (Jeremiah 15:16, 20:9). The desire to compromise so as to be popular no longer overwhelmed my emphasis in life. Thank God for the power, splendor and beauty of the sacred text!

God is my strength and power: and He maketh my way perfect (2 Samuel 22:33).

(3) The Day I began to look seriously for a godly mate for life.

This is such a vital point and some preachers have blundered in this matter while others of us have been

blessed immeasurably with a spiritual wife that contributes mightily in our labors for Christ. Materialistic women who crave fancy houses, furniture, clothing and cars can be the downfall for potentially successful evangelists. A worthy woman is valuable indeed (Proverbs 31). Making a wise choice herein encourages the mandate of Philippians 4:13...

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

(4) The Day I promised God I would give more

generously to His cause was a very important milestone. Malachi informs us that we really rob ourselves when we are stingy with the Lord. So many covetous and greedy folk never invest enough in the cause of Christ to be in partnership with heaven. Mundane interests captivate such brethren and they are never truly in love with the Savior. Luke 6:38 says:

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

(5) The Day I realized the Parable of the Talents

demanding our very best. This is the most challenging parable of all to me. We will give an account someday for what we could and should have done! Mediocre effort will not be tolerated. Some preachers are lazy and get by on less than their best. We all need to truly launch out into deeper matters for God and not ever be content to rest on past laurels.

(6) The Day I fully realized the debt I owed to godly

parents. It seems to take awhile to express the deep gratitude we should have known for many years for the great example of godliness faithful parents passed on to us. I personally admire my Dad and Mother for all they contributed in the spiritual realm to my betterment. If I am lost in Judgment, it will not be their fault. If I walk a golden street in glory it will be mainly because of their loyalty to Christ!

(7) The Day prayer became more meaningful.

As a youth my mind wandered in the assembly when prayer was offered. Concentration and dedication often eluded me. Such attitudes blocked spiritual progress. I am profoundly ashamed of that. What blessings were missed due to indifference and neglect. Sadly, I basically prayed when I was scared or wanted something. Studying the Bible caused me to find brilliant prayers (Psalms 51; Daniel 9; and John 17) as well as tremendous

verses and instructions on the subject. In the past three decades the privilege and power of prayer excite and warm my heart.

The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night (Psalms 121:5-6).

What a beautiful concourse to heaven is the precious avenue of prayer!

(8) **The Day I learned the value of adversity.**

We cannot always live on big rock candy mountain. Some kids never grow up as they expect everything to “come up roses” with never any storm clouds on the horizon. Spoiled by indulgent parents, who overly protect them, such children have a difficult time maturing. When obstacles come these unrealistic offspring buckle and fall apart. Christianity promises adversity (Acts 14:22; John 16:1, 2) as a blessing that draws us near to the heart of God for guidance and solace.

If there were no difficulties there could be no triumphs. . . .

Paul was a better servant because of his trials as a Christian (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). At the end of our time

on earth we will look back and see that what we deemed dark days molded our days into a closer walk with the Savior.

Someone has wisely told us that it is not enough to have the right aim in life if we never pull the trigger. Let us make wise decisions and then actively pursue the road that leads to life eternal. Notice these majestic words of inspiration:

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Corinthians 5:1).

The choices we make today will have repercussions in the world to come (Mark 10:30).

FOR FUTHER RESEARCH

1. What are the seven qualities of the wisdom from above according to James? (James 3:17)
2. What did Jeremiah say that God’s Word was to him? (Jeremiah 15:6; 20:9)
3. What measure will be used to measure what is given back to you? (Luke 6:38)

WHY DO WE HAVE WARS?

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

James says that wars come from within—from lusts. It may be lust for power, pleasure, prestige, position or for possessions. More serious than wars among nations are wars among the members of the body of Christ. James discusses three wars that human beings have: war with God, war with others, and war within ourselves (James 4:1, 4).

All three of these wars hurt God and His cause, for friendship with the world is enmity with God. Our wars hurt the church because many, as a result of wars within the church, become dissatisfied and begin thinking that they might find “more” in the world. Wars within the church hurt individuals and can damn our souls.

Worldliness is the root cause of war! Whenever people yield to the appeal of the flesh and begin to exalt worldly things above spiritual things they begin to engage in immoral acts and follow worldly ways. The general attitude of worldliness can destroy our relationship with God and His people.

Note James’ discussion of wars and worldliness in James 4:1-5. Fourteen times in the first four verses the emphasis on “self” is noted. When self gets in the way of God we begin emphasizing our own desires for pleasures that are unlawful in the sight of God. In fact, our lustful desires elevate self above God (4:2). Our desires become so strong we will satisfy them by any means possible.

James probably used the word “kill” in a figurative sense to imply infighting among Christians. When we do this we have left God out of our plans.

It is so easy to think only of ourselves even in our prayers and ask for God’s help with the wrong motives. We might be tempted to ask “*that we may consume it upon your lusts*” (4:3). This is another symptom of allowing ourselves to be deceived by the world (4:4). If we serve self as our god then we are committing spiritual adultery against God if we are part of the church, the bride of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2; Romans 7:1ff; Ephesians 6:31, 32). The ways of the world and God’s way are diametrically opposed and we cannot love both (Matthew 6:24).

God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5) and demands faithfulness. James 4:6-10 emphasizes God and submission to Him. We should accept God’s grace (4:6) for we are saved through grace (Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 4:16).

We should be obedient to God (4:7) by submitting to His will. By doing so we declare that we’re on the Lord’s side and oppose the devil with all our might. As we obey God we become more like Him (4:8). God is our close personal companion if we obey Him from the heart (Romans 6:17) and humble ourselves before Him (James 4:9, 10).

W.O.T.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Andy Kizer, Ninth Avenue Church of Christ, Haleyville, AL

Question: Is fasting a requirement of New Testament Christianity?

Answer: Abstaining from food and water is not a requirement for salvation nor an act of worship. To "require abstinence from foods" is considered by God to be a "teaching of demons" (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-3, ESV). Therefore, the elders do not require it of the saints, for God does not require it of saints. We cannot bind where God has not bound. Neither can we forbid what God has allowed.

Fasting is, however, a very valuable privilege of the child of God. Though we do not see it commanded in the New Testament, we do see it encouraged and accepted as a common act of disciples of Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not say, "If you fast," but "when you fast" (Matthew 6:16). There, also, is where Jesus pointed out that when a saint is fasting, no one knows it, because it is not made evident (cf. Matthew 6:16-18). Thus, it cannot be a means of boasting.

Fasting, for the Christian, is a strictly voluntary matter which sometimes arises out of a feeling of intense need and never as a result of mere formality. In the New Testament, it is usually coupled with prayer (cf. Matthew 17:21; Acts 10:30; 14:23; 1 Corinthians 7:5).

Fasting has value in times of personal sorrow (cf. Nehemiah 1:4) and when connected with great and important religious events (cf. Acts 13:2, 3). It must never be employed as a substitute for godly living (cf. Isaiah 58:3, 4). God honors it when properly performed out of sincere dedication. Fasting can help us with personal self-discipline, and it can reinforce our appreciation for those things of which we are deprived during the period.

Fasting is beneficial, but not commanded.

The Words of Truth

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TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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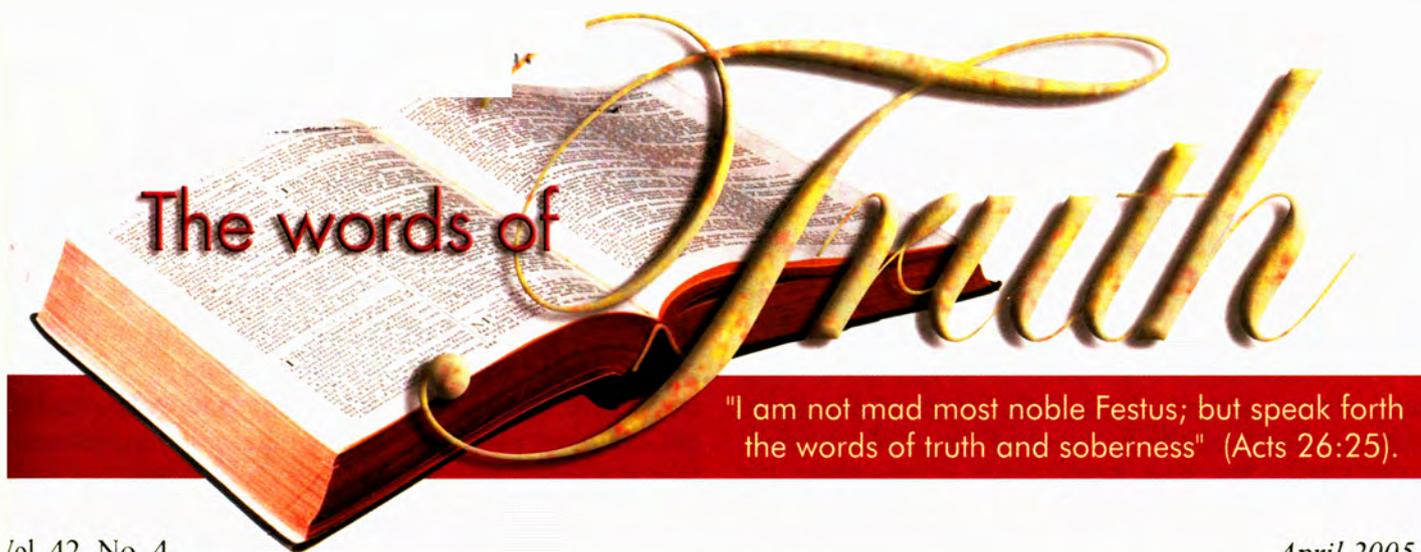
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PROTECTING OUR MINDS

Chuck Webster

One day a mother was scraping vegetables for a salad as her daughter came into the kitchen to ask permission to go to a movie—one with sufficient rating to indicate that it had “adult” language and other material offensive to Christians. “All the kids are going,” she said, “and their parents don’t think it will hurt them.” As she talked, she saw her mother pick up a handful of the scraps and throw them into the salad. Rather startled, she shouted, “Mother, you’re putting the garbage in the salad.” “I know,” her mother replied, “But I thought if you didn’t mind garbage in your heart and in your mind that you wouldn’t care about a little in your stomach.” Thoughtfully, the girl picked the peelings from the salad and then smiled at her mother. “I guess I’ll just tell them I’m staying at home tonight,” she said as she went through the kitchen door.

There’s a lot of filth out there in the world, and removing ourselves from it entirely is impossible. We’re constantly bombarded with it—in the check-out lines at the grocery store, during commercials on television, on the radio, in prime-time programming, and certainly in most modern movies. To escape completely we would have to withdraw from society—something God doesn’t expect (or want) us to do (1 Corinthians 5:9, 10).

Recognizing that a certain amount of exposure is inevitable, some Christians seem to remove any restraints whatsoever, embracing the media—however filthy and ungodly—with the same vigor as their non-Christian neighbors. They might occasionally recoil at the bad language and shake their heads disapprovingly at the sex-saturated content, but they nonetheless expose themselves to programming that is permeated by themes inconsistent with Christianity.

We should ask ourselves: “What does Jesus want us

to do? What would He do if He were physically here? Would He watch this movie? Would He watch this television show?”

One Bible verse is especially relevant: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8 NASV).

How much of today’s television and movie programming fits into that verse?

W.O.T.

Chuck Webster, the former editor of this journal, is the evangelist for the church of Christ in Hoover, Alabama. He may be reached at 3248 Lorna Road, Hoover, AL 35216.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians not to keep company with whom? (1 Corinthians 5:9)
2. In addition to the people mentioned in question one, what three other groups of people were the Corinthian Christians instructed not to keep company? (1 Corinthians 5:9)
3. Where did Paul write that a Christian would have to go to escape all the sinners he mentioned? (1 Corinthians 5:10)
4. To protect the Christian mind, Paul instructed the Philippian Christians to “think” [“dwell,” “meditate,” “calculate”] on what six things? (Philippians 4:8)

THE DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSALISM

Ken Chumbley

Those who would teach the doctrine of Universalism say that in the end ALL are going to be saved, whether or not they have obeyed the word of God or, for that matter, whether or not they know anything about God. There has been an overemphasis by some on God's grace, mercy, and love and, on the other hand almost silence about such things as the judgment of God and the holiness of God. As a result many fall for the false doctrine of universalism. Indeed, such a doctrine is pleasant to believe. Many think that a God of love is just too good to condemn anyone to such an awful place as hell. Man, we are told, is, after all, inherently good by nature. Thus God won't send, so we are told, "good people to hell." What does the Bible teach? An important passage to restudy is 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (KJV).

The truth set forth in this passage of scripture, without any doubt, makes it clear that those outside of Christ, those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ, are LOST. Note what this text says that the judgment of Christ will be measured out BOTH to those who don't know God and those who know of God but do not obey the gospel of Christ.

If those who know not God or who have not obeyed the Gospel are in a saved state or have the promise of salvation without either knowing God or obeying the Gospel, then the imperative of missionary work is totally lost! If those outside of Christ, those who have not obeyed the Gospel are going to be saved without knowing God and without obeying the Gospel, why bother? Indeed, why would Christ's sacrifice upon the cross have been necessary at all? If God is going to save men without their obedience to the Gospel, then why did He send His Son to die on the cross of Calvary?

In 2 Corinthians 5:18 we read, "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." Yes, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" and He has committed the ministry of reconciliation to men. Who is it that needs to be reconciled to God? Is it just those who would visit our services? Is it just those who would fit into our "class" of people? Is it just those who are educated? Is it just those in this country?

NO! "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Do we really believe what the Lord taught and what the Bible teaches about those outside of Christ? Do we really believe that we would be eternally lost and would be in hell throughout all eternity if we did not know God and had not obeyed the Gospel of Christ? Every other precious soul needs to have the opportunity to know God and obey the Gospel of Christ. That is why the Lord gave us what we call the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Let us make this our number one priority. *W.O.T.*

Ken Chumbley is the evangelist for the church of Christ in Belvedere, South Carolina, a part of the Greater Augusta, GA area. He can be contacted at 535 Clearwater Road, Belvedere, SC 39841-2574.

FOR FUTHER RESEARCH

1. Paul writes that Jesus will take vengeance on those that do not do what regarding knowing God? What do these do regarding the gospel? (2 Thessalonians 1:7)
2. With what will those who do not know the Lord and who do not obey the gospel be punished? (2 Thessalonians 1:8)
3. Through whom has God reconciled us to Himself? What ministry is given to Christians? (2 Corinthians 5:18)
4. How many people does the Lord want to perish? How many does He want to come to repentance? (2 Peter 3:9)

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

David W. Hester

Mel Gibson's movie about the last twelve hours of Jesus' life is the topic of much discussion. By now, it is clear that The Passion Of The Christ is one of the most successful movies of all time. It may well end up in the top five. Gibson's epic has generated much conversation about Jesus and the Gospels, which is encouraging. We truly hope all people will turn to the Bible and learn of Christ and His church. Many churches, even some churches of Christ, have enthusiastically endorsed the film, and have used it as a tool for evangelism. I have often said that I am waiting for a biblical epic about Jesus that will be scripturally accurate. As of this writing, I am still waiting.

The film deserves every award it will receive (if any, considering the liberalism of Hollywood). Gibson has crafted a well-made cinematic masterpiece. Additionally, the scourging of Jesus and the crucifixion were the most realistic I have seen depicted. Indeed, Gibson utilized in part a 1986 article from the Journal of the American Medical Association, "On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ." Also, Jim Caviezel portrayed Jesus, not as an effeminate weakling, but as a strong leader.

That being said, I was very disappointed in the movie. Many reports indicated that the film is the most biblically accurate depiction of Jesus ever made. Having seen it, I respectfully disagree. An article that appeared in the September 15, 2003 issue of The New Yorker indicated that Gibson was utilizing the "visions" of two nineteenth century nuns, along with the Gospels. Seeing the film confirmed that report. An article in Christianity Today sheds even more light on Gibson's thought process and inspiration. In "The Passion of Mel Gibson," editor David Neff spends much of his time praising Gibson and his work. Even so, Neff writes, "...the movie was shaped from start to finish by a devout Roman Catholic and by an almost medieval Catholic vision."

Anne Catherine Emmerich wrote a book, published after her death in 1824, entitled The Dolorous Passion Of Our Lord. Gibson freely admits that he drew heavily on that "vision" for many of his scenes. Also, Mary is given a prominent role in the film. This is not surprising, since Neff states that Gibson "prefers the Tridentine Latin Mass and calls Mary co-redemptrix." At one point, when Peter has denied the Lord, he stops in front of Mary and confesses to her, calling her "Mother." Every time Jesus falters in the film, he looks at Mary and seems to regain strength—again, inspired by Emmerich, not the Bible. Mary has almost as many scenes as does Jesus.

The "vision" of Emmerich is utilized by Gibson to shape one prolonged scene, where Pilate's wife gives Mary large pieces of linen—and then, Mary and Mary Magdalene use the linen to wipe up the blood of Jesus

around the flogging pillar. Likewise, it is Emmerich who serves as the source for the scene where Satan is holding a demonic baby (a distortion of the painting Madonna With Child). Emmerich is the source for the scene where some of the children of Jerusalem chase Judas. And, it is again Emmerich who inspired Gibson to depict Mary holding Jesus at the foot of the cross (in a deliberate copying of Michelangelo's sculpture Pieta).

Roger Ebert, in his positive review of the film, said he immediately knew where Gibson drew part of his inspiration—from the "Fourteen Stations of the cross" in Catholic theology. Being a former altar boy, he recognized them in the movie. David Neff refers to the Catholic practice of meditating on "the Five Sorrowful Mysteries when saying the Rosary." He then asserts, "the structure of Gibson's film conforms exactly to the list of the Five Sorrowful Mysteries." I personally could not get past the overt Catholicism, from start to finish, pushed by Gibson.

Which brings me to my biggest concern. I can understand religious people in general endorsing the movie and using it to aid their cause. But, I cannot fathom why some of my brethren would try to use the film to aid them in evangelism. One would have to spend much of his time explaining the non-biblical references. Claiming "poetic license" is not sufficient, given what we know.

All this should reinforce the caution we need to exercise concerning Gibson's film. I encourage people who want to see the movie to watch it, but with a critical eye, based on Scripture. Gibson's work is a marvelous piece of filmmaking—but it is not the Jule Miller video. Some of my brethren need to keep that in mind.

When all is said and done, the Book is far better than the movie. It should be the resource we use, for in its pages we will find the truth concerning our Lord. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). *W.O.T.*

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Editor's Note: Some of our readers may wonder why we would run an article about a movie that has been out so long. Brother Hester has written an excellent article that is well researched. He has appropriately cautioned us regarding inappropriate uses of the movie in question. Some of the congregations of the Lord's church are showing scenes of this movie during the Lord's Supper. I strongly caution sound elders in every congregation to avoid sensationalism and to avoid distractions during the worship of our Lord while attempting to be "realistic."

CAN DOCTRINE BE BOTH SOUND AND LOVING?

Ted D. Burleson

Paul warned the Ephesian elders that savage wolves would enter in among them (Acts 20:29, 30). He knew the power of teachers, whether false teachers or teachers of sound doctrine. He further urged Timothy, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me..." (2 Timothy 1:13 NKJV). Because he knew that the Christians at Ephesus needed encouragement and instruction, Paul sent Timothy there, urging him to especially charge the teachers (1 Timothy 1:3, 4). Let us look at Paul's opening remarks to Timothy to learn more about being teachers of sound doctrine.

SOME TEACHERS HAD TO BE CHARGED (1 Timothy 1:3, 4)

Why did only "some" (certain) teachers need to be charged? "Some" had strayed and turned aside to idle talk (1 Timothy 1:6). "Some" had departed from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1). "Some" had already turned aside after Satan (1 Timothy 5:15). "Some" had strayed concerning the faith (1 Timothy 6:21). "Some" needed to be charged.

What does it mean to "charge" someone? To "charge" someone means to "command" (NKJ), "instruct," (NAS), or "warn" (CEV). Some need to be charged not to do certain things. Some need to be charged not to teach "another doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). What other doctrine could they teach? They could teach another Jesus than Paul had preached, a different spirit than the Ephesians had received, and a different gospel than that which the Ephesians had accepted (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:4). They could be taught anything contrary to sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:10).

Guy N. Woods wrote concerning this text, "Some were teaching doctrines contrary to that which the apostle had taught in Ephesus and were seeking to influence the saints by them. These men were Judaizers—men who taught that Christians were obligated to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses—and they sought to weaken Paul's influence among the churches by impugning his motives, and by questioning his apostleship" (Woods 121).

Some need to be charged not to give heed to fables (1 Timothy 1:4). Fables mean: "Talk of men, rumor, report, a story (true or false); later, a fiction" (Vincent 203). They were not to busy themselves with stories ("myths") and endless lists of ancestors. Peter wrote, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). Paul wrote,

"But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself rather to godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7).

Some need to be charged not to heed endless genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4). According to Galatians 3:18, some had become absorbed in tracing genealogies that were of no spiritual value, since in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek (Matthews 6:11). Evidently it was very important to demonstrate a relationship to an illustrious Jewish leader of the past (Bailey 29). There are troubles caused by teaching other doctrine, heeding fables and endless genealogies. These cause disputes ("mere speculation," NASV). No godly edification from faith comes from these because they don't help people live a life of faith.

LOVE FROM A PURE HEART IS THE PURPOSE FOR THE COMMANDMENT (1 Timothy 1:5-7)

Love must come from a pure heart. This love is opposite of the conflict that results from false teaching, following fables and endless genealogies. "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). This love must come from a good conscience (cf. 1 Peter 3:15, 16). This love must come from a sincere faith without hypocrisy (cf. Romans 12:9).

Some have strayed from these things during Paul's day (1 Timothy 1:6), and sadly, some have also strayed from these during our day. To stray is to swerve and miss the mark. Those that strayed turned to follow Satan (1 Timothy 5:15), profess knowledge (1 Timothy 6:20), and to fables (2 Timothy 4:4). They had turned aside to idle talk and began telling tales that were full of empty chatter. They desired to be teachers of the law but didn't understand what they taught.

Let us use this warning from Paul to be both sound and loving. Love must be the basic teaching of sound doctrine.

W.O.T.

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST: AN OUTLINE

William Gary Crump

- I. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST HAS A SCRIPTURAL FOUNDER-JESUS CHRIST, THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH (Matthew 16:13-18; Ephesians 5:23; Ephesians 1:20-23).
 - A. Christ purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28).
 - B. Since Christ purchased the church with His blood, He is the rightful owner of the Church.
 - C. The name "church of Christ" IS NOT made to denote a man-made religious denomination, but rather denotes ownership.
 - D. The church of Christ is scriptural in name.
- II. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST WAS ESTABLISHED AT THE SCRIPTURAL TIME AND IN THE SCRIPTURAL PLACE.
 - A. The church of Christ was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).
 - B. The church of Christ was established in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4,8; 2:5, 14).
- III. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST HAS SCRIPTURAL TERMS FOR MEMBERSHIP THEREIN WHICH IS ALSO THE SCRIPTURAL PLAN OF SALVATION.
 - A. Hear the gospel (Matthew 17:5; John 5:24; Romans 10:17; Revelation 3:2).
 - B. Believe (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:18,36; 6:46-47).
 - C. Repentance of past sins (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20).
 - D. Confess Christ (Matthew 10:32; Mark 1:5; Luke 12:8-9; Romans 10:9-10; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).
 - E. Baptism for the remission of sins (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:12-13; 10:47-48; 18:8, Romans 6:3 1 Peter 3:21).
 1. The word baptize comes from the Greek BAPTIZO', which means to overwhelm.
 2. Scriptural baptism is accomplished by immersion (Romans 6:4; Acts 8:38).
- IV. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST GROWS IN NUMBER IN THE SCRIPTURAL WAY (Acts 2:41, 47).
 - A. The Lord ADDS the saved to His church.
 - B. People do not "join" a church nor are "voted in."
- V. MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ARE SCRIPTURAL IN NAME.
 - A. They are called Christians (Acts 11:26).
 - B. Members of the church of Christ were first called Christians in Antioch.
- VI. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST OBSERVES WORSHIP SERVICES AT THE SCRIPTURAL TIME: THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK (Acts 20:7).
 - A. The church of Christ observes worship services in accordance with the New Testament pattern of worship, which is the ONLY Scriptural pattern of worship.
 - B. We are not supposed to and we do not Follow patterns of worship found in the Old Testament.
 1. The Old Testament or old law was fulfilled when Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross.
 2. The New Testament went into effect when Christ died on the cross (Hebrews 9:11-18).
 3. The Old Law (law of Moses) was imperfect in that there was no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 8:6-12; 10:1-10).
 4. Therefore, the New Testament or New Covenant was established.
 - C. The Scriptural pattern found in the New Testament and followed by churches of Christ consists of the following elements
 1. The Lord's Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
 - a. Christ instituted the Lord's supper to be a memorial observance of His death on the cross (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29).
 - b. The unleavened bread symbolizes the body of Christ while the fruit of the vine, or grape juice, symbolizes the blood Christ shed on Calvary's cross for the sins of the world.
 2. Singing (Matthew 26:30; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19).
 - a. Faithful congregations of the churches of Christ do not use mechanical instruments to accompany the singing because there is no example of such in the New Testament.
 - b. We are specifically warned not to add or take away from God's word (Revelation 22:18-19).
 - c. Since God's word does not give us an example of such being used in the New Testament pattern of worship, the church of Christ does not take it upon itself to add such to the worship services, nor does the New Testament authorize the use of choirs.
 - d. The implication in the above scriptures is that all are commanded to sing and not just a select few.
 3. Giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Giving should be done in a cheerful, free spirit and not grudgingly or out of necessity (2 Corinthians

- 9:7).
4. Prayer (Luke 18:1; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; James 5:16).
 5. Preaching (Acts 20:7).

VII. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS SCRIPTURAL IN ITS ORGANIZATION AS STATED EARLIER, CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

- A. Each congregation is overseen by elders (Titus 1:5). Elders, also referred to as bishops, must meet certain Scriptural criteria (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
- B. Deacons were appointed to assist elders (Acts 6).
 1. Deacons were appointed in this instance to oversee works of benevolence.
 2. Like elders, deacons also have to meet certain Scriptural criteria (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).
 3. Notice that while elders, assisted by deacons are appointed to oversee their particular congregation where they're members, there's no mention of any earthly, man-made central governing body that oversees the church as a whole.
 4. Since there's no mention in Holy Scripture of any such central, earthly governing body, the church of Christ does not take it upon itself to establish such.
 5. Therefore, by scriptural authority and example each congregation of the church of Christ is autonomous (independently governed) of the other.

VIII. FAITHFUL MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST HAVE AN ETERNAL, SCRIPTURAL DESTINATION; HEAVEN (John 14:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7-8).

- A. The church of Christ must have book, chapter, and verse to give a reason for everything we do.
- B. The church of Christ's sole source of authority and the sole foundation of her beliefs must be the Bible.
- C. The church of Christ MUST NOT subscribe to any man-made creed or doctrine.

CONCLUSION: It is the sincere desire of the church of Christ to worship just as Christians did in the first century and to do Bible things in Bible ways.

EDITOR'S NOTE: It is not unusual to get questions from inmates, however, it is a bit unusual to get articles or outlines from inmates. Brother Crump, having repented and having asked for the prayers of his brothers and sisters in Christ, is incarcerated in the South Central Correctional Center in Clifton, Tennessee, for the next seven years.

A Vision of Heaven

Have you talked to God the Father?
Have you heard about His plan?
Have you read about His promise?
Signed and sealed with nail scarred hand?

There's some land across the river,
And it's offered to us free.
It's a land with living water
Flowing from the crystal sea.

On this land there is a mansion,
And the streets are made of gold.
It's eternal in the heavens,
And it's free, but never sold.

It was purchased by the Savior,
On the cross He died for all.
And the deeds are ready waiting,
For all who obey His call.

You could lose what He has purchased,
If you fail to sign the deed.
Repent, confess and be baptized,
His precious word you must heed.

If you've signed your deed to heaven,
You have hope to find the land.
When you've crossed the river Jordan,
Tracing footsteps in the sand. . . .

Of the Christians we remember,
Who once lived as we now live.
With the promise to share heaven,
Land that only God can give.

Have you looked into the Bible?
Have you learned to watch and pray?
May this vision of our homeland,
Help you see your need today.

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

AID VS. ADDITIONS

Gus Nichols

There is a difference in things which aid us in doing the exact thing required of God, and in things added to the will of God. Plain additions to the word of God are classed by some as mere aids or expediencies.

“AIDS” PERMISSIBLE

Whatever aids us in doing the very thing authorized of God, without becoming an addition to the will of God, is permissible. When God specially authorized a certain aid, then that thing must be done, in the way authorized. However, if God commanded that a certain thing be done, but authorized no certain way of doing the thing required, then the thing required may be done in any way we think fitting, so long as no scripture principle is violated.

THE ARK

God commanded Noah to build the ark (Genesis 6). Now, if God had said nothing more to Noah, then he could have obeyed God and built an ark according to his own ideas. But God told Noah what kind of an ark to build. He gave the dimensions of the ark (Genesis 6). Noah could not add to the size required, nor diminish from it, without sinning in so doing. But if God had said nothing more than this, Noah could have built the ark of metal, wood, skins of animals, or whatever he saw fit. But God did not leave these matters to human judgment. He said build the ark of “wood.” This excluded metal, animal skins, etc., on the grounds that such things were not authorized. They did not have to be excluded by special mention. God did not have to say, “Thou shalt not use any of the following,” then name all the building materials in the universe.

WOOD OF HIS CHOICE

If God had commanded Noah to simply build the ark of “wood,” Noah could have used the wood of his choice. He could have used pine, cedar, or any wood available. Furthermore, he would have been obligated because of his interest in the ark and his salvation thereby, to use the best wood available. But God did not leave the kind of wood to human wisdom: He said build it of “GOPHER wood” (Genesis 6:14). This excluded all other kinds of wood. Noah could not have used pine in flooring the ark, and gopher wood in the rest of the building. He could not have claimed that his authority for pine rested in it as an “aid.” Pine could not aid him in building an ark of “gopher wood.” Hence the pine had to be left out entirely. To floor the ark with pine would have been a plain addi-

tion to the word of God. A so-called “aid” is excluded when it becomes an addition to the will of God, for it is a sin to add to God’s way (Deuteronomy 4:2; 2 John 9; Revelation 22:18, 19).

BUT THERE WERE AIDS

Some things were left to Noah’s judgment. God did not command Noah to use tools in building the ark, yet tools were implied and essential. Saws, hammers, etc., were legitimate aids in doing the thing required. The same is true of a sled, wagon, cart, or an ox or some other animal, with which to haul or drag the “gopher wood” to the right place. The use of the expedients would not have been in the same class with the use of pine in the ark, in addition to the gopher required. To build any part of the ark of pine would have been to substitute pine for the “gopher wood” commanded. Had Noah made such changes, it never would have been written: “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Genesis 6:22).

SOME APPLICATIONS

Some today scramble matters in trying to justify their additions to the word of God by labeling them “aids” and “expediencies.” IF THE THING BEING DONE IS NOT AUTHORIZED OF GOD, THEN THE ‘AID’ ITSELF CANNOT BE SCRIPTURAL. One cannot use a scriptural “aid” in doing an unscriptural thing.

THE MUSIC EXAMPLE

The effort to justify the popular use of instrumental music in Christian worship usually includes a scrambling of “aids” and “additions.” They say the organ is only an “aid” in worship. But in fact instrumental music is an addition to the vocal music authorized in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). God has not authorized both vocal and instrumental music in Christian worship any more than the use of all kinds of wood was authorized in building the ark. God selected the kind of wood when He said, build it of “gopher wood,” thus excluding other kinds of wood. Likewise He selected the kind of music for our worship, when he said, “Sing,” thus excluding the other kind of music.

“AID” BECOMES AN “ADDITION”

The organ “aids” in producing instrumental music—a kind of music not commanded in Christian worship.

Hence the organ is an unscriptural aid, enabling one to do an unscriptural thing in worship. Song books, notes, etc., are true "aids." They aid most of us in doing the very thing which God said do, when He said "sing." The use of such things does not add an extra item to New Testament worship, as does the organ. God commanded vocal music. The organ "aids" in adding instrumental music to the kind commanded. Our music is "singing," whether we use the song book or not. If we sing from memory, we are doing what God said when He said "sing." But if we use the song book, notes, etc., we are still doing only what God required—we're "singing."

NOT IN DOUBT

When Noah built the ark of gopher wood, he not only obeyed God, but did that which was right beyond a doubt. Had he used pine, he would have been doing that which is questionable. Likewise, there is no controversy about singing in Christian worship. All admit this to be scriptural and safe. The controversy now is over the use of instrumental music in Christian worship. All those who claim to be plain Christians are united in the belief that singing is right. There is no argument against singing. No division exists because of it. The division and controversy is all over "instrumental" music in worship. Those who claim to speak where the Bible speaks, and to be silent where the Bible is silent, cannot consistently add instrumental music to the kind of music authorized in the New Testament, which is "singing." Therefore the organ aids in adding to New Testament worship, and is not a scriptural "aid." No "aid" can be scriptural if it "aids" in doing an unscriptural thing.

W.O.T.

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Did God specify the type of wood that Noah was to use to build the ark? (Genesis 6:14)
2. Did Noah build the ark as God commanded? (Genesis 6:22)
3. Has God authorized singing as the type of music He wants in the New Testament? (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)

The Words of Truth

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The words of

Truth

TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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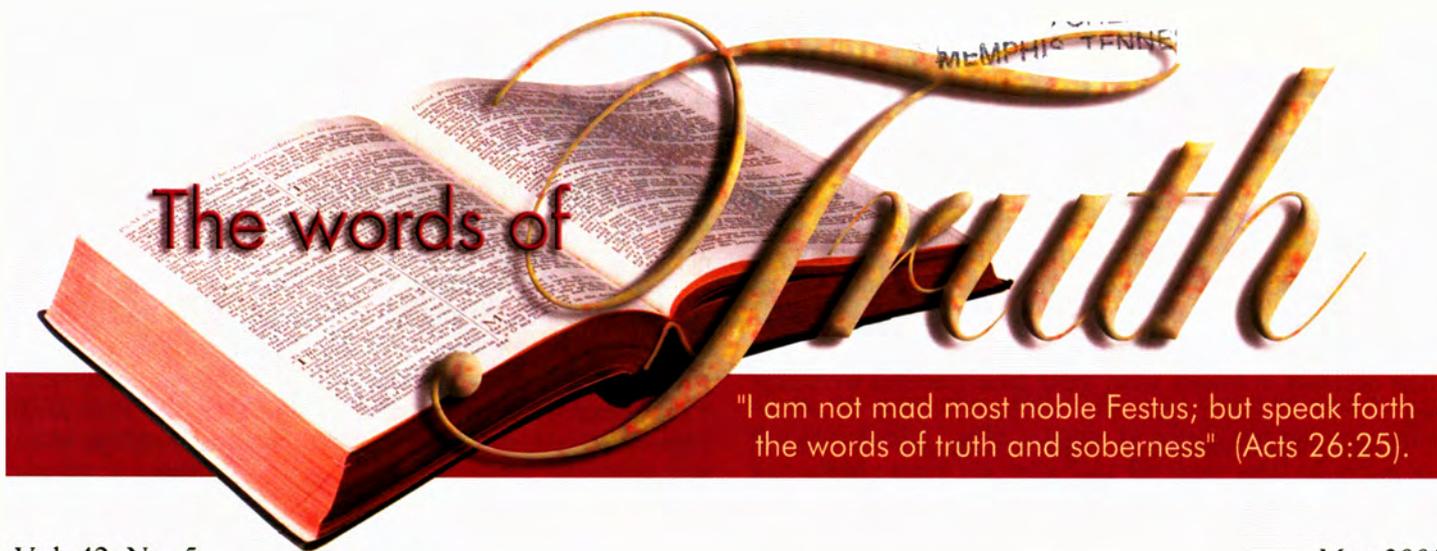
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HEART OF DEDICATION

Ryan Gallagher

There is nothing more sickening to God than a half-hearted Christian...if there is such a thing. Who could forget the imagery used in Revelation 3:16 where Christ says that those Laodicean church members that swayed from light to darkness would be vomited from His mouth. The "fool" who continues to frequent his past life is compared to a dog returning to his vomit (Proverbs 26:11). For those who have come in contact with Christ and have returned again to sin, it is said that "it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Peter 2:21). God hates it when people sway between Him and the Devil!

Let's face it...the struggle to stay a consistent Christian is a tough battle and there is only one way in which we can be assured of a victory. We must completely submit our hearts to the will of God. A poor foundation under a building will eventually cause the structure to crumble and a spiritual life not founded with Christ as the "chief cornerstone." I suppose that Christians will always ask how to develop this kind of commitment in their own lives and I suppose that the same answers will always be given: to pray, study, be faithful in attendance, surround yourself with other Christians, etc. All of these answers are excellent and true, but we have to face the fact that in all of these things, if our hearts are not devoted, it doesn't matter. Jesus said in Matthew 10:38, "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

I have a good friend in Brantford, Ontario that I believe has the heart of dedication talked about in the Scripture. The local congregation there only meets on Sunday mornings. Brother Paul Vance explained to me that after services on Sunday morning, he goes home and reads and studies his Bible until bedtime! I know that when he related this to me the shock on my face was visible. If

brother Vance had his way, we would worship from dawn into the night every Sunday.

When we encounter someone with that sort of dedication to the Lord it should certainly cause us to stop and think. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul wrote, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" When I think of the words of Christ concerning those who serve Him half-heartedly and I examine the life of my friend, Paul Vance, I am immediately humbled and shaken by the reality that I must consistently re-evaluate my own heart. Please be certain of your salvation and serve God constantly. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, 2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 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."

W.O.T.

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FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. What did Jesus say that He would do to the lukewarm Laodiceans? (Revelation 3:16)
2. What did Peter write about those who have known the way of righteousness but have turned from it? (2 Peter. 2:21)
3. Who is not worthy of Christ? (Matthew 10:38)

“YE DID RUN WELL”

Neil Richey

The apostle Paul wrote the book of Galatians to his brethren in Galatia in hopes to encourage them to get back on track. He was concerned how they had quickly removed themselves from the Christ that they once so eagerly obeyed (Galatians 1:6). He knew that it was the Judaizers that had been troubling them, nevertheless, it was their decision to follow what these false teachers were saying.

During his discourse he made a statement that we are all familiar with: “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Galatians 5:7). Let’s take the phrase, “Ye did run well,” and use that as a spring board for our study in this essay.

Ye Did Run Well . . . Because You Recognized the Importance of It

The media is always in a buzz before the Olympic Games. The elite athletes of the countries around the world are invited to appear on the world’s stage and compete in their respective event. This invitation is only made to those who have qualified. So, to qualify, the athletes train—many for the majority of their lives.

One event that many of the athletes train for is the race. Like these Olympians, we too have a race to run. However, our race is a spiritual one in which there is no winner. God does not expect us to win the race, but to finish the race. Some of the last words of the apostle Paul were to that affect—“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:6-7). Paul successfully finished the race, and Heaven was waiting for him—“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4:8).

Like Paul, God wants us to successfully run the race so that we can hear the words, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.” How are you doing in the race? Are you running well? Or, is God saying, “You did run well?”

Ye Did Run Well . . . However, You Have Become Hindered

Professional runners can sometimes be hindered in their race. Maybe they become sick the night before the race and lose their momentum when competing the next day. Some runners are stopped in their tracks when a leg cramp hits them. There are so many things that can keep a runner from reaching his goal of winning or even finishing his race.

In our spiritual race to heaven, we often find ourselves hindered. We sometimes sing a song during worship that

says, “...often I’m hindered on my way, burdens so heavy I almost fall...” The devil is pulling out all stops to try and make us fail in the race.

One of the concerns of the Olympic Games is the safety of the athletes and the spectators. With the threat of terrorism in recent years, security is constantly being tightened. Imagine for a moment trying to run and being shot. That is exactly what the devil is doing to us. Paul said, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Ephesians 6:16). The devil is literally throwing obstacles in our way in hopes that we will fall down and give up.

Have you been hindered lately in your race for heaven? If so, the Bible will help. James tells us that when we are faced with the temptation of the devil, we should first realize that it will help us to be faithful if we let it—“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience [steadfastness]” (James 1:3). Then, James says to pray about it—“...let him ask of God...” (James 1:5). When you pray, ask God for wisdom—“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Then, ask for that wisdom without doubting—“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering...” (James 1:6).

Ye Did Run Well . . . But Don't Stop! Keep Running!

Athletes are often encouraged never to give up—keep on fighting. When you fall down, get back up! The same is true for us. When we submit our will to God’s by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins, thereby being added to the church (Acts 2:38, 47), God tells us to keep running—be faithful.

You see, heaven is dependant on our running the race unto the very end. That’s why John wrote, “...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Keep looking forward to the prize ahead, and never look back (Philippians 3:14; Luke 9:62).

Thankfully, as we run the race, we have help. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

How are you doing in running the race? Are you like the Galatians who “did run well?” Maybe you have given up. Does it seem like it’s just not worth it anymore? May I encourage you to hang in there? Please, live your life in view of eternity. Let’s all run to heaven. *W.O.T.*

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YOUR CHILDREN HAVE BEEN DRAFTED TO BATTLE

Brad Harrub

We all know one. You know, those young kids who can rattle off questions at speeds that make most Indy drivers jealous. "Why is the sky blue? Why is water wet? What is dirt made of? Can worms smell? How do fax machines work?" While we encourage our young children to imagine and pretend, we often are rewarded with some very colorful, if not mind-boggling questions. Most of these questions we either answer quickly, or simply, then change the subject. Or, we use alternative strategies like food or videos. But what happens when our children begin asking us tough questions that have to do with matters of faith? What happens when our children come home from school and want to know how dinosaurs fit in with the Bible? Or what do we tell them upon discovering that their science class is studying evolution? Oftentimes, these important questions are left unanswered as our children are instructed to quickly "wash up and get ready for dinner." Unfortunately, today many parents find themselves reacting to questions and topics, rather than planning ahead. As Christian parents, we need to be proactive rather than reactive. We need to be on the front line, teaching our children the truth about the world around us as they grow, because if we don't, there is someone out there more than willing to teach them another version.

Possessing a belief in God is not enough. Our children (and grandchildren!), need to know how to defend that belief. The truth is, one day in the not-so-distant future, our children will find their faith being challenged. Their ability to handle that situation will greatly affect whether they live a life loyal to God or whether they abandon Him and His teachings. There are literally thousands of evolutionists currently living who once espoused a belief in Christianity. Today they are apostates, placing more faith in science than the Word of God.

Picture for a moment the heartbreaking scene of two parents sending their young teenage son off to fight in a war. As tears roll down their faces, they cling to their son, wishing their hugs could somehow ward off the impending military assignment. Dad takes a minute to have a man-to-man talk about his son keeping himself safe, and mom reminds him they will be there to support him throughout his upcoming ordeal. There could be no mistaking that this family understands their son is going to war. And yet, how many families realize there is an ongoing war for their children's very souls? It is literally a fight, one that evolutionists, humanists, and skeptics have been waging for many decades. And, sadly, this is a war that has resulted in thousands of spiritual casualties. There are no tears for this send-off. There are no man-to-man talks re-

garding a son keeping himself safe. Tragically, many parents are so caught up in their day-to-day routines that they don't even realize their son or daughter has been "drafted." And so, many parents just stand by silently as their children go into battle for their souls. Parents, we need to change this attitude. If we are ever going to stop the casualties, we must change it. We must wake up and realize this is indeed a battle, a battle in which our children must know that we are going to fight for them until we draw our last breath. We must arm our children with the very best equipment for this war. As Christian parents and grandparents, we must arm ourselves with knowledge based upon evidence, and be prepared to tackle some of these "tough questions" with our children and grandchildren. And we must never be willing to give up.

In Ezekiel 22 we find one of the most troubling passages in all of God's Word. In reviewing the actions of Jerusalem, Ezekiel records that Jerusalem had violated most, if not all of the Ten Commandments. The vast army of Nebuchadnezzar was poised around the city, about to begin a two-year siege that would bring utter destruction to the city. In those days, the common practice to fortify a city was to build a giant wall. Enemies wanting to overthrow the city were then forced to concentrate their efforts on breaching a hole in one portion of the wall. But often, men of the city would step into the gap and fight to protect their homeland. They were willing to "stand in the gap." At the end of chapter 22 we learn that this is not the case with Jerusalem. God said: "'I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their heads,'" says the Lord God." No one was willing to stand in the gap. Parents and grandparents, we must be ready, willing, and able to stand in the gap and fight for the souls of our children! Unrighteousness still abounds. The laws and commands of God are still being violated. Jerusalem needed an individual who could step forward and stand for the truth. The absence of that individual led to their ultimate destruction. Homes that are absent of individuals willing to stand in the gap today can expect a similar destruction. Have you heard the battle cry? Precious souls are at stake!

W.O.T.

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THE JESUS SEMINAR

David Hester

On June 26, 2000, ABC produced a documentary that was nothing short of audacious. Entitled, "Peter Jennings Reports: The Search for Jesus," it is purported to be an unbiased account of the anchorman's "search" for Jesus via academic scholars and trips to Palestine. However, what resulted was a showcase for the most liberal views imaginable—namely, those of the Jesus Seminar.

As is the case, usually, television was far behind the loop. Actually, the views that were aired have been simmering for the past fifteen years, ever since the Jesus Seminar began. In 1985, Robert W. Funk, Marcus Borg, and John Dominic Crossan launched the Seminar as a way of jump starting the so-called "quest for the historical Jesus," which refers to three previous liberal attempts to divorce the man Jesus from the divine Son of God.

Thus, the Jesus Seminar was begun. Although wishing to distinguish themselves from the earlier quests, one is struck by how the presuppositions are similar. For example, in a debate concerning the work of the Seminar, Marcus Borg contributed a chapter entitled "The Irrelevancy of the Empty Tomb." At any rate, Funk, Borg, and Crossan led the movement to reexamine the New Testament evidence concerning Jesus.

Those who followed their lead endeavored to determine what Jesus "really said," as opposed to what they thought was added later by Jesus' followers. The method they employed was farcical. The scholars actually voted on each biblical passage. They did this by casting color-coded beads into a box. Red meant "Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it." Pink meant "Jesus probably said something like this." Gray implied "Jesus did not say this, but the ideas contained in it are close to his own." Finally, black meant "Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later and/or different tradition."

The result of such was The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?, published at the end of 1993. This volume prints all of the passages in the four Gospels, color-coded as per the previous description, plus the apocryphal so-called "gospel of Thomas." What brought the book so much attention at the time was the proportion of the color code. Less than 20 percent of all the sayings attributed to Jesus was colored either red or pink. Only one verse of Mark was colored red; just fifteen sayings of all the Gospels combined. Seventy-five sayings are colored pink, while 416 are colored gray, and 886 are colored black. Almost all of John is totally rejected, as is the case with all of Jesus' claims about Himself. Yet, this has been repre-

sented as "mainstream." John Dominic Crossan even goes so far as to say that Jesus' body was devoured by a pack of wild dogs at the foot of the cross.

Above all else, the Seminar rejects anything remotely resembling the miraculous. Included in this are the virgin birth, raising people from the dead, and Jesus' own resurrection. Even in the one instance when they do concede the supernatural—Jesus' healings of the people—they claim it is no different from "healings" performed by Eastern mystics and shamans.

In 1998, the Seminar produced another book, The Acts of Jesus. It purported to show what Jesus did and didn't do. But, as is the case with their previous work, those involved in the project demonstrated disdain for the New Testament evidence. During this "second phase" of the Seminar, lasting from 1991-1996, they examined 176 events. Again, they utilized the same methodology—voting by casting beads into a box. Of the 176 events, only 29 received either a red or a pink rating—just 16% of the total. Only 10 events received a red rating.

What do they have to say for themselves? As has been shown, the participants in the Seminar very definitely had liberal presuppositions. Consider their attitude concerning the Gospels: they say that the author of Mark "...was not an eyewitness..." they refer to "...the evangelist given the name Matthew..." and that Luke "...is at least a third-generation Christian scribe..." In addition, they assert "...Luke's knowledge of events in the larger world is faulty..." As if that were not enough, the assertion is made that much of what is written in the New Testament about what Jesus did is simply "folklore." To illustrate what they mean, they refer to the so-called "Roswell Incident," in which a flying saucer was supposed to have crashed in Roswell, New Mexico. The comparison is then made between sorting folklore from truth in that incident, and doing the same in the Gospels. How can anyone reasonably claim to have an unbiased attitude towards the New Testament, with all of these presuppositions in play?

But then, consider something else. On the dust jacket of *The Acts of Jesus*, the conclusions that were reached are listed. Consider some of them:

- Jesus of Nazareth was born in Nazareth, not in Bethlehem.
- He did not walk on water, feed the multitude with loaves and fishes, change water into wine, or raise Lazarus from the dead.
- The empty tomb is a fiction—Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead.

How can the “scholarship” of the Seminar be taken seriously when such erroneous beliefs are fostered on the public? The fact is, it *is* being taken seriously. One thing that distinguishes the Jesus Seminar is its media-savvy instinct. Not only did ABC produce the special mentioned previously, but also PBS produced a “Frontline” documentary purporting to be about Christianity: “From Jesus to Christ-The First Christians.” In it, the Seminar’s views were presented as the authoritative word on the New Testament, without any kind of dissenting voices heard. Not only is that indicative of poor journalism, it also is a perversion of the Word of God.

This is not the first time that people have attacked the credibility of the Gospels and the deity of our Lord. However, we are now living in an advanced technological age. Information is being produced faster and is more accessible than at any time in the history of the world. This means that not only can the Truth be proclaimed widely; so can error. The challenge to the Lord’s church is deadly serious.

Having said that, there are some observations that must be made. **First**, our colleges, universities, and schools of preaching must address the threat of the Seminar, if they are not already doing so. Preachers must know how to give an answer to these issues.

Second, the situation is looking more and more like the situation that existed at the turn of the previous century. That is, “destructive criticism” invaded our schools and pulpits. John William McGarvey battled against it, as well as Hall Laurie Calhoun. We must, also.

Third, critical scholarship must also be re-examined in light of the Seminar. That is, trust in the methods of such must be limited. Is it not significant that the Seminar is simply taking the liberal solution concerning the “Synoptic Problem” to its logical end?

Modern critical scholarship has been accepted by many in religion, even within the body of Christ. Many facets of critical scholarship have been incorporated without question—including the matter of the inspiration of the Gospels. However, not everyone unquestioningly submitted to modern criticism. The late Rex A. Turner, Sr. taught a class at Southern Christian University entitled, “The Synoptic Gospels.” In my class notes, notice what he says concerning the views of too many today:

In the hands of liberals, however, the study of the Synoptic Gospels is not nearly so innocent.

- 1) The liberals come with the doctrine of the priority of Mark.
- 2) That the gospel of Mark was written earlier than the gospels of Matthew and Luke.
- 3) That Mark copied from a source which the liberals label, Marcus Q.
- 4) That the gospels of Matthew and Luke were copied from Mark, together with the compilation of other sources.

- 5) That Matthew and Luke were completed in the second half of the first century.

Now, assuming for the moment that the liberals are correct in their holdings, what would this do for your concept of inspiration?

Indeed. Brother Turner forcefully and deliberately taught the truth concerning the Gospels, and in turn asked what he called “Questions That Are Soul Searching:”

- 1) Was Jesus a mere legend?
- 2) Are the documents of the gospels substantial, or reasonable, beyond doubt, or are they mere legends?
- 3) Is Jesus to be accepted only as a great moral teacher?

Brother Turner answered the first question “no;” the second question, “beyond doubt;” and the third question, “no; he is the Son of God—the Messiah.” In addition, he answered the claims of liberals in his book Systematic Theology. In his chapter, “The Supposed Priority of the Gospel of Mark,” he sets forth the truth of the matter. Brother Turner dates Matthew at A. D. 50, Luke at A. D. 58, Mark at A. D. 67, and John around A. D. 85-95.

In closing the chapter, brother Turner said something which needs to be heeded by all of us today: “The issue at stake is inspiration.” As he was on so many other matters, Rex Turner Sr. was right on target. His judgment stands the test of time, and must be considered by all of those who take seriously the claims of modern critical scholarship concerning the Synoptic Gospels.

The fact is, the centerpiece of the liberals’ “solution” to the Synoptic Problem—the so-called “Q” document—is a chimeric that exists only in the minds of those willing to accept it as true. Such a document has never been shown to even exist. Surely it is more than a coincidence that the participants in the Jesus Seminar give much space to the “Q” document, and the four-source theory of the Synoptics. This should be enough to show the fallacy of the theory.

While a student at Freed-Hardeman, one of my teachers gave a brief but effective way of answering the so-called “Synoptic Problem.” The four authors of the Gospels gave their own Holy Spirit-inspired perspective on the life of Christ. They were four unique witnesses. When one puts together all of the Gospel accounts, he has the complete, merrant, inspired record—without relying upon man-made theories.

In the final analysis, Peter Jennings, ABC, and the Jesus Seminar do not determine Truth. Only God’s Word does that. The salient question to consider is simply: can we trust the Bible, or not? We can, and we must.

W.O.T.

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WE'VE TRIED THAT BEFORE!

David Courington

In planning the work of the church we sometimes hear someone say, "But we've tried that before, and it didn't work." Often we will not get involved in worthwhile works because of past failures. We are like the man who diets, loses a few pounds, starts eating more, gains those pounds back, plus a few more, then says, "Dieting won't work. I tried it." Yet when we try and fail, we should have at least learned one thing that won't work. But it might be that if we tried something only slightly different, gave a little more effort, or reorganized things a bit, we would meet success.

Mark Twain said, "We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it, and stop there, lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid. It will never sit down on a hot stove lid again, and that is well; but also it will never sit down on a cold one anymore." The church may have had a visitation program that either fizzled out or did not work. We should not conclude from that experience that, "Visitation programs don't work. We've tried that before!" Rather, we should know from the scriptures that visitation is essential. (Matthew 25:34-46). Whether we have an organized program or not we must visit. But there are congregations that have visitation programs that are an encouragement to the members to visit, and a way to see that some are not overlooked. Perhaps instead of saying, "We've tried that before!" we should say, "Let's see what does work and what we could have done better."

Some have also used this phrase regarding personal work. We may have had little success at converting people to Christ through personal studies, door knocking, different forms of media, etc. But that does not mean that people cannot be converted. This is the church's mission (Matthew 28:18-20). It may take many contacts to convert one soul. It may take different methods to get people to hear the same gospel. But one thing is for sure. One will never catch a fish unless he has a hook in the water and he will never convert a soul if he does not try, and try again.

Even our benevolent work, Sunday school teaching, preaching, mission works, etc...can seem unproductive. But we must not quit. Paul said, "And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10).

Helen Keller said, "When one door of happiness closes, another opens. But often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us." May we continue to work diligently in the Lord's kingdom, not neglecting any opportunity to do good.

W.O.T.

Brother Courington preaches for the Sylvan Springs Church of Christ. He may be reached at 927 Hathcock Drive, Mulga, AL 35118.

Beyond This Life

Beyond this life we'll wake to see
What life eternal then shall be.
There is a city God prepares
For His children. We'll be His heirs.

Beyond this life the lost shall weep.
Too late, too late a watch to keep.
If life on earth today should end,
Have you obeyed God's Word, my friend?

The beauty of this life we've seen,
But death for us is in between
This and heaven, the Christian's goal,
When back to God returns the soul.

This life will end, We know not when,
But after while we'll live again.
If we fulfill our mission here,
The sting of death no more we'll fear.

Obey the Lord! Keep His commands!
Have faith and hope! Live by His plans!
When heaven's door is opened wide,
In peace and joy we'll live inside.

Let not your heart be troubled then,
The best of life to come is when
The lonely heartaches all have passed,
And we are safe in peace at last.

Above the hills when sun is set,
He'll say, "Well done!," Then we'll forget
The pain, like arrows shooting through.
He'll give to us a body new.

Beyond this life is home sweet home.
No sleepless night, nor storms will come.
With streets of gold, the gates of pearl,
Beyond this life is heaven's world.

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Tim Childs

The gospel of Christ is a "good news" revelation from heaven and truly a "wonderful story of love." It is an authentic message whose author is God (not mere mortal man). It is a message God chose to supply motivated by love and mercy in view of his desire to reclaim and redeem sinful man whom he had created in his own image. Isaiah, the prophet, writes: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Concerning the gospel, men and angels are prohibited from altering its message in any shape, form or fashion (Galatians 1:6-9). The apostle Paul pronounced a curse upon any who are so brazen as to pervert its message. You and I must not be negligent with respect to it (Hebrews 2:1-4).

The Call of the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

The gospel of Christ is the "tool" that God has chosen to use to draw all men unto salvation and deliverance from sin's captivating power through his only begotten Son. Therefore, Christ has given his followers the "Great Commission" with the charge: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Through the gospel God invites all sinful men to be a recipient of the priceless gift of the forgiveness of all one's past sins. As the Corinthians, we too can be washed, sanctified and justified (1 Corinthians 6:11) through the sacrifice of the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Today Jesus still calls you and me to come unto him for rest (Matthew 11:28) and gives access to God by the faith of Christ (John 14:6).

The Challenge of the Gospel

Through the gospel, Christ calls upon each of us to repent of our sins and iniquities. The forerunner of Christ, John, the baptizer, called upon men to repent (Mark 1:2-4). When John was imprisoned, Christ called upon His contemporaries to repent of their sins (Mark 1:15). Christ's message was filled with the theme of repentance (Luke 13:1-5) to avoid the consequence of eternal ruin and loss of one's soul in torment. The apostles of Christ preached the same message of repentance (Acts 2:38) in view of Christ's return and the final judgment (Acts 17:30-31).

It is imperative we come to view sin as God views sin. Since God does not wink at sin, we can not pass it off as something at which to laugh. Since God is a holy God, He

calls upon us to be holy (1 Peter 1:14-16); and, He seeks to motivate us to turn from our sins by contemplating His goodness toward us (Romans 2:4).

The Choice of the Gospel

The gospel provides you and me with a choice that has eternal consequences. You and I can choose to "sow to the flesh" during this life and "reap corruption" or, we can make the choice to "sow to the spirit" and "reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7-8). It is a choice no one can make for us.

You and I can be encouraged and take heart as we learn from a servant of God who lived centuries ago. Moses made the choice to identify with the people of God and suffer affliction with them rather than to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:24-26). Bear in mind, dear reader friend, that the pleasures of sin are truly seasonal. That is, they are only temporary at best, while the reward of holy and righteous living is one that is enduring throughout eternity with a crown of life to wear in heaven (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

The gospel is a message of hope and power. The evangelist/Apostle Paul was not ashamed of Christ nor his gospel (Romans 1:16) as he recognized it to be "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The gospel has the power to "translate us into the kingdom of his dear son" (Colossians 1:13). The gospel of Christ has: (1) facts that we should believe; (2) commands that we must obey (Hebrews 5:9); and, (3) promises to cherish and receive from the bountiful, gracious Giver of every good gift. The gospel of Christ can transform your life into one that is glorious indeed! *W.O.T.*

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FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. What was Paul's warning to the Galatians about "another gospel?" (Galatians 1:6-9)
2. What did the writer of Hebrews write about the "great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:1-4)
3. According to Paul, by what did God call the Thessalonian Christians? (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14)
4. To whom is the gospel to be preached? (Mark 16:15)

A HANDBREADTH

Mike Benson

STRETCH OUT YOUR palm...

Separate your fingers to their widest; hold them as far apart as you can. Study what you see and then consider: Scripture says that's a picture of human longevity. David wrote, "LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor" (Psalm 39:4-5). That's right. Life at its best is little more than an abbreviated measurement. A handbreadth.

Jeanne-Louise Calment would have agreed. According to Guinness, she was born in Arles, France on February 21, 1875 and died on August 4, 1997. Do a little math in your head and you'll discover that she lived 122 years, 164 days. Whew! She lived a long time, didn't she? Not really. Not when you consider life when compared to eternity. As long as Jeanne-Louise lived, hers was but a handbreadth.

Dear friend, in terms of the clock, your life is ever-so-short (Job 14:1-2; James 4:14). Assuming you escape the ravages of disease, you don't perish in some untimely accident, and your parents had extremely good genes, it's still doubtful that you'll live as long as Jeanne-Louise Calment. And even if you do, it will be but a handbreadth.

Consider:

- What are you doing with your time (Ephesians 5:15-16; Colossians 4:5; Psalm 90:12)? Paul Meyer wrote, "Most time is wasted, not in hours, but in minutes. A bucket with a small hole in the bottom gets just as empty as a bucket that has been deliberately kicked over."
- Are you accomplishing the really important things (John 9:4)? Are you "run ragged" with urgent matters?
- If you were to die right now, could you say, "I didn't neglect the most important things in my life?" Doctor Jesus had a very full patient schedule (Mark 6:31) and yet He finished His job (John 19:30).

Time is limited. It is like a handbreadth. Use it well.

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The Words of Truth

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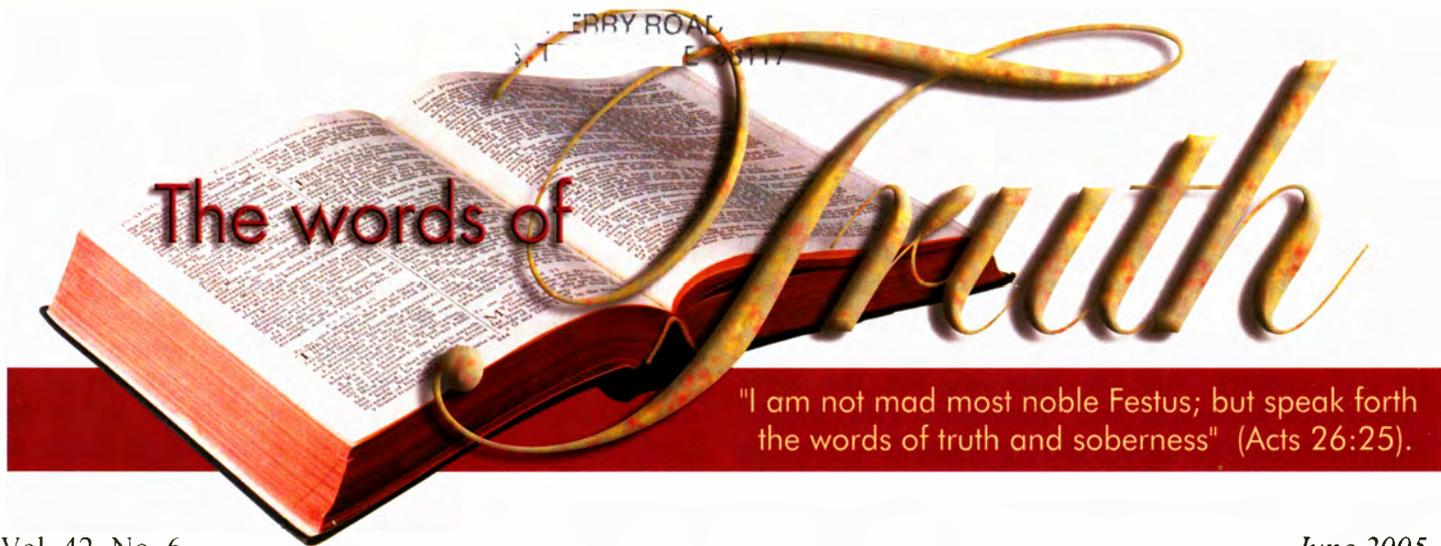
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GOD USED JOSIAH POWERFULLY IN HIS SERVICE

Ted D. Burleson

As King Jeroboam of Israel (B.C. 970) stood beside an idolatrous altar, a man of God came from Judah to Bethel and said, "A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you" (1 King 13:1-2). From this we can already see that God had a plan for Josiah's life even though Josiah wouldn't be born for another three hundred years!

In B.C. 611, Josiah was living just happily as most eight year-old-boys would. His mother was Jediah and his father, Amon, was the king. Amon's officials conspired against him and assassinated the king in his palace. Imagine the grief a little boy felt as his father was buried in the garden of Uzza. Imagine the shock when the people of the land made eight-year-old Josiah king in his father's place (cf. 2 King 21:23-24).

When Josiah was twenty-six, he brought all the pagan priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense to false gods. He broke down the shrines at the gates (see 2 King 22:1, 3, 8). He removed the horses and burned the chariots that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun from the entrance to the temple of the LORD. Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones. Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the LORD. Josiah slaughtered all the priests who offered sacrifices on the altar of the false gods and burned human bones on the

altars.

The Passover had not been observed in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel so Josiah caused the Passover to be celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem that year. Josiah provided for the people who were there a total of thirty thousand sheep and goats for the Passover offerings, and also three thousand cattle-- all from the king's own possessions. He got rid of the mediums, household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things found in Judah and Jerusalem. The Bible says that neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Neco fought and killed him at Megiddo. He was only thirty-nine years old when he died. Josiah's servants brought his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb (cf. 2 Kings 23:11-34).

In his lifetime, Josiah removed all the detestable idols from all the territory belonging to the Israelites, and he had all who were present in Israel serve the LORD their God. As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the LORD, the God of their fathers (cf. 2 Chronicles 34:1,33).

God didn't wait until Josiah was an adult to use him powerfully in His service. He needed Josiah, and He needed him right then! God needs you, and He needs you right now!

W.O.T.

THE RESTORATION PLEA

David Hester

“The restoration was to consist in holding precisely and only what is taught in the word of God, and in founding our practices strictly thereon...To believe precisely what the Scriptures teach, to practice only what they enjoin, and to reject everything else.”

So said Moses E. Lard, one of the great preachers of the 19th century. All too often we use the terms “Restoration Movement” and “Restoration Plea” without explanation, assuming that everyone understands what the terms mean. However, that assumption can no longer be made. There have been many attempts in recent years to rewrite Restoration history (One such example: using the term “Stone-Campbell Movement” instead of “Restoration Movement”—a subtle attempt to cast churches of Christ in a denominational context, with Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell as the founders. Another is the trend to use the words “sectarian” and “sectarianism” to describe those who hold true to the New Testament. Until the late 20th century, those words referred to denominationalism).

What Lard expressed was simply a summation of 1 Peter 4:11: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” How can one say what God has said, on any matter, without going back to the word of God? When one accepts any part of Scripture as an authoritative rule of

faith and practice, he has accepted the Restoration Principle—returning to the Bible for all religious matters—regardless of how little he accepts.

In the long ago, the prophet Jeremiah wrote, “Thus saith the Lord; cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord” (Jer. 17:5). This verse summarizes the desire of many of our day—to turn away from what the will of the Lord requires. The Restoration Plea calls for all people to return to the Lord’s way in everything religious: “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16).

This is what the great pioneer preachers of yesteryear proclaimed. This is what we must proclaim, for it is what the New Testament declares. For true restoration to take place, we must go back—not to Rome, not to Constantinople, not to Mecca, but to Jerusalem! We *can*, and we *must*, be about the business of restoring pure New Testament Christianity in the 21st century! *W.O.T.*

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HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?

Bruce Ligon

The ability to remember is a wonderful blessing. It is amazing how that many years can transpire, but in an instant we are able to call to mind an event or person from years ago that we have not thought about in a very long time. But at the same time all of us know from personal experience that we are not able to remember everything. Or to express this reality in another way, sometimes we forget.

As Christians, it is possible for us to forget or lose sight of the importance of fundamental principles that have to do with our personal relationship with the Lord. Listed below are three principles that we need to strive to always keep before us. Regularly keeping these things before us will help us to remain strong in the Lord.

First, all blessings are from the Lord. James 1:17 reminds us, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (NKJV). A good exercise for each of us from time to time is to pause from the regular routine of life and “count our blessings.” As a familiar gospel song emphasizes, as we do this we will be surprised what the Lord has done. While there are difficulties and discouragements

that come into the lives of each of us, the reality is still that we have been greatly blessed by the Lord. Indeed, our attitude should be as the Psalmist, “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” (Psalm 116:12).

Second, the gospel of Christ is powerful. Because of the reality of sin (Romans 3:23; 6:23), mankind’s greatest need is salvation. In Romans 1:16, the apostle Paul declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). While there are many problems plaguing our society, the gospel of Christ is the answer and solution. The glory of the gospel of Christ is that it is based on the love, grace, and mercy of God and that it is capable of providing all those who obey its commands the assurance of salvation.

Third, as Christians, we have responsibilities to the Lord and His church. It is most certainly true that it is impossible to earn or merit our salvation. But it is also the case that God is expecting our willing and faithful service. Consider carefully these words of exhortation, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in

them" (Ephesians 2:10). Properly understood, Christianity is not a spectator sport, but a lifestyle devoted to service and devotion to the Lord. The need of each of us is to find some way to serve the Lord based upon our talents, abilities, and opportunities. And as we give of ourselves in the Lord's service, we have the following assurance that our time and efforts will not be in vain, "Therefore, my be-

loved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" Corinthians 15:58).

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WHAT KIND OF "MANAGER" IS GOD?

Tim Childs

Some months ago, this writer heard a leader in the Lord's church ask another, "Do you believe God "micromanages" your life? Then, recently, I heard Larry King in an interview with Rick Warren, a preacher for a large denominational church in California, ask the same question of Mr. Warren. In both instances it seemed the question was being asked rhetorically with the proper response apparently to be understood as "no." What role does God have in the Christian's life today?

When we think of a "micromanager" in the secular world, we note one who is "hands on." He or she is an individual who is heavily involved in the day to day details of making decisions and overseeing the workers being managed.

I once heard a deacon in the Lord's church say that his mother, who belongs to a denominational church, went so far as to believe that on the Lord's Day the Holy Spirit led her in the selection of which dress to wear to worship that day. I do not suggest that God cared whether my wife wore her blue dress or her yellow one to worship yesterday.

We can learn something about the way God "manages" our lives today by seeing how he has been involved in an integral way in people's lives throughout the course of history. Did God create the universe and sit back and watch it go (as Deist hold)? Or is He not the sustainer as well? Was God aloof during the days of

Moses and the formation and life of the nation of Israel? How did God "manage" the life of the newly formed church on Pentecost? Without God's heavy involvement and providential care the church would have been crushed and silenced.

Elijah (1 Kings 18) asked the prophets and devotees of Baal: Where is your god? The follow-up question was: What is he doing? Has your god gone on a journey? Is he asleep? The church of today needs to ask these same questions about our view of God. Does it necessarily follow that because there are no on-going revelations and miraculous spiritual gifts that God has withdrawn himself from our lives? Has God become remote and indifferent to our daily lives? God is alive. He hears. He answers. He protects.

Jesus teaches timeless/universal principles about God's involvement in our lives through the use of things like birds and grass of the field (Matthew 6:25-33). If God has numbered even the hairs of our head (Matthew 10:30), it stands to reason that God is near and is not delinquent in his responsibilities as the "manager" of the universe, the church, your life and mine.

W.O.T.

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NEHEMIAH: AN IMPRESSIVE HISTORY

Neil Richey

Thirteen General Periods in the Old Testament

1. Beginnings (Genesis 1:1-5:32)
2. Flood (Genesis 6:1-8:19)
3. New Beginnings (Genesis 8:20-11:32)
4. The Great Patriarchs (Genesis 12:1-45:28)
5. The Egyptian Sojourn (Genesis 46:1-Exodus 14:31)
6. Wilderness Wanderings (Exodus 15:1-Deuteronomy 34:12)
7. Conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1:1-Judges 3:11)
8. The Judges (Judges 3:12, Ruth, 1 Samuel 12:25)
9. United Kingdom (1 Samuel 13:1, 2 Samuel-1 Kings 11:43, 1 Chronicles-2 Chronicles 9:31)
10. Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-2 Kings 18:12, 2 Chronicles 10:1-28:7)
11. Judah Alone (2 Kings 18:13-25:7, 2 Chronicles 29:1-36:21)
12. Babylonian Captivity (2 Kings 24:1-25:3, 2 Chronicles 36:6-23)
13. Return from Captivity (Ezra 1-6, Esther 1-10, Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah 1-12)

It is in the period called “Return from Captivity” that we find the text for our study in this essay—the book of Nehemiah. By way of this study, we only want to make four observations.

A Book With an Impressive Historical Setting

By impressive we mean, a vivid impression upon our minds. Following Israel’s deportation into captivity, Judah maintained the Southern Kingdom. Yet, they did not learn their lesson from their northern brethren. Therefore, Judah came under Babylon’s control, and the first captives were taken out of the land in 606 B.C. (Dan. 1:1-7). Two subsequent deportations of captives occurred in 597 and 586 B.C. Jeremiah, a contemporary of these events, prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years (Jer. 25:12). No details are given of those 70 years of captivity.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah pick up the account of God’s people, the Jews, returning home from captivity. It began with the decree of King Cyrus in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4). This return home came in three groups. Zerubbabel led the first group home in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:5-6:22). Under Zerubbabel’s leadership, the first group was to rebuild the temple. After having faced the adversaries, and overcoming complacency with the help of Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was finally built and dedicated (some 20 + years after returning to Jerusalem). Ezra led the second group home in 458 B.C. (Ezra 7:1-10:44). It was during this time that the Jews experienced a great spiritual revival. We have skipped nearly 60 years, and Ezra, with a commission from King Artaxerxes I, leads a second group home. Ezra finds that God’s people have intermarried, compromising their spiritual devotion. He prayed for the people and began a series of reform. Nehemiah led the last group home in 445 B.C. Nehemiah would now lead home the last group of Jews in order that they might rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

A Book With an Impressive Historical Account

Johnny Ramsey says, “Some critics of the Bible scoff at Nehemiah as being a bricklayer’s book. But there is a much deeper plot than that in this dramatic section of God’s word. The purpose of rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall was to keep Abraham’s seed safe within and the world outside the confines of the city David had taken from the Jebusites (2 Sam. 6). It was imperative that Israel remain intact until the coming of the promised Seed (Gal. 3:16)” (Practical Bible Studies, p.p. 111-112).

Upon the recognition of Nehemiah’s own errors and those of his people, he requested of the king safe passage back to Jerusalem (Neh. 1-2). Nehemiah’s request is granted. Nehemiah returns home, and under his outstanding leadership, and by the divine providence of God, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days--and that in spite of the opposition of Sanballat and his follow-

ers (Neh. 2-6). Too, Nehemiah improved the religious character of his own people (Neh. 7-13).

A Book With an Impressive Historical Character

Nehemiah was an impressive leader. But, what made him so? He had an unstoppable faith in God (Neh. 2:8; 2:18; 2:20; 4:14-15). He encouraged his Jewish brethren to cooperate (Neh. 2:18; 4:6; 4:17). Nehemiah knew how to prepare himself and his people (Neh. 2:12-18). Nehemiah was enthusiastic, and that enthusiasm was contagious (Neh. 4:6). He was a praying person (Neh. 4:9). Nehemiah was a watchdog--one who protected his people (Neh. 4:9; 4:17).

A Book With an Impressive Historical Message For Us

We will only emphasize two messages that God, through Nehemiah has for us today in this great book. First, we learn how to be good leaders. Second, we learn more perfectly the importance of prayer.

Observe who a good leader is. A good leader is one who knows how to relate to his people. “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (Neh. 1:4). My question is why? Because his people were hurting. He knew how to sympathize with his people. Add to that, a good leader will inspire others to go to work. “Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach” (Neh. 2:17). They all went to work, and the wall was built in just 52 days. Then, a good leader will not give in to the opposition. “But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore will his servants will arise and build...” (Neh. 2:19-20).

Observe what a good prayer life is. One should pray in earnest. “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them” (Neh. 4:9). Add to that, our prayer life should be continual (cf. 1 Thes. 5:17—“Pray without ceasing”).

Nehemiah—What a History. When we look through the telescopic lens of time back to about 430 B.C. we read the autobiography of a man who was a great servant of God. May we be like he was. *W.O.T.*

Brother Neil Richey is the evangelist for the Augusta Road Church of Christ in Greenville, South Carolina. He may be reached at 5315 Old Augusta Road, Greenville, SC 29605.

NEW BOOK FOR TEENS

Ted D. Burleson

Glenn Colley and Chuck Webster, both former editors of this journal, have written a new book for teens. The title of the book is Get Real: Real Teens Making a Real Difference in the Real World.

Today's teenagers, youth workers, and Bible class teachers need good, solid material that addresses the challenges that young people face in today's world. Get Real is such a book. It challenges young people to have real faith, biblical faith, in a world that thrives on counterfeits. Glenn and Chuck encourage teenagers to exhibit the kind of faith that Paul described in 1 Timothy 4:12...being examples in the way they walk, talk, act, live, and love. Get Real will be an excellent resource for teen Bible classes, as well as personal devotional reading by young people and those who want to encourage them in their walk with Christ.

Wendell Winkler, a gospel preacher in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, said of the book, "I pray that every congregation of the Lord will include Get Real in their teenage curriculum. Every student needs a copy."

Billy Smith, Dean of the School of the Bible at Freed-Hardeman University said of the book, "Get Real is biblically based, well written, and beautifully illustrated in the language of today's youth. I am happy to commend this excellent work."

Allen Webster, gospel preacher and editor of House to House/Heart to Heart, writes about Get Real, "both authors know the Bible and can be trusted to be completely true to its teachings. I highly recommend Get Real to you and the young people who are important in your life."

The thirteen chapter titles include: "Do People Look Down on Me?," "Do My Words Help People?," "Do My Words Hurt People?," "How Do I Know What's Right?," "Will I Be Faithful Ten Years from Now?," "Am I in Love?," "I'm in Love," "Do I Have an Attitude?," "He's Got an Attitude," "Can I Win a Soul for Christ?," "Is My Faith the Real Deal?," "Do I Have a Dirty Mind?," and "Stay Out of the Back Seat."

The books are \$7.95 plus shipping and handling and may be ordered by contacting Chuck Webster at 205-822-5610 or chuchwebster@bellsouth.net.

W.O.T.

Deep Water

I'm afraid you're in deep water,
And the tide that flows is swift.
Have you looked back to the shoreline?
Have you noticed any rift?

Have you thought about the Captain?
He will take you safely in.
To the ship with riches laden,
He'll forgive you of your sin.

There's a warning sign that's posted,
And it's there for all to see.
The light in the lighthouse burning,
And the guard to set us free.

Where the water flows like crystal,
Calm and clear, but not too deep.
There we're safe from storms that gather,
Day and night a watch he'll keep.

Are you drifting like the driftwood?
Have you noticed how time flies?
Are you often warned of danger?
But ignoring frantic cries?

There's a point of no returning;
And a cry for help too late,
Means a soul is lost forever,
Gone past, the mighty floodgate.

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

*Counsel in the heart of a man is like deep water;
But a man of understanding will draw it out
(Proverbs 20:5)*

OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART...

Adam Faughn

We are often reminded of this famous phrase from the lips of our Savior: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Sometimes, however, we need to be reminded of just how true that statement is. It is easy to learn so much about a person simply based on what comes out of his or her mouth.

Recently a quote came to my attention that caused me to shudder, but also to be reminded of the verses quoted above. The person who made this statement was Dr. John Parsons. He made the statement in an interview with King's College, in London, England. This is the quote: "The pro life movement is having a negative impact on abortion. Sometimes women change their minds on the operating table and then we lose money! We have to run a cost effective termination service. We have abortion on request now. It's what I believe and what I practice. A woman has the right to abort—whether it's to go on a skiing holiday or whether the fetus is disabled."

It is very obvious what this terse statement should cause us to be reminded of, isn't it? Those of us who believe and teach that abortion is the killing of the innocent are so often labeled by others as legalistic, closed-minded or uncaring. Others say that it is not our right to try to tell others what to think or do—or even what is right and what is wrong.

However, just by reading the statement made above by Dr. Parsons, we should be easily reminded of the mind-set of those who advocate the "pro choice" lifestyle. To them a skiing holiday (vacation) is just as important as, if not *more* important than, the life of a new child. How sad, but, also, how telling!

When we read quotes such as that one, it should remind us that the basis for the sin of abortion is really grounded in selfishness, which would seem to fall most basically under "the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16). The "mother" (or "mother and father") is far more interested in herself than in the interests of the precious little one struggling within her. While that "mother" should be thankful every day that her parents saw fit for her to live, it is quite obvious that she does not. Any woman who would abort her baby, most especially when her life is not in danger, is only interested in furthering her own agenda, career and legacy.

When one studies the Bible on the subject of abortion, it is nearly impossible to avoid the list given by Solomon of the things that God "hates." One of those seven is "hands that shed innocent blood" (Proverbs 6:17).² Abortion, notice, is killing one who is living, human and innocent. How could anyone claim that this practice is good?

So, the next time you hear or read of someone bashing those who teach, as does the Bible, that the killing of the unborn is absolutely wrong and sinful, be reminded of the statements of those who advocate abortion. While they try to sound open minded and accepting, sooner or later their words will show their true colors. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." *W.O.T.*

Adam Faughn is the Youth Minister for the Ninth Avenue Church of Christ in Haleyville, Alabama. He may be reached at P.O. Box 716, Haleyville, AL 35565.

THE WARMTH OF LIGHT

Scott McCown

Springtime in Alabama is a time of change. Flowers bloom, trees bud, the sun shines, rain falls, and occasionally a surprise in the form of a late snow. Spring always presents quite a quandary, and not just for the weatherman. Most of us have had to face the issue of what to wear each morning. We check the weather on television or even online, but we can never be sure if we are right.

Take, for instance, one day when I chose to wear a light jacket on a particular morning. When 9:00 AM

arrived, and the local bank opened, I decided to walk the half mile or so to the bank. During that short walk, the wind began to blow across my face and through my thin jacket. I began to have negative thoughts about my decision to walk, and to question the reliability of the local weather forecast. I felt as if the wind had a mind to blow my coat away, I zipped it up a little higher and began walking a little faster.

Walking to the bank necessitated that I return by the same method when I completed my transactions.

How much I dreaded that return walk! Having walked approximately half way back, I began to get warm. The sun decided to come out to play. Oh how good the sun's warmth felt on the back of my neck! Oh how nice that warmth felt as I continued my trek! By the time I reached the bottom of the hill down from the building, I had to stop, not to catch my breath, but to take off my jacket. What the wind failed to do with its force, the sun accomplished with gentle warmth.

This is a true event, but it does remind me of a certain fable concerning a conversation turned contest between the wind and the sun. The wind in the fable did boast to the sun of its power, and did try and fail to remove a man's coat by force. The sun however prevailed, by warming the man so that he removed his own coat.

This story is like the story of God. God, although He has the power, does not use this power to force us to do His will. God in love, being love, gently warms our hearts through the sacrifice of His Son (John 3:16-17). In another place John records, "*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 4:9-10 - ESV).

This story also contains instruction for us. How do we influence people? Many times we try to force our opinions (correct or not) on others. We feel or think we know what is best for them and we tell them so in no uncertain terms. If we force them to listen and close our ears to their thoughts and beliefs, we

can not lead them to truth, they only tighten their coats of doctrine more tightly around them and quicken their pace to get away from us. What if, what IF, we tried to gently warm them with the truth of God's love? What if, what IF, we let God's love flow through us and warm their hearts? What if, what IF, we let our light shine **on** them instead of shining the light in their eyes? Remember Jesus' words, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16- ESV). Look again to the context of John's words in 1 John 4:

"We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1Jo 4:6-11 - ESV).

Take note of those around you, and let God work His power through your life, as you let your light shine, and act in love to those nearby. *W.O.T.*

Scott McCown is the evangelist for the Parrish Church of Christ in Parrish, Alabama. He may be reached at P.O. Box 118, Parrish, AL 35580.

TIS THE SEASON

Dale Hubbert

As the weather warms up there are valuable blessings to be enjoyed. The earth warms up and becomes fertile for the vegetables that provide delicious nourishment to the body. Warmer weather in contrast to cold winter temperatures offers the pleasure of being outside more and enjoying God's creation.

Warmer weather also ushers in other things that are not desirable if the Word of God is to be revered. As temperatures rise some remove clothes to the point of immodesty and shame. Unfortunately, many either do not know or do not care about the impact their dress has upon others. We have sadly followed the path of Jeremiah's day with a lack of ability to

blush even at the most shameful situation (Jeremiah 6:15).

It is not possible in the spring and summer to go to the mall, grocery store, or any other public place without seeing those who have no sense of respect for the covering of their body in a way that would please God. These scenes are common and have become accepted in society. God however has never allowed the world to dictate or change His will regarding what is and is not righteous.

The church is not immune to this problem. Sadly, some of those who appear in the presence of others in shameful and sinful clothing profess to belong to the

Lord. Paul's admonition for women to profess godliness in their dress has been abandoned in favor of the popularity and pressure of the world around us (1 Tim. 2:9, 10).

Parents either do not know or do not care that their children are dressing in such a way as to promote lust and sin (Matt. 5:28). Some teenage girls (and guys) who are members of the church have joined a wicked society rather than remaining true to God and pure in their conduct and example before others (1 Tim. 4:12).

Some who would never appear in the mall or at the grocery store in improper clothing believe by their practice that there are exceptions in which godly clothing is not necessary. Swimming, boating, banquets, social events, athletics, and vacations are among the areas some have chosen to make exceptions to God's law of purity (1 Tim. 5:22). Who made these exceptions okay with God? It certainly wasn't God!

This problem even finds its way into the assembly of the saints. It is sad and appalling what some will wear to a gathering that is designed to worship God and learn more of His will. Men are embarrassed and made uncomfortable passing the emblems of the Lord's Supper because of the way some women and girls have dressed themselves. Of all places, would one not have enough respect for God to put on suitable clothing?

This sinful problem will not soon go away. It is our responsibility as children of God to always dress ourselves in a way that would find the approval of God. It is also our responsibility to teach, encourage, and rebuke when necessary our brethren who bring shame to themselves and the church (1 Tim. 5:20). The Christian life is always best—it is not always the most popular.

Dale Hubbert is the evangelist for the Curry Church of Christ. He may be reached at 5454 Curry Highway, Jasper, AL 35503.

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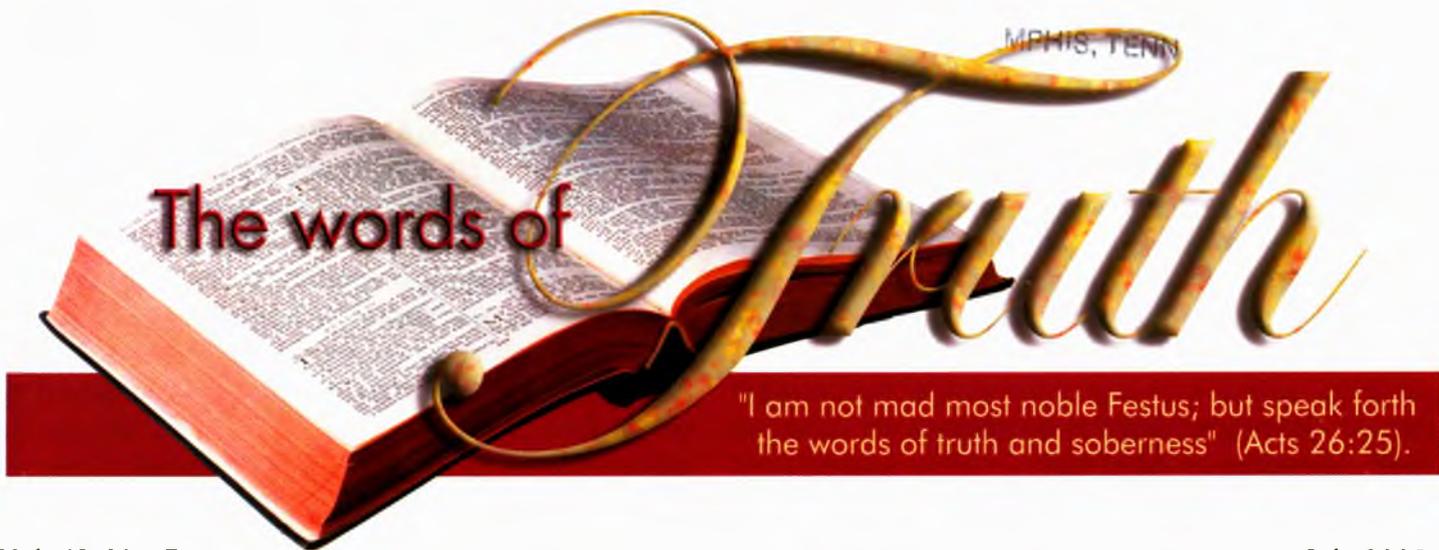
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THE GREATEST INTRODUCTION

Tim Childs

John, whom God sent to make final preparations for Christ's coming, did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:3, 4; Luke 3:3). It was God's plan for John to prepare the way for Christ so people's hearts would be turned God-ward and prepared to receive Jesus, and directed toward Christ's soon coming kingdom (Malachi 3:1).

Jesus was introduced to the people of Judea by John in the most declarative fashion: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). What a powerful and meaningful introduction. No one in all the history of the world had even been introduced like that, or since.

John introduced Jesus to Andrew. Andrew, in turn, quickly introduced Jesus to his own brother, Simon Peter. The text of John 1:41, 42a read, "He (Andrew) first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus." As Andrew had met and discovered the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy, he was so excited and thrilled that with a sense of great urgency he brought Simon as is indicated by the expression, "He first findeth his own brother." It was so significant that it would not wait until some indefinite future time. The occasion was compelling upon him.

Then, the text records how Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus. Philip urged Nathanael to, "Come and see" whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth. Thankfully, Nathanael was willing at

least to "check it out."

Jesus introduced Himself to the woman at Jacob's well as the Messiah, or Christ, for whom she and so many others were waiting (John 4:25, 26). Later, when she departed, she was so excited in her haste that she left her water pot behind as she hurried back to the city. Immediately upon her return she is heard speaking to her people: "Come see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" Upon the investigation of the local townspeople who met and talked with Christ, the proof was convincing as they told her: "For we have heard Him ourselves, and know that it is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

These were men and woman, like you and me, who were taught and thus were able to identify the Christ. Upon such recognition, they were "bound and determined" to share their newfound knowledge so others could equally benefit in such a blessing as knowing the Savior. You and I can follow their examples in pointing men to Jesus, in introducing Him to our family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. You and I, too, can make the greatest introduction a person can make by bringing them to Jesus.

Jesus is the greatest personality to ever walk upon the earth (which He created Himself, John 1:3, 10). There was never a man so caring, compassionate, giving and forgiving. There was never one who lived in this world that ever had such an impact for good as well as the power to change men's lives.

There was never one who lived in this flesh (as an adult) who was so pure and innocent, living a life in full harmony with that of the Father in heaven. Never was one's heart more fixed on fulfilling His Father's will. Never was one's heart more filled with love for God, the Father, and His fellowman as is exhibited in His substitutionary death upon the Roman cross outside the gate of the city of Jerusalem.

Jesus is the greatest friend you and I will ever know.

"Have you a heart that's weary,
Tending a load of care;
Are you a soul that's seeking
Rest from the burden you bear?"

Do you know my Jesus,
Do you know my friend,
Have you heard He loves you,
And that He will abide till the end?

—William F. Lakey

He is the greatest friend that your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers could ever have. So, why not take the initiative and introduce the two? In eternity, they will thank you over and over again. You can do it. *W.O.T.*

In mid-July brother Childs will become the evangelist for the Hillcrest Church of Christ, in Baldwin, Mississippi. We wish him well in his new work.

WHAT BURDENS DO YOU BEAR?

Neil Richey

One of the great invitations of the Lord is found in Matthew 11, and it reads, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Are you fatigued by the tremendous load you now bear? Do you feel as if you have the weight of the world resting upon your shoulders? Do you need refreshing? Then do I have the solution for you. His name—Jesus! His book—the Bible!

When you are bearing the burden of . . . Poor health, the prescription is James 5:14, 15. "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."

A spouse who is not a Christian, the answer is 1 Corinthians 7:14, 16. "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

Loneliness, the companionship is 2 Timothy 4:16-18. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: . . . Notwithstanding the Lord

stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Discouragement, the encouragement is Galatians 6:9. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Losing a Christian loved one, the comfort is 1 Thessalonians 4:18. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

A questioning faith, the confidence is Hebrews 6:17-20. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of

his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.”

Being a Christian who sins, the solution is 1 John 1: 4-10. “...But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

Peer pressure, the ability to conquer is Matthew 5:13-16. “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Anxiety, the cure is Matthew 6:25-34. “Therefore I say unto you, be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?...And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment?...Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Do your burdens seem to heavy to bear alone? If you answered yes, you are exactly right. You cannot do it alone. There are some burdens that good Christian friends can help you bear—“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). On the other hand, there is one friend who can and will help you with every burden. His name is Jesus. *W.O.T.*

Brother Neil Richey is the evangelist for the Augusta Road Church of Christ, 5315 Old Augusta Road, Greenville, SC 29605.

THIS, TOO, WILL PASS

Wanda Kartina McKinney

Whenever the talk of the people
tends to get you down,
And you are surrounded by evil
but your friends cannot be found.
You then start to search for an answer
but you remain without a clue,
Your troubles start to get greater
and you do not know what to do.
Your family does not understand
you feel they have left you behind,

They never recommend
to talk over what is on your mind.
But, you look up to the heavens above
and pray to God with such strength,
Only He can show you love
the love that you really need.
Yes, the people may point, stare, and laugh
and your friends may stray,
But, remember this, too, will pass
because God will make things okay.

MODEST APPAREL

Billy Banks

In 1 Timothy 2:9 we find an admonition to the women to “adorn themselves in modest apparel.” Paul is writing here by inspiration and gives guidelines about proper dress. The definitions, by Webster, for “modest” include: “restrained and unreasonable,” “avoiding display,” and “shunning indecency.” In today’s culture violations of the biblical principle of modesty in dress is commonplace—in movies, on television, on the beach, in the popular magazines, and even in the local newspaper. Many of the celebrities dress in provocative attire and are not the role model they should be for our ladies and young ladies. Christians must look for a higher standard in the way they dress.

In the warmer months our ladies and young ladies need to be especially attentive to the type clothing they wear. It is not possible to name every type of clothing that would not pass the biblical test but maybe this question will help: If modern bathing suits, short shorts, plunging necklines, see-through blouses, skin tight jeans, expansive midriffs, mini-skirts and micro skirts are modest, what would be immodest?

Certainly our Creator wants Christian women to be attractive physically (as well as spiritually) but

without undue attention to themselves through immodest dress.

Remember, we have a high calling as Christians—we are ambassadors for Christ, our spiritual King. Let us represent Him well as we strive to be good examples everyday in the way we walk and talk and certainly in our dress, whether it be at work, school, recreational activities, and yes, even at church services.

We love our Christian young people dearly. You are not only the church of tomorrow but you are the church of today. As such, you need to be the best that you can be—a Christian lady or young lady who adheres to the fashion standard set forth in the Good Book—that of modest apparel.

Young men also need to wear clothing that reflects the Christian example whatever the occasion and especially at the worship services. *W.O.T.*

Brother Banks is an elder at the Cox Boulevard Church of Christ in Sheffield, AL. He recently retired as the President of Lambert Book House/Publishing. He may be reached at 1918 Pleasant Drive, Muscle Shoals, AL 35561.

MAKING A STAND FOR WHAT IS RIGHT IS NOT HATE

Robert Curry

Several months ago an individual wrote a newspaper article entitled, “Unlearning the hate that’s so carefully taught.” The author wrote of feelings of ill will toward those spiritually and socially different (i.e., Muslims and homosexuals) from those of us who believe and uphold the moral standards of the Bible. The author also shared his own experience of meeting a man, “one of the most gifted, spiritually mature, wholly together people I have ever known.” He altered his initial view of the man “because I saw the fruits of the Spirit where I wasn’t expecting them.” The author then came to his point:

Religion should be a place where humans are reconciled in the presence of the mystery of divine love. But all too often, religion is captured by its own cultural conditioning and its limited human

vision. Too often one religion will try to make its light shine brighter by casting another religion in its dark shadow.

The author of that article could not be more incorrect.

I get rather tired of those who claim standing for what is right is hatred and prejudice. In the recent election season this was constantly seen in the Democratic cries against the Republican denunciation of gay marriage and abortion as prejudice and attacks against human rights. Of course, such claims are made by those who do not feel the Bible is the absolute, final authority for human conduct or those who feel the Bible is the subject of private and personal interpretation. All of this is the poison fruit of our ecumenical world. I insist it is not wrong, prejudiced,

or a violation of human rights to stand for what is right, Godly, and biblical; it is not hatred, but love for all that belongs to God and is in accordance to His will.

Even though the author mentioned above writes of tolerance in issues of morality and religious differences, I will focus only on morality in this article. Much of the same principles that apply to speaking against immorality also apply to religious compromise and tolerance. To examine both is far beyond the limitations of this brief article.

Love for All, But Intolerance for Wickedness

I agree with the perspective of love for all mentioned by the author above. I believe it is biblical to assume Jesus loves the Muslim and the homosexual, and everyone else as well. Christians are to have a genuine concern for the souls and welfare of all human beings, not wishing any harm, physical or spiritual, to come to them. For us to express hatred toward those whom Jesus loves is rebellion against Him. Yet, advocates of moral and religious tolerance are sadly mistaken to equate biblical love and the acceptance of what the Bible condemns. The Bible condemns all that advocates a human relationship that goes against the laws of nature and morality such as homosexuality (cf. Rom. 1:26-27) or adultery, drunkenness, murder, and immorality which are the works of the flesh, the practitioners of which will not inherit the kingdom (Gal. 5: 19-21).

Only those sparsely knowledgeable of the Bible would claim Jesus Christ would teach tolerance toward that which violates His place as Lord and Savior, as well as Creator. Yet, continually the "religious" and "spiritual" seek to embrace both the ways of the world and the will of the Lord. They seek to reveal their magnanimous gestures of spiritual tolerance, claiming an association with Jesus Christ, but seek to break down the barriers Jesus erected for the benefit of those who would live as His servants. It cannot be acceptable to condone what the Lord condemns; to tolerate what he insists is intolerable. Paul wrote, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). How can what angers God, what He calls wickedness and godlessness, be tolerated?

Such has become the practice of many under the

false banner of love, but such love is not biblical, nor is it logical, for all that is love begins with God, revealed through His son (1 John 4: 10). To condone what is unscriptural and call it love is not biblical love in any sense. No one can logically claim, as the author above does, that someone who practices what God condemns is spiritually "mature" or evidences the "fruits of the spirit." Paul expressed his love for the church in Corinth, yet rebuked them harshly for their spiritual immaturity, tolerance of incest, unfaithfulness in marriage, and unscriptural worship (e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:24). Peter expressed his love to the churches (1 Peter 2:11; 4:12) and encouraged them toward love (3:8). Yet, he rebuked them for their guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking, as well as a lack of submission to God. Clearly Paul and Peter felt their love for the churches was expressed not only through their fellowship in faith, but also in their rebuke of all that did not coincide with God's will. Loving the churches as they did, how could they do anything less?

Love in the Highest Sense

To stand against what God condemns and those who practice such is not hate, but love in the highest sense, for it expresses love for God and His will and love for the souls of those who put themselves at odds with God's will. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart," wrote Paul, "I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you" (2 Corinthians 2:4). In other words, what Paul did was evidence of his abundant love for the church in Corinth. For him to have said nothing to Corinth regarding their spiritual immaturity and wickedness would have not been evidence of his love, but his indifference to their souls.

Spiritual correction and a defense of what is biblical and moral are logical. Consider Solomon's famous wisdom regarding children: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). This underlines part of the problem: we live in a society that does not train its children, failing to hold them responsible for their conduct. We have bought into the theory that discipline stunts the emotional and mental growth of the child and we have chocked on that illogic for years. Consider also Solomon's warning and encouragement toward the plight of human knowledge: "There is a

way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). To the author above, it seems right to equate love and tolerance for what is illogical and immoral. Of course, such thinking is not sensible or reasonable, but merely easier done in the short run, while in the long run it causes severe problems and distress.

Paul insisted the scriptures are inspired of God and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, thoroughly equipping the man of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Those who follow the lead of our above-mentioned author do not accept that, but feel the best course is tolerance as the best display of love. In response, Paul would say, according to the text, love as it should be expressed is an intolerance of that which needs correction and reproof.

Recall that Paul encouraged Timothy to be ready to preach the word in and out of season (every opportunity), to convince, rebuke, and exhort with longsuffering and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2). Ask yourself why Paul would encourage Timothy to do that. Paul actually explains why he did so: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up to themselves teachers; and they will turn away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3, 4). Paul stated it clearly: our society is full of those with itching ears and have gathered for themselves teachers who advocate what they wish to hear and do. They have turned aside, not only from the truth, but from logic and common sense. To speak out against the illogic and unscriptural attitudes of society is not only necessary, but the evidence of the greatest love we can show.

Conclusion

Standing up for what is righteous and biblical is not hatred, prejudice, or intolerance. I would challenge the homosexual and the advocates of such a lifestyle to prove the logic of their claims; if their lifestyle is normal then prove it, but if not, embrace the logic of Scripture. I would also challenge those who advocate a freedom of moral standards while claiming righteousness to prove the logic of their thinking; if it is right and logical to live as one pleases and claim Christianity then prove it, but if not, then embrace the logic of Scripture.

To say no to what God condemns is love at its

Our Father Planned the Family Home

"Not good that man should be alone,"
Our Father planned the family home.

In His creation, God above
Made a help meet for man to love.
He, from a rib, while Adam slept,
Created Eve, a wife, to help.
In time were children born to bless;
Each one to hold, love, and caress.

Life always has, and always will,
Be at its best when we fulfill
The plans that God, in His own way,
Blazed out for couples to obey.
We find no place where Jacob shirked,
But seven years for Rachel worked.
As of "few days" he could refer,
Because of the love he had for her.

God joins together man and wife.
This union is to be for life;
Then gives us children, oh, so dear,
To mold like clay, with love and care.
Love is the key our Father gave
To lock within, the home to save.
True love can mend a broken heart
Before the family's torn apart.

The church is compared to bride and groom.
To separate, there is no room.
In marriage two become as one.
By man it's not to be undone.
First things are first, when from the start,
We love the Lord with all our heart.
Marriage we'll better understand
If we obey the Lord's command.

Divorce is not what parents need.
Stay together, with love, we plead;
With dreams of golden years ahead,
Sweet memories of the day you wed.

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

highest form; love in a biblical sense. It is screaming, "Fire!" when the building is burning and shouting, "Watch out!" when danger approaches. Our author and those who agree with him, according to their reasoning, insist it would be best to embrace the fire and an individual's right to be destroyed by it. It all boils down to what authority one assigns to Scripture, does it not. If the Bible contains the authority of God and is a mandate for all human conduct according to God's will, then obedience to its commands is not

hate, but pure love. It is loving someone so much we warn them of the danger of violating what God will judge.

It is time to be logical, it is time to be Scriptural, and it is time to be loving. It is time to make a stand for what is biblical. *W.O.T.*

Brother Curry is the evangelist for the Johnson Church of Christ, 5618 Elmore St., Springdale, AR 72762.

IS GAMBLING WRONG?

Ted D. Burleson

Question: I thought gambling was only wrong if it became an addiction—what do you say about this?

—a reader from Greenville, SC

Answer: Although there is not a verse in the Bible that says, "Thou shalt not gamble," there are many New Testament teachings that direct Christians toward attitudes that oppose gambling. Consider the following biblical principles:

- Christians should consider themselves **dead to motives based on greed** (Colossians 3:5). Don't even associate with those whose materialist spirits motivate them to greedy practices (1 Corinthians 5:10). Statements like, "We're not promoting gambling, we're promoting public revenue," are covert rationalizations to satisfy greed under the pretense of seeking the improvement of society.
- Christians are to **earn an honest living** by doing something useful and good (Ephesians 4:28). According to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, able-bodied people who refuse to work shouldn't eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). Gambling is the expectation of profit based on pure chance with very little investment of money, time, or work.
- Christians, according to Romans 7:7, **are not to "covet,"** (to want to take your neighbor's things) yet gambling is motivated by covetousness. Covetousness and gambling violate the Golden Rule by neglecting to treat others as you want to be treated (cf. Matthew 7:12). Some religious organizations even capitalize on the use of gambling to raise money by appealing to society's

tendency to covet.

- Christians must **be faithful stewards** to the one for whom we work (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2). Gambling is certainly not good stewardship since the assumption is made that our earthly possessions belong to us and not the Lord. Gambling violates good stewardship and other principles of Christian living.
- Christians must guard their influence by **avoiding even the appearance of evil** (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Suppose someone with weak faith witnesses you purchasing a chance on a car from a local civic group or putting a dollar on a certain sports team in the office pool. What has your influence taught the person with weak faith?

Please study these and other passages of Scripture and determine for yourself if gambling in any form is compatible with Christian attitudes, principles, and actions. Can you imagine Jesus Christ buying a lottery ticket or using a slot machine?

Brother Phil Sanders of the Concord Road Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tennessee, compiled a list of reasons not to gamble:

- Gambling is based on greed (Proverbs 28:22)
- Gambling is absorbed with the idea of getting something for nothing (1 Timothy 6:9, 10)
- Gambling preys upon the poor (Proverbs 22:16)
- Gambling breeds dishonesty and deceit (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22)

W.O.T.

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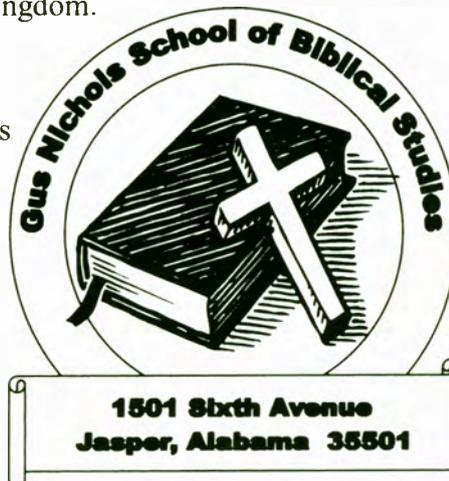
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TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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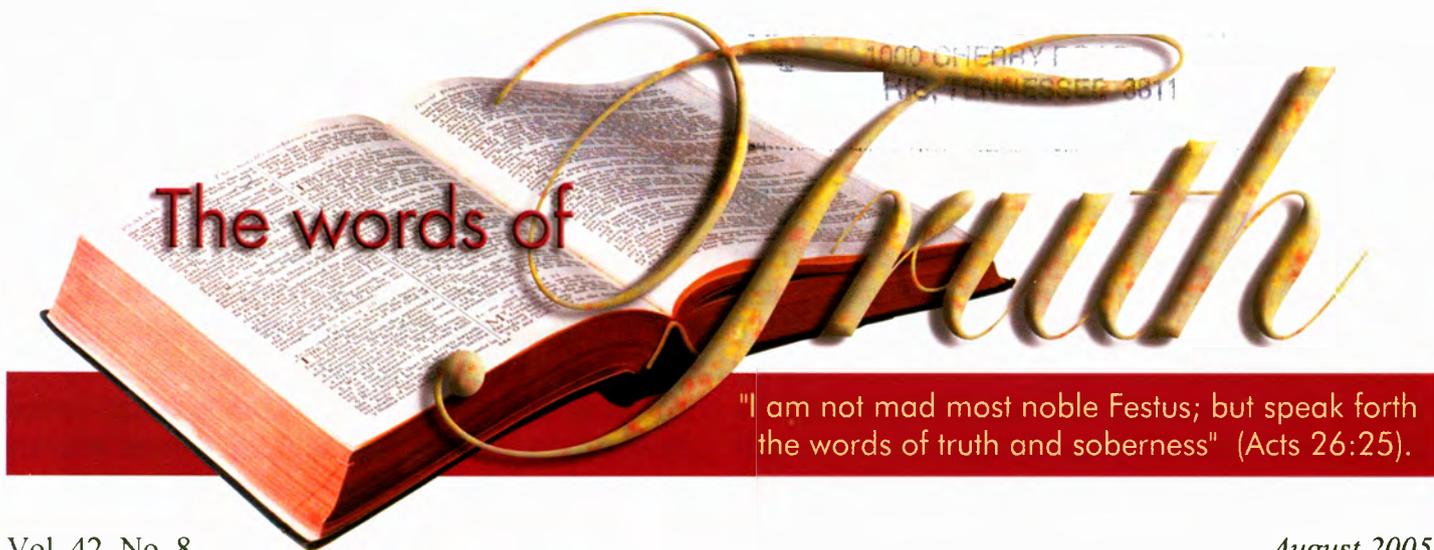
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“CAN I TALK TO THE OWNER?”

David Courington

It was one of those moments when I blurted out the first thing that came to my mind. A telemarketer who had no idea whom he was calling, called the church building the other day and asked, “Can I talk to the owner?” I couldn’t resist telling him that he would have to call God. Perhaps I should have said, “That’s a long distance call,” or “I doubt it,” or maybe “Have you said your prayers today?”

The question of ownership of the church brings to mind what I used to hear some of the older folks say when I was younger. If you would say, “I am going to my church today,” they were quick to reply, “Whose church? It is God’s church.” Seeing that Paul called the gospel “My gospel” (Romans 2:16, 16:25), I am not convinced that there is anything wrong with one saying, “My church.” After all, we are a part of it if we are God’s children. But at least the old timers knew that the church did not belong to them; it belonged to Jesus Christ.

We need to go back and dust off some of the Scriptures that say such things as, Matthew 16:18, where Jesus told Peter, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Indeed it was, and is, Jesus’ church.

Today, there are those who seem to have forgotten just whose church it is. They have their own doctrine that conflicts with that of Jesus. Yet the Bible says in 2 John 1:9-11, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ

has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” Only Jesus’ doctrine will do for His church. Any other teaching is not to be received or fellowshiped. Whose doctrine are you following regarding how you worship, what plan of salvation you teach, how the church is organized, etc.? After all, it is the church of Christ (Romans 16:16).

As God’s children, we belong to Christ. Not only does He own the church, but He owns us. Paul used this argument in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, to show how sinful it is to commit sexual sin. He stated, “You are not your own.” It would do us good to remember each day who our own is and to spend some time talking to Him in prayer. *W.O.T.*

David Courington is the evangelist for the Sylvan Springs Church of Christ. He may be reached at 927 Hathcock Drive, Mulga, AL 35118.

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“Devil Disease”: Illustration Of Galatians 5:15?

Neal Pollard

The Tasmanian Devil population is being decimated by a strange, deadly malady known as “Devil Facial Tumor Disease.” It is a cancer that horribly disfigures an ever-growing portion of the carnivorous marsupial’s body until it suffocates or starves from lesions in the neck. Horrific as the disease is, its means of spreading through that animal population is even more so. The best guess of scientists is that the cancer cell is transmitted when the Devils bite each other during the course of fights. In attacking their fellow species, they are infecting themselves and likely precipitating their own demise. Their infamous ill temperament may be facilitating their own extermination.

False teachers troubled Galatia. This troubled Paul, who by inspiration denounced especially the Judaising trouble-makers in the latter part of the epistle. Paul used many graphic ways to describe their doctrine and approach. It was “bondage” (5:1). It nullified the effect of Christ’s atonement in their spiritual lives (5:2). It indebted one in a way impossible to pay (5:3). It estranged one from Christ, causing that one to fall from grace (5:4). It hindered true obedience to God (5:7). It was destructive leaven (5:9). It was brought by troublemakers and persecutors (5:11,12). It was fleshly (5:13, 16ff). It led to spiritual destruction (5:17-21). It was harmful to “one another” relationships (5:26).

Yet, the most graphic description in the midst of several is found in Galatians 5:15. Paul warned, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another” (NKJ). Paul had just hyperbolically yearned that the troublers would figuratively mutilate themselves (5:12), but now he says those with such a divisive, ungodly methodology were destined to spiritually wound and even destroy those likeminded.

Liberalism is a dominating, troubling concern in spiritual Israel today. The church faces so many battles centering on proposed changes that threaten to undermine its authority and identity. Many want to change things clearly and principally set forth in

scripture to suit their own desires and inclinations. In some places, there is an outright push to denominationalize the church of Christ and pollute our pulpits and classrooms with blatantly false ideas.

However, one is naïve who believes only one side (i.e., the “left”) is attacking biblical center. There are too many from another direction who are equally damaging and vicious in their attacks on the body of Christ. In one sense, they are more dangerous due to their contention that they are rooting out all false doctrine and exposing all error. When they are doing so with proper ethics, attitude, and balance, they are to be applauded. Yet, there is a mentality that seems wholly obsessed with full-time heretic detection, slandering brethren, and scrupulously elevating minutia as on par with Christ’s doctrine. They unnecessarily divide brethren and split congregations. They polarize and draw away disciples after themselves. They are fight-pickers, seemingly eager to engage in lengthy, unending diatribe and debate to the exclusion of other Christian obligations, of righteous, Christlike conduct, and of a charitable spirit that “is not rude...keeps no record of wrongs...does not delight in evil...” (1 Corinthians 13:5,6).

Yet, a pattern seems to be emerging among such contentious brethren. First, they are increasingly turning on one another. Further, they are succeeding in infecting themselves by their biting and devouring. Then, they are facilitating their own demise—that of their influence, reputation, trustworthiness, and respectability. However, they have also viciously wounded good men and women from among us in the process. It is an epidemic that deserves closer attention and needs eradication.

If there is biblical center, it can be abandoned in more than one direction. The antidote is Christ-like love that leads to love of truth and kind treatment of brethren. To do less leads to horrific disfiguring of the body of Christ.

W.O.T.

Neal Pollard, the evangelist for the Cold Harbor Road Church of Christ, may be reached at 6856 Cold Harbor Road in Mechanicsville, VA 23111.

“CHURCH OF CHRIST BACKS SAME-SEX MARRIAGE” (?)

Chuck Webster

Most of you have no doubt seen headlines similar to the one above which recently appeared in a Texas newspaper. The church of Christ in that community received several calls from people expressing disappointment that the “church of Christ” would condone homosexuality. Confusion among the general public is not surprising, in view of most people’s lack of familiarity with the history of various religious groups. But, in the interest of clarification, a few comments are appropriate.

The resolution under consideration occurred in the denomination called the “United Church of Christ,” not the undenominational “churches of Christ.” *The New York Times* was more precise in its title and began its article with this statement: “The United Church of Christ became the first mainline Christian denomination to support same-sex marriage officially when its general synod passed a resolution on Monday affirming ‘equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender’ ” (Shaila Dewan, July 5, 2005). At a news conference after the vote, John H. Thomas, president and general minister of the denomination, said, “On this July 4, the United Church of Christ has courageously acted to declare freedom, affirming marriage equality, affirming the civil rights of gay couples to have their relationships recognized as marriages by the state, and encouraging our local churches to celebrate those marriages.” The United Church of Christ has 6,000 congregations and 1.3 million members.

“Churches of Christ” and the “United Church of Christ” are completely separate religious entities. According to its official web site, the United Church of Christ was created on Tuesday, June 25, 1957, at the Uniting General Synod in Cleveland, Ohio (<http://www.ucc.org/aboutus/shortcourse/ucc.htm>). It was the result of a merger between the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches and “embodied the essence of both parents, a complement of freedom with order, of the English and European Reformations with the American Awakenings, of 17th-century separatism with 20th-century ecumenism, of Presbyterian with congregational politics, of neo-orthodox with liberal theologies.” Historically, in churches of Christ we trace our American roots to the early 19th-century efforts of

Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and others. But our plea has always been simply to return to New Testament Christianity, and so we trace our spiritual ancestry to the Christians of the New Testament. We do what we do religiously because of our commitment to the Word of God as inspired, infallible, and authoritative (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The United Church of Christ, in contrast, has the slogan, “God is still speaking,” by which it suggests that the Bible is not the sole source of divine instruction. These polar opposite views of the Bible—and the consequent religious beliefs and practices—form the foundational differences between the United Church of Christ and churches of Christ.

“Churches of Christ” do not “back same-sex marriages.” In every dispensation, God has taught that the practice of homosexuality is sinful. See, for example, the following passages: Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10. Because of our commitment to the Bible as the Word of God, we oppose the practice of homosexuality as we do the practice of every other sin, in spite of what prevails culturally. In contrast, the United Church of Christ stated in its resolution that, “Ideas about marriage have shifted and changed dramatically throughout human history, and such change continues even today.” In other words, marriage is defined culturally instead of biblically. That view of Scripture allows for the approval of whatever becomes acceptable in any particular culture. It also blatantly ignores the fact that God created marriage and defined it as man and woman (Genesis 2:24).

It is disappointing to recognize that our world is straying farther and farther from the standard of morality revealed in the Bible. It is even more discouraging to see certain religious groups acquiesce to our ungodly culture and completely abandon God’s teachings on right and wrong. Perhaps this should serve as a reminder to us that we must never waver in our commitment to the Bible, always being willing to swim against the tides of the culture that surrounds us. God’s Word is true in every generation, regardless of what people around us choose to believe.

Chuck Webster of the Hoover Church of Christ, may be reached at chuck.preacher@gmail.com.

FOCUS CHRISTIAN, FOCUS

Tim Childs

The faithful child of God will exercise tremendous diligence as he seeks to walk with God each day. You and I must not be half-hearted nor indifferent about the steps we take as we pursue the narrow way unto life eternal (Matthew 7:13-14). If we are negligent, or otherwise fail to heed the Apostle's warning to be sober and vigilant, we do so to the peril and destruction of our soul (1 Peter 5:8). As a heaven-bound Christian, I need to have a keen focus upon the following:

Christ. Isn't it reasonable that Christ, "who is our life" (Colossians 3:4), "our hope" (1 Timothy 1:1), and the "author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), should be our focus? The one whose name we now gladly wear should be at the center of our attention. The Hebrew writer skillfully directed the eyes of weary, struggling saints to Jesus, our Savior, as they were tempted to surrender their faith for temporary human comfort. Christ is set before our eyes, too, as the model of patient steadfastness. "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:3).

Cross. Our focus as followers of God should be upon the cross. For you and me, the cross serves as a

symbol of the deep treasures of God's love and grace. Additionally, it is a symbol of how horrible sin's effects truly are (Hebrews 9:22). God's justice demands that sin be punished. Understanding the implications of the cross should motivate and enable us to overcome our personal sin(s). When you and I grow spiritually in Christ, we do all that is possible with God's power and grace working within us to avoid crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting him to open shame (Hebrews 6:6).

Crown. The incorruptible crown of life is symbolic of the reward God has promised to give all of us who overcome through Christ and his atoning blood. James writes, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12). Jesus admonished the Christians at Smyrna that having been "faithful unto death, I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). We must be faithful and endure any cost for Christ "that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11). Focus on these. *W.O.T.*

Brother Childs, the evangelist for the Hillcrest Church of Christ in Baldwin, Mississippi, may be reached at Timchild258@aol.com.

MY MOTHER, TERRI SCHIAVO, AND GOD'S PROVIDENCE

David W. Hester

Perhaps it was the image on the video that sparked the memories. As the reporter described the heartrending details of the Terri Schiavo case, her face filled the screen. There she was, her eyes slowly following the balloon her father held above her head. And again, Terri's mother speaking to her; the eyes seeming to light up in response. The reporter was explaining how several doctors had said she was in a "vegetative state." That phrase brought back the anger—the fear—the dread. For, you see, that phrase was used at one point to describe my mother.

In July of 2003, I received news that hit me like a punch in the stomach. My parents—Benny and Mary

Anne Hester—had been involved in a terrible automobile accident near their home in Jasper, Alabama; Daddy was injured, but was conscious and able to walk. Mama, on the other hand, was in critical condition. My wife, Brenda, who had first received word, contacted my sister, Sandra Lynch. As soon as Sandra arrived, we all headed to Birmingham.

When we got to the hospital, Daddy was relieved to see us but was distraught. Oblivious to his own pain, all he could think of was Mama. The brethren from the congregation where he preached were there in a huge show of support and love, for which we will always be grateful. But, when Sandra and I first saw

Mama in the ICU, it was a shock.

She was lying on the bed, motionless, with her eyes fixed in an emotionless stare; tubes and machines were hooked to her body. We called out her name; talked to her; no response. Daddy, through his tears, poured out his love and implored her to fight—to come back to us. No response. My wife, who is a speech pathologist, later told me that when she first saw her, she did not expect her to live. Truth be told, not many people did. Sandra has worked for many years in the health care profession; although her exterior was calm, I could tell that she was very concerned.

Those first few weeks were critical. Prayers from concerned brethren around the world were made for Mama. All the love and support from brothers and sisters in Christ will never be forgotten by our family. The cards, the phone calls, and the visits meant so much to us. Indeed, we eventually saw the truth of the Scripture: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Yet, in mid-August, we received news that brought us as low as we could possibly get.

It was on a Saturday. The neurologist on call asked to meet with Daddy, Sandra, and me in a small family conference room. Her demeanor was somber; her words measured. After reviewing all that had been done, she said, “Your mother has less than a one-half of one percent chance of ever waking up.” At that point, to me it seemed all of the oxygen had been sucked out of the room. Then, she added something I will never forget: “You all need to be thinking of the plans you need to make.” My sister’s eyes focused on the therapist like lasers. With a slow-burn intensity, Sandra replied, “What plans?” The young neurologist was taken aback, and stammered that nothing had to be decided just now. By this point, Daddy had regained enough composure to make it clear to the young lady that we would do all that it took to bring Mama back—as long as there was life, there was hope. However, after she had left, he broke down, almost crushed by the sobering news. We all were at our lowest point.

God’s providence is a subject that I freely admit to not being an expert. There are many things in connection with providence that fall under Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Though we do not understand

why God allows certain things to happen, we know that all will be revealed after the Day of Judgment when the saints will have all eternity to find out from the Father Himself. We can be encouraged from the examples of great men like Job and Joseph, as well as righteous women like Esther, who trusted God in spite of difficulties. And, we are emboldened by the life of our Lord, who suffered adversity from his own people to give Himself as the ultimate Sacrifice. In spite of what we go through in this life, nothing can match the pain and heartache He suffered. Yet, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16).

Less than a month after the meeting with the neurologist, Mama opened her eyes. Only now her eyes were alert and responsive. We did not want to get our hopes up too much, but then she began to move her hands and feet ever so slowly, in response to commands. After a few days, the nurses had her sitting up in her bed. A speech pathologist came in to ask Mama a list of questions; I was particularly interested, since this was Brenda’s line of expertise. Mama responded to them in a hushed voice, affected by the tube that had been in her throat. The young lady asked, “Who is the President?” After a couple of seconds, Mama replied, “W” (The nickname for George W. Bush). The startled therapist said, “What?” Mama again said, “W.” The speech therapist said, “Why, you’re smarter than I am! I wouldn’t have thought to have said that!”

After a couple of more months of therapy, Mama finally went home with Daddy. Since then, she has made slow but steady improvement. Though she will never be back to one hundred percent, we are thankful to a gracious God for allowing her to be with us. She has made remarkable progress, given where she was after the accident. She frequently calls me and Sandra on the phone and talks with us. She can get around the house with a walker and can do certain things for herself. She is a strong lady, with a determination to live and continue to make a contribution to the Lord’s cause.

(continued on page 7)

A BOOK ABOUT ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH

Ted D. Burlison

Redeeming the Times: Addressing Issues of the Church in the Present Age is edited by Russell L. Dyer, Tommy F. Haynes, and Jeff A. Jenkins. The 2004 book from Clarity Publications contains sixteen chapters by seventeen authors on issues that are very important in the face of Satan's attack on the church.

Note the following chapter headings in the 191 page book:

- "Why Should We Teach the Word of God Today?" by Jeff A. Jenkins
- "Inspiration and Inerrancy" by Dr. Kippy Myers
- "When God is Silent" by the editors of the book
- "Wrestling with Our History" by Chuck Monan
- "Law or Love?" by Tommy F. Haynes
- "From Faith to Faith" by Tim Pyles
- "Is Ecumenism What Jesus Meant?" by Dr. Lindsey D. Warren and Thomas Bart Warren
- "Does the Church Need to Change to Grow?" by Dale Jenkins
- "Worship in Our Time—Contemporary or Traditional?" by Russell L. Dyer
- "Instrumental Music—Tradition or Scripture?" by Ron Williams
- "The Role of Women in the Church" by Neal Pollard
- "The Elder as a Spiritual Leader" by Dale Hartman
- "The Influence of Entertainment" by Steve Bailey
- "Are the Fields Still White?" by David Deffenbaugh
- "Can the Bible Be Understood in Our Time?" by Dr. Ralph Gilmore

An appendix near the end of the book lists a short biographical sketch of each author. An added feature of the book is that many of the contributors shared extensive endnotes for additional research and study.

Redeeming the Times is not a simple book that can be read without considerable attention. However, when we consider the important subject being discussed, it is well worth the effort. *W.O.T.*

Words of Truth

The words of truth, God's book divine,
Gives hope with faith to stand,
If we obey the gospel call,
We'll reach the Promised Land.

Sin storms may rage, the gale winds blow,
But God will see us through,
With Christ to intercede, for us,
Fear not, His word is true.

Be brave and strong, with armor on,
Keep sight of heaven's goal.
It won't be long, we'll soon be home,
To dreamland of the soul.

The words of truth, the book divine,
Is here for us to read,
It tells us how to worship God,
His word is what we need.

Once blinded by the sins of life,
With faith it's plain to see,
His plan for us is all we need,
The grace of God is free.

His mercy reaches everywhere,
We need Him and He's there,
Through ages He has proved to us,
His love beyond compare.

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

(continued from page 5)

Which brings me back to Terri Schiavo. I have to wonder—if she had the same love and support from her husband that Mama had from my Dad, would she have made the same kind of recovery? It angered my wife that so little therapy was allowed. Our hearts went out to the Schindler family and the immense pain they suffered. Though they were not New Testament Christians, they relied on each other for support. I empathized with them.

Just this afternoon, Mama called from her cell phone. Daddy was driving, and they were going to the Post Office. She spoke with the same excitement and intensity I had always known her to have, when aroused to make a difference on an issue. “David, I’ve written a letter to the President about that girl in Florida. I’m going to tell him about what I went

through, and that she deserves to live!” I couldn’t help but remember the same intensity many years before, when she and a number of Christian ladies worked hard to keep the Equal Rights Amendment from being approved in Tennessee, where Daddy preached at the time. In fact, Mama not long ago came across some old material from those days, rekindling her desire to make a difference. As she went on describing all she had written, I grinned from ear to ear. *Thank you, Lord, for all your blessings. Thank you for your Providence and your Son who died for us. Thank you for blessing us in ways we will never understand.*

W.O.T.

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ARE YOU PASSING THE TEST?

Neil Richey

While attending an area-wide gospel meeting, I heard the preacher say, “Each of God’s commands, in essence, is a test.” He was exactly right.

Most of us understand the need to obey God’s commandments. We know the words of Jesus that say, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). We recognize the fact that “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). We know that the love of God is “that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

At least, with lip service, we say that the commandments of God are not optional. But, do we believe that—really? Consider if you are passing the following tests.

There is the Attendance Test. One of the most simple of commands given to Christians by God is found in Hebrews 10:25—“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Yet, Christian men and women fail this test miserably on a regular basis. Most Christians make themselves available to attend Sunday morning worship—I said most. However, many, as the numbers indicate across the board in churches of Christ, fail to come back on Sunday

night, Wednesday night, much less during Gospel Meetings.

Few there be that would deny it is a good thing to assemble with the saints when they meet for the purpose of worship and study. With that in mind, consider these words, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Are you passing the attendance test?

There is the Prayer Test. Are you a praying person? I mean a regular, sincere, praying person? There is great appreciation extended to the psalmist for these words, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17). Prayer is the only way in which the faithful Christian can pour out his heart to God. When is the last time that you “talked to God?”

Some have said, “I pray to God, but He just does not answer my prayers?” If you are a faithful Christian, you need to know that He does. “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers” (1 Peter 3:12). He may not always answer your prayers the way you think that He should. Sometimes He answers yes, sometimes no, and sometimes wait awhile. Are you passing the prayer test?

There is the Bible Study Test. We eat everyday. Most watch television or listen to the radio everyday.

Some read the newspaper everyday. Do you read the Bible everyday? We would do well to adopt the same attitude of the Bereans. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Are you passing the Bible study test?

There is the Giving Test. Every time we assemble upon the first day of the week in order to worship God (Acts 20:7), we observe the command to give as we have prospered (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Have you ever considered that this is a test that tells God how much we love Him? As the apostle Paul talked with the Corinthian brethren about their giving practices, he pointed out the example of how the Macedonians gave. "I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love" (2 Corinthians 8:8). Here Paul tells the Corinthians that the way they give is a result of how much they love God. Are you passing the giving test?

There is the Soul-winning Test. One of the great joys of a faithful Christian is to share the saving message that he has learned with others. Just this week a brother came into my study with a handful of church bulletins. I began to discuss his plans for them and he told me that he likes to hand them out to those with whom he comes into contact. Jesus said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Are you passing the soul-winning test?

The preacher was right, "each of God's commands, in essence, is a test." How have you been at test taking lately? The grade will either be pass or fail. May God help us to be faithful so that we can stand prepared to give an account of how we tested.

W.O.T.

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The Words of Truth

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WORSHIP MATTERS

Tim Childs

According to a news report from Fox News online, there are two new “faith based” cheerleading camps; one has opened up in Georgia, and the other in North Carolina. The purpose of these camps is to teach cheerleaders from “Christian schools” to “mix religious messages with cheerleading.” The report states, “They tell campers that cheering is a God-given talent that can spread Christian lessons.” John Blake, one of the event coordinators, says: “We think it can even be an act of worship.”

This report is representative of the confusion that still exists in our world with respect to the nature of worship, what constitutes worship, and how God reveals He is to be worshiped during this final age of human life on earth.

We are worshipful creatures. Human kind will worship someone or something. It is simply part and parcel of our nature, and none can make a conscious decision to say in effect, “I will not worship.” Historically, some have worshipped the sun or other celestial objects, a tree, rock, angel, man, a “Saint,” a cow, departed ancestors, God, himself/herself, money, etc.

However, God is to be the sole object of man’s worship (Exodus 20:3-5; John 4:23-24). You and I are to worship the Creator rather than any creature that God has made (Romans 1:24-25). The angel of the Lord recognized the impropriety of John’s attempt to worship the angel (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). The Apostle Peter recognized he must not be elevated by any man to such a level as to be wor-

shiped (Acts 10:25-26). He flatly told Cornelius, “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (10:26).

When you and I come to know the glorious nature of the Creator of heaven and earth, we will understand that God is so worthy of our worship. We are able to discern the Creator’s glorious nature by an observation of His magnificent creation, and by intently looking into the revelation He has given of Himself in Holy Scripture. Through the prophet Isaiah, we are reminded that God’s thoughts and ways are superior to ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). As wonderfully fashioned as you and I are by the Master’s hand (Psalm 139:14), there is no feature we possess that can even begin to rise to the level of our God. God is all-knowing and all-powerful; He is not bound by time and space. With respect to His character, He is infinitely holy.

God is not to be worshiped to fill some supposed need on His part. Rather, He is the one who fills our needs “seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25; 14:17). “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). God is still God, and He is not left deficient in any respect even if should all humanity turn their back and refuse to worship Him.

Jesus has taught us to be true worshippers of God (John 4:23-24). There is a spiritual need that is inherent within us. Although we reside in this tabernacle of clay, there is within each of us a spiritual component. God has made us in such a way

that we can have association and a connection with Him, spiritually. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Anything men may choose to use to help us "get through" to make that spiritual connection that appeals to one's fleshly senses is a detriment rather than an aid in worship. That is why images and such were forbidden by God in the old law (Exodus 20:3-5).

Some today (unfortunately) think in terms that worship is only an "emotion" or attitude. Certainly one's attitude or emotion is involved, but by itself does not constitute worship. Wayne Jackson writes:

"Basically, worship involves a deep sense of religious awe that expresses itself in ritualistic acts of devotion and service. Those acts of devotion that Christians are called upon to use in worship upon the first day of the week are revealed by our Creator as: (1) singing psalms, hymns, spiritual songs as we make melody in our heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16); (2) prayer (Acts 2:42; 1 Thessalonians 5:17); (3) the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7); (4) giving of our money (1 Corinthians 16:2); (5) preaching the Word of God (Acts 2:42; 20:7). These are the only acts of worship that God has authorized and commanded for Christians to employ through pre-

cept and example."

The motive for our worship that we render to God is love. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). When we genuinely love God (with every fiber of our being) and His chosen people, the church, we will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:24-25). Like David, we will rejoice for the opportunity to be spiritually strengthened through true worship (Psalm 122:1). When we come together to worship our heavenly Father upon the first day of the week, we should love God to the extent we are motivated to give Him the very best we have to offer. May our hearts be "in tune" with God during the week so we may come before him acceptably on the Lord's Day.

Sadly, there are those who are content to be distant with God presently, thinking that somehow God is going to put them "on the front row" in heaven. While we are in part, flesh, God is able to see through us as a window, and He knows the thoughts and intents of our heart. Draw near to God today; He knows and is able to fill all your needs (Philippians 4:19).

W.O.T.

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THE CHURCH NEEDS TO WATCH

David W. Hester

The word *watch* carries with it several meanings. One is, "to be or keep awake." Another suggests, "to keep guard." An additional definition says, "to be on the lookout." When one applies such meanings to the Lord's church, he sees the significance of the word itself.

God wants His church to be awake, always on guard against evils that might creep in to hinder its progress and destroy the peace and harmony for which Jesus prayed. In addition, the church must look ahead for danger signals in order to steer clear of the snares of Satan.

The New Testament is replete with passages suggesting that it is important for Christians to watch. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptations." In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul told Timothy, "Watch thou in all things. . ." Then, in

Revelation 16:15, it says, "Behold, I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." What are we to watch? There are many things that bear watching if we are to be as God would have us be and make the church the kind of church that God wants.

First, we must watch ourselves. Occasionally, people will say, "You had better watch that fellow," or, "He (or she) bears watching." However, we need to bear a little watching, too! In Acts 20:28, Paul told the Ephesian elders, "Take heed 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." Notice that Paul said first, "Take heed unto yourselves." Some within the body of Christ apparently think that only elders and preachers are to be engaged in looking af-

ter the souls of others. It must be remembered, though, that each of us has a soul to look after. We will give an account on the day of judgment for the things we have done; we will either be saved or lost. Thus, we must take heed unto ourselves.

In watching ourselves, we must watch our everyday life. We must see to it that our lives are in harmony with that which we believe and teach. It needs to be such that would grace and adorn the gospel of Christ. Paul told Timothy, "Be thou an example of the believers. . ." (1 Timothy 4:12). This applies to all Christians, not just those who are younger. Our postmodern world normally judges us by the lives we live, and not necessarily by what we believe and teach. A church member who curses, drinks, and gambles is not a good example of the believers! We must watch ourselves and shun the very appearance of evil in our everyday lives.

In Titus 2:14, Paul said that Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Since we are redeemed, we are to be unlike the world. Paul again encourages us in Romans 12:2. "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."

A second thing that bears watching is our talents. God has blessed each of us with an ability to do something in His service. The Lord has also given us all something to do along with that ability. If we fail to develop our talents, are we being faithful servants? The one-talent man in Matthew 25 was an honest man. He did not steal his lord's money. As a matter of fact, he took good care of it and did not lie about it. He even brought it back and gave it to him. He could have reasoned, "Since my lord has entrusted me with only one talent, and did not give me as much as the others, I am insignificant. There's nothing worthwhile that I can do. My lord is a hard man anyway. I will bury the talent."

No doubt, we have people in the church just like that who say, "I don't have the ability to sing like brother so-and-so," or, "I don't have the ability to teach like sister so-and-so." Therefore, they reason, there is no need to even try. Brethren, God is a just and merciful God, and he only expects us to do that which he has given us the ability to do! While the parable is not particularly addressing the abilities that

children of God possess, it is good for all of us to examine what we are doing in the Lord's service. Of course, not every man can lead singing, or read Scripture, or teach a class. Not every lady can teach children or other ladies. However, each of us can do something. It may be that your talent is to encourage people to come to church, or to be more faithful. It may be your ability to make cards for those who are sick and shut-in. You may be able to prepare meals for those who need them. It matters not how insignificant; God has blessed us in some way, no matter how small it may seem. We also need to develop the abilities God has given us. Who knows? It may just be that your ability is just waiting to be used!

A third thing we must watch is our worship. We must always remember that God is to be pleased above all. In John 4:24, Jesus said, "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." God is the object of our worship, not idols. A few years ago, a Hindu temple that opened in Birmingham, Alabama; it received extensive media attention, especially in print. Pictures showed the caretaker "feeding" an idol! Is it not amazing, that in the 21st century, people would still worship statues? Paul, in Acts 17, makes it clear that God is to be worshipped.

We "must" worship God. That is, it is not an option! We cannot treat times of worship in a cavalier fashion. God deserves our time and devotion. Further, we must worship him "in spirit." That is, with the right attitude of heart. Our worship must be completely dedicated to God, and our minds clear of any distractions. Our hearts must be filled with love and gratitude.

Then, we must worship God "in truth." That means, of course, that we must worship as the Bible teaches and not deviate from the instructions given within. Otherwise, our worship is vain. In Matthew 15:9, Jesus said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." John warns us in 2 John 9-11 against going beyond the doctrine of Christ. It is clear that any additions, substitutions, and changes in God's plan are wrong. That is why instrumental music, "special music," and other innovations cannot be allowed in worship. Elders must especially be on the lookout for any deviations from the New Testament pattern. Preachers need to proclaim the whole counsel of God concerning these matters.

Finally, we should all watch our hearts and keep them clean. The wise man said in Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). But, before one can keep his heart pure and clean, it must first be made clean. In 1 Peter 1:22, Peter writes that one’s heart is made pure through obedience. He says, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.” When one obeys the gospel of

Christ, his heart is purified. As we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse us (1 John 1:7-9).

The church must always be watching. Are you, as a Christian, helping to that end or, are you a hindrance? These are questions that beg to be answered. May all of us strive to do the Lord’s will, so the church can be the kind of church that God wants.

W.O.T.

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THE MIND OF CHRIST ON THE SUBJECT OF EVANGELISM

Neil Richey

In Don Humphries’ book Hearts on Fire: A Strategy for Dynamic Evangelism, he quoted an older preacher who said, “If man has a soul, and he has, and if that soul can be won or lost for eternity, and it can, then the most important thing in the world is to bring a man to Jesus Christ.” Question: Are we doing that? I found something that I consider to be very sobering: “The average member of the church of Christ has heard 4,000 sermons, sung 20,000 songs, participated in 8,000 public prayers. . .and converted **zero** sinners.” How close are you to the average?

Philippians 2:5 says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” We understand the importance of having an attitude like Jesus, the need to be pure like Jesus, and the importance of having a relationship with the Father of Jesus, but do we equally understand the importance of being a soul winner like Jesus?

Of all the occasions of Jesus reaching out to lost souls, one that I find especially interesting is in John 4:1-19—Jesus and the Samaritan woman. From this text, let’s make just three observations about Jesus and soul winning.

Jesus was a soul winner who would...

Exploit Every Occasion

The animosity was ever growing among the religious elite based in Jerusalem. As a result, the Lord left Judea and made his way toward Galilee. On this journey, the Lord found it necessary to go through

Samaria (John 4:1-4).

When Jesus arrived in Samaria, He stopped in a well known city called Sychar, located two and one-half miles east of the city of Shechem. He saw a Samaritan woman at a well and asked her for water—probably enough for Him and His disciples who had gone into the city to purchase food (John 4:5-8).

This Samaritan-Jew found it very odd that a Judaeen-Jew would converse with her, Jesus took advantage of this opportunity to teach the woman, right where she was (John 4:9-11). Like Jesus, we too must exploit every occasion to teach the lost.

In what we commonly call the Great Commission, Jesus began by saying, “Go ye therefore...” (Matthew 16:15—KJV). The better rendering of the Greek would be, “As you are going, preach the gospel to every creature. . .” Reaching the lost should be a full-time job for us. One fellow said, “My profession is living for Jesus; I just sell insurance to pay expenses.”

Engage with the Opposition

Where did we every get the notion that we should avoid trying to reach those in the denominational world? From whence did the idea come that no one in denominational error is interested in studying the truth found in the pages of Holy Writ? Have we forgotten that some of the greatest religious leaders of the first century became simple New Testament Christians (i.e. Paul, Nicodemus, Cornelius)?

The Samaritan woman, though involved in gross

immorality, was religious (or at least knowledgeable about religious matters) (John 4:12, 20, 25). Though she was religious, Jesus still engaged her in study. Keep in mind that Jesus did not come to make people religious, he came to make them religiously right (Matthew 7:21-23).

What right do we have to keep the truth of simple New Testament Christianity to ourselves? Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it. Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase that beautiful instrument. But to his great dismay it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession, and he would not sell it. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no right to keep that to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it." Will we, with the same zeal, share what we know with the world?

Exclude No One

The Samaritans have often been referred to as half-breeds. As a result, the Judean-Jews greatly despised them. So, when Jesus taught her, He was breaking a barrier. We should not be selective with

whom we share the gospel. The Lord loves everyone. "For God so loved the world. . ." (John 3:16). "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world. . ." (Mark 16:15). ". . . God is no respecter of persons. . ." (Acts 10:34-35).

If we are going to be soul-winners like Jesus, we must break the barriers of race, social status, economic status, etc. As one brother said, "Black, white, poky-dot, doesn't make any difference. We've all got to repent." "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Jesus wants all men to be saved. He wanted the wicked Jezebel to be saved (1 Kings 16-21; 2 Kings 9). He wanted the immoral, adulterous, Samaritan woman to be saved (John 4:16-18). He wanted Adolph Hitler, Darwin, and the 9-11 terrorists to be saved. He wants all to be saved. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Sadly, not all will be saved (Matthew 7:21-23).

Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you wondered if anyone ever really cared for you? A man by the name of David did. When pursued by his enemies, he hid in a cave, and said, "I looked on my right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psalm 142:4). May it never be said of us, "He did not care for my soul." Let's, like Jesus, exploit every occasion, engage the opposition, and exclude no one as we try to bring all men everywhere to the Lord.

W.O.T.

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DO YOU NEED WHAT CHRIST OFFERS?

David Courington

We are told in Ephesians 1:3 that all spiritual blessings are "in Christ." It is so sad that there are teeming millions in this world who need what is readily available to them in Christ, but they never turn to him for these blessings. Let us notice in this article a small part of what is available.

There is hope for the hopeless in Christ. All hope resides in Christ. We are told in Ephesians 2:12 of those who are "without Christ," "without God," and have "no hope." This is the worst of situations. There are so many today who have no real hope. Abject poverty, sickness, and yes, the ravages of sin, can render one hopeless. But in Christ there is always hope. We are told in Colossians 1:27 that God had made available to the Gentiles, ". . . Christ in you, the hope of glory." Without hope one can expect no progress in life, no improvement in his circumstances, and no good outcome. With Christ we can expect all of these things.

There is help for the helpless in Christ. Often men get into situations where they cannot help themselves. Regarding spiritual matters, there is never a solution to our needs in self. Our help must come from a source much higher than we are. The Hebrew writer exhorts those who are in Christ saying, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Do you need help? Why not turn to Christ? Psalms 46:1-2 (read the entire Psalm) says, "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

There is a home for the homeless in Christ. Not only are there those who are home-

less in the streets of our large cities, but also there are others who have no real place of rest and encouragement. Paul said of the Gentiles who came to Christ, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). Those who are Christians have a place to call home in the body of Christ- the church. Not only this, but we have a heavenly home to look forward to when this life is over (Colossians 1:5). *W.O.T.*

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Build Your Home on the Word of God

The home built on the word of God,
With time will stand the storms.
And find through faith, the plan for life,
The ways true love adorns.

Where children gather close to hear,
The words they need to fill,
The mind with thoughts that make them strong,
To climb life's steepest hill.

God will not leave us all alone,
But give us joy and peace.
He is the rock to build upon,
His love will never cease.

For strength that will endure through time,
And calm life's restless sea,
Love and home with the word of God,
Makes home what home should be.

Eva Nell Brown Naramore



BE AN EXAMPLE

Johnny Ramsey

Sometimes we meet young people who are more spiritual and who have deeper moral convictions than their parents. Their stands for righteousness alienates devoted Christians from ungodly family members. I have actually known parents who encourage their children to dress immodestly, to dance, to drink socially, and to attend filthy movies so as to be popular, sophisticated and “mature.” We are deeply indebted to noble young adults who have more wisdom and dedication than parents who care very little for things divine.

Secondly, moral integrity has been known to cost sincere Christians their job. I personally knew a young lady several years ago who lost her position as a receptionist because she refused to lie for her boss. But she respected the Bible and knew that telling the truth is mandatory for children of God (Ephesians 4:15 and 4:25). That last verse tells us: “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every in truth with his neighbor.”

Sometimes faithful members of the church who refuse to forsake the assembly because they put God’s kingdom first (cf. Hebrews 10:25; Matthew 6:33) are dismissed from their jobs due to the materialism of the working scene. Since being “unequally yoked with unbelievers” is forbidden in 2 Corinthians 6:14, certain circumstances in the labor arena cannot be tolerated by sincere followers of the Lord. Sadly, however, many have forsaken the path of gospel living due to allegiance to “the almighty dollar.” Of such the Bible states in 2 Timothy 3:4, “Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

In the third place, the cost of moral purity can result in persecution for the consecrated servant of the Savior. Christ Jesus made it clear that walking in the steps of the Redeemer could certainly result in tribulation just as the prophets of old suffered at the hands of evil men. In fact, Matthew 5 clearly enunciates: “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Paul told his beloved brethren that true believers will suffer for the cause of the Master (Philippians 1:29). When we stand up for Jesus, we will just naturally war against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:10-12), and the Devil will see to it that

stern opposition will ensue. The path that leads to moral purity is challenging indeed.

“O for a faith that will not shrink,
Though pressed by every foe,
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe.”

It takes courage, loyalty, and stamina to withstand the fiery darts of the wicked, but the struggle is worth it (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The fourth high cost of morality can well be loneliness, mockery, and ridicule from the world and sometimes by brethren who are shallow and secular in their emphasis. Just as Jesus was “laughed to scorn” (Mark 5:40), so can loyal devotees of heaven be scorned by their contemporaries. Peer pressure is more than some folk can endure—even for the sake of Christ. In many metropolitan areas, congregations that still stand for the bulwarks of righteousness walk a lonely road. Many brethren have become so loose in regard to marriage, divorce, and remarriage that plain Bible preaching on the subject is ignored so as to accommodate people who have run roughshod over God’s first divine institution (Matthew 19:1-9). Others have compromised to the core on modesty of dress and the spiritual attitude that would prohibit such folly (1 Timothy 2:9-12). Therefore, when we take a stand for purity we hear such contemptuous remarks as: Archaic, harsh, stupid, legalist, unloving, out of date, “old fogies,” etc.

Ridicule from the world and mockery by some brethren can be the high price of living for the Lord. When popularity with people is a high premium with us, we ought to read again the clarion call of Galatians 1:10. “If I were yet pleasing men I should not be the servant of Christ.”

When we think we are alone because we courageously live for Jesus, we need to remember the beauty of John 16 and 2 Timothy 4, “I am not alone because the Father is with me.” That makes up for any earthly problem. Serving the Lord has rich benefits now and in the world to come. *W.O.T.*

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IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH CREMATION?

Andy Kizer

As far as I can tell from a study of the Bible, the act of cremation violates no New Testament principle.

Life is the union of the body and the spirit. Death is the condition that results from the separation of the two. Once the spirit has left the body, the lifeless body begins its return to the original elements (cf. James 2:26). Solomon wrote, "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Whether the effect is the slow disintegration of the body through the processes of decay or is achieved in seconds by fire, the result is the same, i.e., the return of the body's elements to their original state.

In the bodily resurrection discussed in 1 Corinthians 15, the "building blocks" will be reassembled and in either instance (natural decay or cremation) the effort will be the same. Bodies which have returned to dust long centuries ago do not exist in bodily form any more than those bodies that were immediately consumed by fire. In both cases, the elements are in the universe waiting the call of God on the last great day. The One Who by the power of His word, spoke into existence the first man, will have no difficulty in bringing back together again the separated elements when the spirits emerge from the Hadean realm to join those elements on Judgment Day. The body will be raised, but then it will be changed into one fit for the spiritual realm.

We are taught in the New Testament to exhibit proper respect for the dead and to deal with them in a dignified and respectful way. Cremation, as today practiced, in no way opposes New Testament teaching.

W.O.T.

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The Words of Truth

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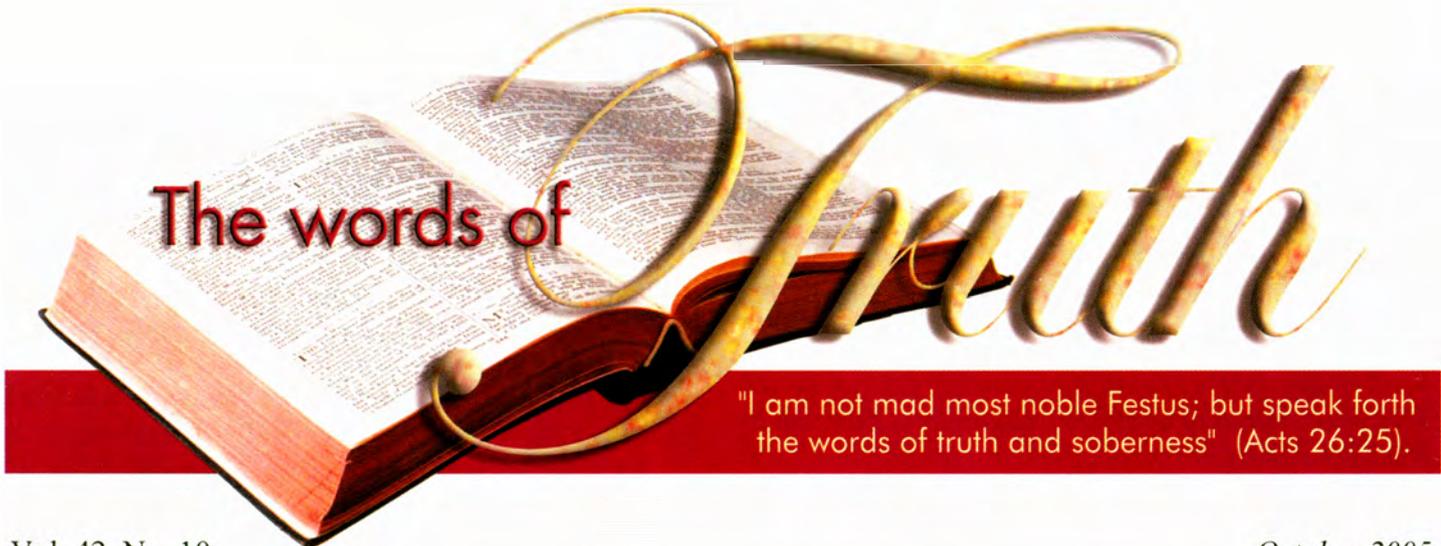
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RESOLVING CONFLICT CHRIST'S WAY

J. Scott Pena

If we are human (which if we are reading this then we are), then we will make mistakes. Those mistakes may come in the form of saying something hurtful to another human being (whether intentionally or not). Other mistakes may be doing something directly, indirectly, intentionally, or unintentionally that hurts another person's feelings or causes them pain. Conflict is almost inevitable because being humans we have free will, we are not robots programmed to say, do, and think everything that is good and nothing that is bad. Being humans and having freedom of choice we eventually differ in thought patterns or the way we handle things. For example, I no longer let my mother fold my clothes when I go home because she doesn't fold them in the *right* way—that is *MY* way. You see, some things, such as laundry, can be accomplished in many different ways, with one way being just as good as the next. Eventually though, we will ruffle someone's feathers. The question is how to handle this conflict.

God directs us to resolve conflicts in Matthew 5:23-26, 18:15-17. In order to resolve those conflicts there are three things that we ought to do. First, commit ourselves to pleasing God. Second, repent and seek forgiveness from God and the other party involved. Finally, seek to love the other person in the way that God wants. Let us examine these three directives more closely.

First, we must *commit ourselves to pleasing God* (2 Corinthians 5:9, 14, 15). What does it mean to please God? To please God means seeking to bring Him delight by being and doing what He desires. In

order to please God we must obey His word (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 2) and depend on His power (Hebrews 13:20, 21). If God wants us to resolve conflicts and we want to be pleasing to God then the first step is to desire His pleasure and not ours. Even when we would delight in ignoring the conflict or person, or to seek revenge against this person (s), we must remember to please Him and not ourselves.

Secondly, we should repent and seek forgiveness of both God and the other person. We need to repent to God from the sinful desires that caused the conflict in the first place. James 4:1 says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" Conflicts come from your heart, because we want things so badly that we will sin to get it. We should heed the words of Joel, "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God" (Joel 2:12, 13). Not only do we need to confess to God but also the person we have offended (Matthew 7:3-5). We are called to be responsible for ourselves, not the other person. The main thing is to make sure you have done your best to be in a right standing with God and men.

Finally, we must seek to love the other person with Christ-like attitudes (Ephesians 4:1-3, 32). Remember the words of the Gospel that tell us to love our enemies (Luke 17:3, 4; Matthew 7:5). As we try to love our enemies we ought to remember the definition of love; it keeps no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5). Love means learning to listen and speaking to others in a godly way (Proverbs 12:18;

18:13), and serving them in Christ-like ways (Luke 6:27-28).

Resolving conflicts that no doubt will arise can be done the same way Christ did. By committing to please God, repenting to God and the other party involved, and seeking to love the other person (s), we can mimic the way Christ would handle conflict. It can be done with a little mature Christian effort!

W.O.T.

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A PECULIAR PEOPLE

Gus Nichols

God's people are to be a peculiar people. Moses said unto ancient Israel, "The Lord hath chosen thee to be a *peculiar people* unto himself above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2). After the deliverance of the people from Egyptian bondage, God governed them for more than three hundred years through judges. But when Samuel became old, and his sons disobedient, the people rebelled against the very arrangement of having judges, and demanded a king, instead of respecting God's order of things. They said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 3:5). They did not want to remain a *peculiar people*. But God was displeased in them, and He said unto Samuel, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

Excuse versus Reason

The *reason* for this wicked demand was their determination to be *like all the nations*. But their excuse was expressed unto Samuel when they said, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). This is true to nature. Those who turn from the truth rarely ever give their *reason* for so doing, but they hide their *reason* in the background, then drag out some *pretext* or *excuse*, in the hope that it will appear more plausible. They are ashamed of their *reason*, for it is often simply silly in the extreme. There could be no reason for overthrowing God's system of government, even though

Samuel's sons did not walk in God's ways, but also brought reproach. However, when people reject God, and determine to go after some new thing, there is nothing much that can be done with them, except to leave them alone to reap their fleshly sowing (cf. Galatians 6:7, 8). God wanted these people to be "A peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2). But they wanted to be *like all the nations*, and therefore demanded a king.

Called Out of the World

As these ancient Israelites had been called out of Egyptian bondage, and were to be a *peculiar people* above all nations, we, too, have been called out of the bondage of sin, and into the church of our Lord, and are to be also a *peculiar people* (cf. Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). But many now, as then, want to be like the nations around them. They want to convert the church to worldly standards, so they will not be ashamed to bring their worldly friends to church with them, with assurance that their worldly ideas about religion will not be disturbed. They want to make the church like the denominations around them. Perhaps instrumental music was introduced into the worship largely to be like others. But finally the people obtained it because *they* wanted it. Then, once it is in, some sort of justification for its use had to be made. Searching the Scriptures for authority for it was, perhaps, an after thought. This may account for the weak arguments made in its defense.

Immoral Conduct

Many other practices are started because of the desire to be like others. Boys begin smoking cigarettes, in most instances, they say, just to be like others. They do not want to be *peculiar*. Yes, and when the worldly and wicked women began to smoke, nice girls with weakness of character, which was no match for their desire to be like *the nations*, and those around them, also began to smoke. They wanted to be like the world. No reason can be given for such a habit, and such a waste of money and time. So they give excuses. It is generally known that such smoking cost billions of dollars in fires every year. But some old hag of an *excuse* is paraded out in the front, while the *reason*, the very *cause of the fire* was an awfully bad habit which owes its existence to nothing but a desire to be like others. Time would fail me to tell of the prominent sins of drinking strong drink, cursing, etc. (cf. Proverbs 20:1). But we should *keep*

ourselves *unspotted from the world* and *be not conformed to this world* (cf. James 1:27; Romans 12:1, 2; Titus 2:12-14). Instead of wanting to be more like Jesus, many are always wanting to be like others around them, who are of the world. Furthermore, it has about reached the point where if a man lives with his wife, he will be *peculiar*. So many are divorcing their wives, and husbands, that this will often be done because of those around us. Hence, when any sin or false doctrine becomes popular, it becomes a tremendous power for evil, because of the weakness to want to be *like the nation*.

Generation versus Regeneration

We might mention religious influence in this connection. The influence our parents, and other close relatives, often has more weight than what God says relative to church affiliation. To go into a church solely because one's kin are in it, is to show spiritual weakness. If children must be like their parents, and close kin, then children of infidels should be infidels, like their parents. Catholics like theirs, etc. This is actually done. They are simply controlled by the desire to be like others, and not necessarily by the word of God. Why not give more time to searching the Scriptures to learn how to be more like God would have us to be? Is our church relationship to be determined by the natural birth — depend upon the sort of teaching influence surrounding our birth — or should it be determined by searching the Scriptures to see what is true? (Acts 17:11, 12). Is it *generation*, or *regeneration*, which settles the matter? This sickly sentiment is so generally the case, that some of you may be thinking right now that all people are affiliated with the church of their kin. *The nations* is no mark of Christianity. We need convictions — need to know the truth and stand for it, regardless of whether our kin knew and obeyed it or not. We can't go to heaven upon other people's religion. Investigate the claims of the preacher, too, as well as your kin. Somebody is in error, and it might be nearer home than we have supposed. Make no sentimental excuses, but learn and obey the word of God, as found in the New Testament, regardless of what it is. Be like the disciples in the New Testament, in faith, doctrine and practice. If truth keeps one with relatives and friends, then well and good. Otherwise, follow where the good Shepherd leads in his word.

W.O.T.

LESSONS FROM A YOUNG GIRL

Michael D. Greene

"And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. Then she said to her mistress, 'If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy'"
2 Kings 5:2, 3

Some folks pass through this life and do great things and are remembered for a long time. Others flash on the scene and quickly pass from memory. Still others, and this includes most of us, lead our lives in quiet, and humble service. What good we do is never known outside our own circle. The *little maid*, as the King James Version calls her, falls into this category.

The story of Naaman and his dipping seven times in the river Jordan to be healed of leprosy is one that is familiar to all Bible students. Many lessons have been taught from that great story. Lessons on Naaman's obedience, on God's power to save, on the prophet Elisha. But how many have been preached about this *little maid*? What lessons can we learn from her?

This young girl had learned the lesson of contentment. She had been taken from her homeland. She was now a servant in another's home, but she was content.

Paul said that he had learned to be content wherever he was and in whatever state he found himself (Philippians 4:11-13). How we need this lesson today. So many are discontent. Discontent with what they have, discontent with their station in life, and often times unwilling to work to change it! We need to learn to be content with such things as we have.

I am afraid many in our world today suffer from the disease of *wantitis*. It is a disease that makes us want what we do not have. The advertising folks are experts at spreading the disease. They seek to convince us what we have is not good enough, or that we deserve something better. Someone once said to me: "The only cure for wanting is getting." Some seek to satisfy the desires for things. But getting does not cure "wantitis." As Jesus said, we need to look to the heavenly treasures, not those of this world. That is

the only way to be truly content. Paul had learned that lesson and was able to speak of the peace of God that passes understanding in the same context (Philippians 4:6-9).

Secondly, the young maid was not vindictive. Can you hear some in her situation saying: "Why should I do anything to help Naaman? Look what he has done to me." Being vindictive and determined to get even or to get what is my due seems to be the driving force for many in today's society. But the quality of this young girl's heart is evident.

The New Testament tells us "to do good to all men" and to be not weary in well doing for in due season we shall reap if we faint not (Galatians 6:9-10). As a child of God I am commanded to love my enemies (Matthew 5:43-44). That means seeking the best for all around us, even if they do not reciprocate. Easy? No, but very rewarding.

Third, we see from this young maid the value of memory. We need to place in our memory those things that will serve us well. We also need to put into our children's memory those things that will help them to do good and to be good. Sometimes we have to make those opportunities. God did so for the Israelites on at least two occasions. One was the Passover Feast (Exodus 12:26-28). Another was when the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan River (Joshua 4:4-6).

The story is told of a young service man far from home who gave in to the temptation to go to a bar with his friends. As he was going, he glanced at his watch and realized that it was bedtime at home. He then remembered his mother's promise that she would pray every night that God would keep him from temptation. He then turned around and went back to his room. The memory of his mother's prayer kept him from sin. We need to fill our memory with good things.

Finally, this girl refused to remain silent. She spoke up, at the possible risk of her own life. What motivated her? She had knowledge that the master needed. Would she keep it to herself or would she share it? Again, why would she want to do anything for this man that had enslaved her? Whatever fear or hesitations she might have had, she was able to overcome them and share the precious knowledge she had with her master.

We have what the world desperately needs: the gospel of Christ. The moral and ethical teaching of the Word of God is the only hope of salvation and moral improvement this world has. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which they

can be saved (Acts 4:12). But are we sharing the good news of the gospel with the world? Perhaps the greatest sins in the church today is the sin of silence. What will motivate us? Let us refuse to remain silent. The world needs to hear the message!

Let us pray that the Lord will fill us with the contentment, purity of heart, good memories, and courage of this little maid from long ago. *W.O.T.*

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HOW TO OVERCOME SIN

Tim Childs

Many *how to* books have been written and published over the past few years for today's *do-it-yourself* handyman or woman. Where there is an interest, there likely is a book to cover it. *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, by Carnegie is a popular one that has helped many. Some may be interested in *How to Stop Aging at 30*, or *How to Cut Your Bills in Half*. One interesting title I came across recently is *How to Avoid Love & Marriage*. The book comes with a *money back* guarantee and it boasts it is "Guaranteed to ruin any deep relationship." Now, what would you pay for that one?

The greatest need you and I have is to be forgiven of our past sins and experience continual cleansing by Christ's blood. The greatest challenge you and I face on a day to day basis is with reference to maintaining and strengthening our relationship with God while living in a world of corruption. The Christian life is one of spiritual warfare where we grow and seek to conquer our battles with Satan and learn to practice the admonition of Romans 12:21, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." As soldiers of Christ either we will overcome, or we will be overcome (2 Peter 2:20).

You and I need to realize that there is no temptation and there is no sin known to man that cannot be conquered through the gospel and the power of God in our lives. We will fall short in different ways through life, but we must not keep practicing the same sin over and over habitually. Jesus came and lived among sinful men that he might become a *model* to show us how to overcome sin in the flesh. God gave us the Holy Scriptures as a preeminent *reference work* to teach us the way to overcome sin in

our lives. Many of us need to be more earnest in our efforts to overcome.

To overcome sin you and I must increase in spiritual strength. As a *babe in Christ* one is quite vulnerable. Peter writes, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

The apostle John addressed devout young men in 1 John 2:13: "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one." Again, in verse 14 he states further: "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." There are no steroids or other short-cuts to spiritual stamina. We should pursue the purpose of the Psalmist: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

To overcome sin you and I must crucify self. The apostle Paul presents the doctrine of Christ with reference to this imperative as he wrote to both the Roman and Galatian brethren. Through the gospel we identify with Christ in His crucifixion so that we are "crucified together with him." The effect of the power of the gospel in our lives is that the "body of sin" is destroyed and sin no longer is the dominant driving force. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:2; 5:24). Hear Paul: "I am crucified with Christ. Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20).

To overcome sin you and I must stand up and say *no* to Satan. Truth be known, Satan is a coward. James writes, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Jesus is our model in overcoming Satan. He conquered Satan in Matthew 4:1-11 as He resisted against any impulse of the flesh by appealing to the word of God: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). Every time you say *no* to Satan it becomes easier to say *no* when temptation comes your way in the future. On the other hand, each time you succumb to the devil's devices it becomes easier to say *yes* and give in again. You and I should not want to repeat time and again the sin for which Christ had to die. Let us not crucify "the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:6). Friend, the life of a Christian is not one where we live the same as we did before. Grace is not a *free pass* to commit sin. "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15, 16).

Tim Childs, the evangelist for the Hillcrest Church of Christ in Baldwyn, Mississippi.

THE STORMS OF SIN

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

The storms of sin with winds of force
Can rain on love and cause divorce,
Flood out the paths true lovers make
While stones of hail the heart can break.

Where once the morning light shone through
Like diamonds sparkling in the dew,
When each made sure the other heard
"I love you dear," . . . so sweet the word.

The two as one in joy and love,
Joined together by God above,
Believed the home could safely stand,
Built on the rock, not on the sand.

And for a while so calm and clear
When life was young, with love and care;
The two could dream of distance far,
See blue sky and evening star.

But wandering eyes began to gaze.
The sin of lust then changed the ways
That once were kind, and warm and sweet
To pleasure found in vain deceit.

Sin thunders roar, the lightnings flash.
Rough waters cause the rocks to crash,
And love they've known they soon forget,
Until life's filled with sad regret.

No longer then is there desire
Because sin builds a flame of fire.
The children live, in doubt, with fear;
Sleepless nights! Eyes filled with tears.

But home sweet home where there is peace
Can cause the storms of sin to cease,
And damage done repaired, in time
Can calm the soul, the heart, the mind.

BEFORE AND AFTER

Johnny Ramsey

The typical Corinthian was the derelict of the Roman Empire in the first century of the modern era. With the degenerate Cretian he was the worst of ancient society and worthless to the core. To suggest there was a power able to transform such spiritual garbage was inconceivable. However the vivid contrast in their conduct before and after the gospel came into their lives is beautifully stated in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Does not 2 Corinthians 5:17 majestically remind us that to be in Christ means that old things are passed away and *behold*: All Things Become New!

Repentance, according to the Bible, means a change of mind that results in a changed life (cf. Matthew 21:28-30, Acts 3:19). Marvelous indeed is the change Christianity provides and the blessings that flow into our days because of the gospel's dynamic power. One stanza of a renowned spiritual tells us:

Down in the human heart
Crushed by the Tempter
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore
Touched by a loving hand
Wakened by kindness
Chords that were broken
Will vibrate once more.

It is true that we will reap as we have sown (Hosea 8:7) but Christianity can overwhelm the sins of yesteryear. It has been properly stated . . .

A misspent youth may result in a tragic old age. However, if a man named Saul of Tarsus could change from enemy of truth to humble servant of God, there is hope for all of us. God's eternal purpose — New Testament Christianity — is truly *the land of beginning again*. In an overlooked hymn we have these words of hope:

I was a wayward wandering child
A slave to sin and fear
Until this blessed promise fell
Like music on my ear.

A wise man stated that the highest reward for our toil is not what we get for it but what it helps us to become!

When God's grace enters our sojourn and He works in us (Philippians 2:13) to heaven's good pleasure, we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) to become what we would never achieve on our own (Mark 1:17). When Paul wrote in Galatians, chapter one, that "... I now preach that faith which I once destroyed..." he gives us hope that past mistakes can be erased by the grace of God and the blood of Christ as we embrace the good news that make us free (Romans 8:1-2). When we bring our thoughts into captivity unto the Lord we turn our back upon the past and launch out into a much better realm. Christ came to give us life and light and hope (Luke 1:79) and we should allow these blessings to flow freely into our new-found commitment to spiritual values.

The greatest success story ever told is the change sinners make when they leave Satan's domain to become citizens in the kingdom of God's dear Son (Acts 26:18).
W.O.T.

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IT IS ALL ABOUT GOD

Richard Mansel

Pregnancy and childbirth are amazing feats of endurance. How can a woman endure the pain and discomfort? The expectant mother is focused solely on seeing, touching, and loving her baby. Likewise, how can a young athlete work for years with no pay just to perform for one day in the Olympics? They do so for their country and team. Both the expectant mother and the athlete endure for a higher cause.

As Christians we must develop this same attitude. The expectant mother's every waking thought and action is with her baby in mind. She never thinks of doing anything to harm the little one she loves so much.

When we go about our daily Christian walks we must be aware every waking moment that we are a child of God and are wearing Jesus' name (Ephesians 4:1; 5:1, 2, 8).

In 2 Timothy 1:8-12, Paul explains how he is able to endure the persecutions, hunger, cold and pain of serving his Master. Paul is *not ashamed* of God and his *sufferings according to the power of God* (1:8). He is *called* for God's purpose (1:9). The apostle writes in Philippians 3:14, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Like Paul, God becomes the focus of all that we do.

Paul says he is appointed a preacher and apostle for God's purpose. He endures the sufferings with joy because he is thrilled to have the opportunity to suffer for Christ. Paul stresses this attitude in his writings (2 Corinthians 12:2-6; Philippians 1:12-18, 27; 2:12-17; 3:3-8; 1 Timothy 1:12-17). He knows there is a higher calling than self.

Paul's teaching, by word and deed, is that everything we do brings glory to God (cf. Colossians 3:17). For Christians this means everything is about God and not ourselves.

Moses tries to talk God out of using him to lead his people out of bondage (Exodus 3). God says, fine. Let your brother speak. It does not matter that Moses might tangle his words or be embarrassed. God's mission is bigger than Moses. The only thing that matters is that God is glorified (1 Peter 4:11). Moses is just a messenger, God is the message.

As a preacher stands before an audience to preach or teach, the Lord must be the only thing in focus. If the preacher becomes the center of the attention, then he is preaching himself and not God and souls will be endangered.

Simon the Sorcerer, in Acts 8, begs for the power to disseminate the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. He is rebuffed because he wants to bring glory to himself and not God.

People say, "my church" when it is Christ's church and not ours (Matthew 16:18). Others say, "I don't enjoy worship." When we come to worship it is not about us anyway. Everything that is done in worship should bring praise and glory to God and not ourselves. If we practice this we will not be concerned with being an audience, but an active participant in worship.

Others say, "I don't like this teaching." The Psalmist responds, "Your word is settled in Heaven" (Psalm 119:89). God's Word is already completed and settled. We have no right to try to change, alter or dismiss its teachings. Instead, we

bow our stubborn will before it and let God's word be absolute truth.

All that we do as Christians is about God and not ourselves. In everything, mine becomes His. He is certainly capable of leading and handling it properly. Let us submit, not challenge His throne (James 4:10).

W.O.T.

Richard Mansel is the preacher for the Lone Star Church of Christ in Falls of Rough, Kentucky. He is also a weekly columnist for Forthright Magazine.

I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST

Earlene Rose

In this beautiful world created by God,
My days are usually happy and free,
But creeps in some dark days when fear clouds my eyes,
And my cares seem to mount upon me.
The tasks at hand seem insurmountably big,
And I doubt the strength to go on.
I selfishly feel that my load is too great,
And that I am traveling alone.

Then by faith, I look back to a scene long ago
When another one carried a load
Upon freshly scourged shoulders, feeling pain every step
As His feet slowly moved on the road
To a hill out of town where an angry mob waits
Crying mercilessly, "Crucify,"
And as sinless perfection is nailed to that cross,
They cry all the more, "Let Him die."

Into innocent hands, spikes tore through the flesh,
And held God's dear precious Son
Upon that crude cross until His head dropped in death
As He uttered the words, "It is done."
It was my sins He carried to that cross on that day,
And left them at cruel Calvary,
And I know I can do all things through Jesus my Lord
For it is He who no strengthens me.

REASONS TO PRAISE THE LORD

Ted D. Burleson

Note just four of the countless reasons to praise the Lord. **First**, Jesus lets us lean upon His bosom during the storms of life. To lean upon someone's bosom carries the idea of eating together on the same couch and denotes the closest communion possible. Consider John 13:21-26. A storm was brewing among the apostles as Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him. Note that John was leaning on Jesus' breast and that it was "one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 25). You can lean upon Jesus during the storms of life.

Second, Jesus supports us in our helplessness. As he awaited execution Paul wrote to Timothy from prison, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me . . . and the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:16-18). This is the kind of support we need in our helplessness. Jesus supports us when we're helpless.

Third, Jesus gives us strength when we're weak for He is strong. Consider the centurion whose servant was sick and ready to die but the centurion didn't feel worthy for Jesus to enter his house (Luke 7:1-10). This describes the attitudes of those who can benefit from the strength that Jesus gives.

Fourth, Jesus forgives us and makes us pure. Simon the Sorcerer's sins were washed away at baptism and then forgiven again when he sinned shortly after his conversion (Acts 8:9-22). Only the cleansing power of Jesus' blood can make us pure from our sins.

W.O.T.

The Words of Truth

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Truth

TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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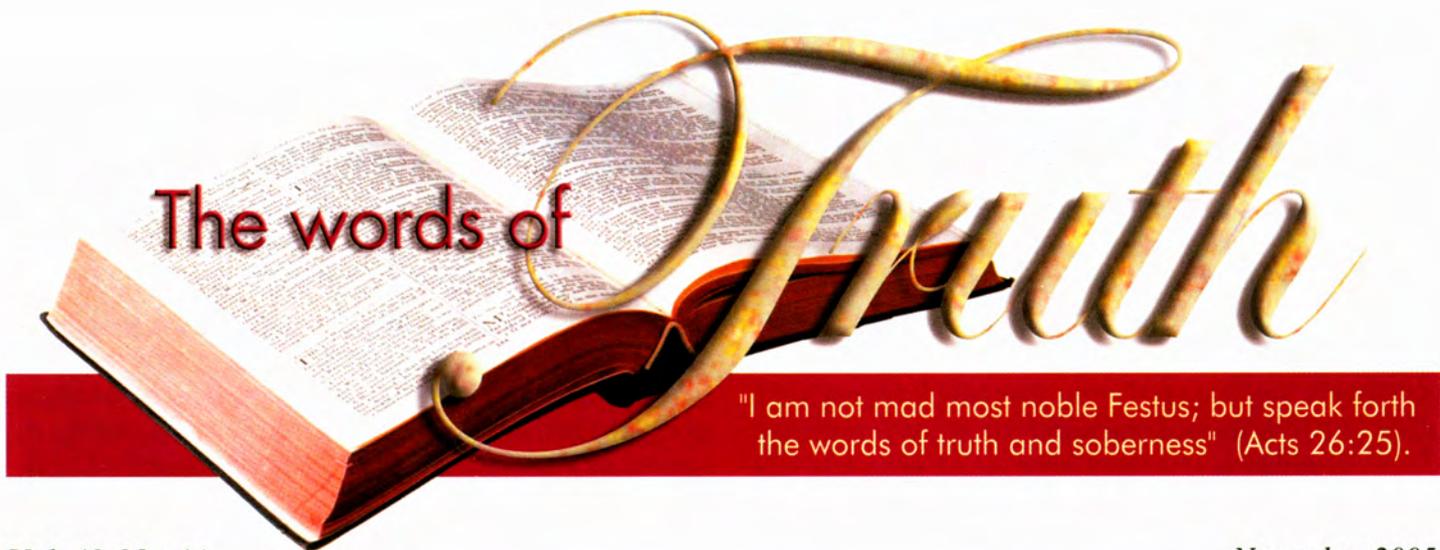
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FIVE POINTS TO PONDER

Johnny Ramsey

There are several Bible truths that tower above the rest. In fact, these extraordinary points sum up the major areas of Scripture. To overlook these epochal matters will cause us to be unbalanced spiritually. When we put these monumental landmarks in their proper place, we are well on the road to heaven. It is sad to contemplate that millions of people go through life missing out on the majestic themes of godliness. The five points to ponder are these:

- God's Sovereignty
- Human Sinfulness
- Christ's Death
- Our Freedom of Choice
- Responsibility of Christians

When we come to realize that our Creator has sublime and absolute authority, we cease to be overly concerned with popularity among mankind. We desire to please our Maker above all else (James 4:4-10) and to rescue the perishing lest their sins overwhelm them and the events at Calvary be in vain. When we use our ability to exercise our volition in heaven's direction, we realize the deep responsibility we possess as servants of the Savior.

"Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy powerful hand."

Several notable passages definitely stress the omnipotence of the Almighty:

- Psalm 66:7 – He rules by His power forever!

- Psalm 93:1 – He is clothed with majesty.
- Psalm 90:1 – He has always been!
- Psalm 24:1 – The earth belongs to Him.
- Romans 13:1 – There is no real power but His!
- Daniel 3:17 – He is able to deliver us.
- Proverbs 3:5 – We should rely upon Him always.

When we fight against God, we shall never prosper (2 Chronicles 13:12 and 26:5). Conversely, walking in the glorious light of heaven's sacred counsel guarantees us joyful existence now and abundant life in the world to come (Mark 10:30). A great hymn tells us:

"All the way my Savior leads me
Cheers each winding path I tread
Gives me grace for every trial
Feeds me with the living bread."

Submission to the Father's will is the wisest decision earthly pilgrims could ever make. Sadly, rebellious hearts continue in sin when grace could abound. Shameful opposition to the Redeemer's plan brings sorrow incapable of full description. The peace that righteous living provides escapes many folk who choose to wallow in the mire of wickedness (John 5:40).

"Souls in danger, look above
Jesus completely saves
He will lift you by His love
Out of the angry waves."

We are exceedingly unwise to allow the wages of sin to oppress and dominate us when we could be free to enjoy the benefits of salvation through Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24; 6:23). Man's sinfulness drove the Savior to the Cross and our stubborn will crucifies the Son of God afresh (Hebrews 6). In the very shadow of Golgotha every sinner should stand, in deepest gratitude, for the gracious gift of cleansing that flowed from the wounded side of our Lord (Zechariah 13:1).

"All to Jesus, I surrender
Humbly at His feet I bow
Worldly pleasures all forsaken
Take me, Jesus, take me now."

Using our freedom of choice (Joshua 24:15), we should rush to the dearest Friend we shall ever know and take a stand for matters divine and eternal. He is our refuge and strength and our help and deliverer as we struggle through this vale of tears and press on to higher ground (Psalm 70:5; Philippians 3:14). We realize our need for heaven's help (Psalm 124:8) and the vanity of pursuing earth's fleeting and shallow treasures. The responsibility of pointing men to God is not a grievous burden but, actually, becomes the quintessence of life for us (John 1:29; Mark 16:15). Let us, therefore, be busily engaged in the glorious work of Jehovah (2 Corinthians 6:1) as we march irrevocably toward that final hour. For, after all, our eternal destiny is in the hands of the sovereign God who made the heavens and the earth! Kipling wisely wrote:

"Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget."

ON CALVARY'S CROSS

J. Metcalfe

They crucified my Lord and God, and pierced His gentle heart,
And though it happened long ago, I know I played a part,
My very pride, and passion and my selfishness and greed;
Contributed the nails that caused His hands and feet to bleed.
Each sinful deed became a thorn upon the cross He wore;
And every cruel word I said increased the rabble's roar;
I made Him walk and stumble on His way to Calvary;
And there I raised Him on a cross, for all the world to see;
And there in agony He died, that we might live anew;
In the divine forgiving words, "They know not what they do."

W.O.T.

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THE PLAN OF SALVATION IS NOT NEGOTIABLE

Robert Curry

The question of salvation is both popular and controversial within the ranks of the religious and spiritually-minded. It is popular because every spiritual person wants to be saved. It is controversial because everyone has a different idea on how to be saved. A variety of views permeate the religious world: (1) salvation through a church, (2) salvation through faith alone, (3) salvation through confession alone and, (4) salvation through goodness and morality. Salvation is also divided by several views of baptism: (1) baptism not required at all, (2) baptism required, but only for the right of fellowship, not salvation, and (3) baptism by sprinkling, pouring or immersion.

Which view is correct? Who is saved, and who is not? Of course, the only source for information must be the Bible. Yet, even that does not eliminate disagreement, for differences thrive. There is a *plan* of salvation, and that plan must be observed. It is a method, a pattern, and a means to an end.

We all recognize the threat of sin and the need for salvation. Jesus said that He was the way, the truth, and the life, and no one would get to the father except through Him (John 14:6). That means the plan of salvation belongs to Jesus; it is set, fixed, and unchangeable, and that means the plan of salvation is not negotiable.

Six Steps to the Plan

The plan of salvation is understood best through the use of six necessary components. The first component is that one must hear the word of God. Hearing is a biblical precedent to discipleship. Jesus alluded to Isaiah 6:9, 10 in Matthew 13:14, 15 when He spoke of hearing, but not understanding, lest anyone would hear with their ears and be healed. In His instructions to the churches, Jesus told them, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" NKJV (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Hearing, then, is a component of the plan of salvation. Romans 10:14 asks, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" The verse is set upon the foundation of Paul's desire that

Continued on page 5

WHAT CAN EVANGELISM DO FOR ME?

Neil Richey

In the Great Commission, Jesus told the apostles to "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16). These words of the Lord remind us of the need for more personal evangelism. The benefits of personal work extend to those taught, as well as to those doing the teaching. What are the benefits afforded to me when I am actively engaged in personal evangelism?

It Will Make Me A Greater Bible Student

Peter reminds us, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). The more people you talk to about the Lord, the more questions you will be asked to answer. How can you give an answer from God's word if you are not grounded therein?

It Will Make Me A More Prayerful Person

Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38). Personal evangelism is not easy. We will often find ourselves in need of the Lord's help. So many times, Scripture tells us to pray with regard to spreading the Gospel. We are told to pray for open doors (Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). We are told to pray for the courage of those who preach the Word (Ephesians 6:19). We are told to pray for workers (Matthew 9:38). Prayer makes the difference in whether or not our personal work is successful.

It Will Draw Me Closer to Other Faithful Brethren

It is God's desire that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). This being true, faithful members of the church are united in a common goal of "seeking and saving the lost" (Luke 19: 10).

It Will Fill Me Full of Personal Joy

The psalmist wrote, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5, 6). Those of you who have seen a friend or loved one immersed into Christ because you shared with them the saving message of Jesus know about this joy. This personal joy will only increase one's desire to see more people come to a knowledge of the truth, and make the decision to obey it.

Let us all strive to become more involved in personal evangelism. If we do, the benefits will be tremendous. Most importantly, we will have full confidence in knowing that we are doing the Lord's will by "seeking and saving the lost."

W.O.T.

Neil Richey is the evangelist for the Augusta Road Church of Christ, 5315 Old Augusta Road, Greenville, SC 29605.

WHAT PRODUCES SALVATION?

Tim Childs

Jude, the brother of our Lord and Savior, wrote his epistle in part to "exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). It is our objective to teach "sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1; 1:9) and to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). We cannot be the faithful servants of God when it is our objective to be "men pleasers" (Galatians 1:10) through silence (Acts 4:18-20). We want to urge you who read this to investigate your beliefs in the light of the Holy Word of God as the Bereans had the wisdom to do (cf. Acts 17:11).

We, who are members of Christ's church, sometimes are charged with holding an erroneous view of what produces salvation since we do not advocate as some that salvation is by "faith only." We are further charged with holding to a "works" oriented salvation because we teach there is more involved than subjective belief in Christ. Salvation by "faith only" is a doctrine that suggests that belief (mental assent) in Jesus Christ as our Savior is the only preceding factor

pertaining to the human response that brings one into a saving relationship with God. Because of the contention that the sinner is saved from his past sins by belief in Jesus only, they are strongly opposed to the concept that baptism (immersion in water) has one whit to do with one's salvation.

Many who hold to the "faith only" doctrine are not consistent because when they are "pressed" about the matter they will further admit that repentance of one's sin is also a condition of salvation (Luke 13:3, 5) as well as confession with one's mouth that Jesus is the Christ (Romans 10:9, 10). In James chapter 2, the inspired writer uses the example of Abraham, the father of the faithful, to teach a lesson on how "faith" and "works" go together to make a life acceptable before God and to make one's faith complete (James 2:21-24). He concludes this section: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (2:24). There is no place in all of Scripture that teaches men are justified by "faith only." James teaches that faith without works is dead (2:17). This principle is true no less before one's conversion as it is after one's conversion. The devils believed and trembled (James 2:19). Are they saved by an equivalent faith?

Those who hold to the doctrines and traditions of men reject the baptism of the Great Commission (administered by the authority of God, the Father, Jesus, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit), (Matthew 28:19) just as the scribes and Pharisees rejected the baptism of John, the forerunner of Jesus (Matthew 21:23-26). Some seem to know more than God with reference to the purpose of baptism under the covenant of Christ, for they suggest it has no real purpose, no real significance. If it is okay if you are baptized, it is okay if you are not baptized. You can still be saved and enter heaven if you're not baptized (it is claimed). Please study the following:

- Jesus Christ says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15, 16).
- The Apostle Peter, one of the Apostles to whom Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven (the church) (Matthew 16:19), preached to his believing and convicted audience: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:37).
- Annanias (a man sent by God to Saul of Tarsus to tell him all the things appointed for him to do)

Acts 22:10), said to Saul: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

- Later, Paul, the Apostle of Christ, wrote to the Corinthian brethren: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). There is "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5) and it is the baptism of the Great Commission that Christ commanded and all who are penitent believers are subject to it if they will have Jesus to be their Lord and Savior. The sinner's baptism is a passive act (unless one baptizes himself and that doesn't happen) and is no more a work of merit than is repentance of one's sins or confession of one's faith.
- We are saved by "grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Faith trusts God to keep His Word to justify and sanctify us when we have "obeyed the Gospel" (Romans 10:16).

Those who say baptism is unessential to salvation contradict Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16). The Apostle Paul pronounces anathema upon them for presenting a perverted message (Galatians 1:6-9). They teach that a person is saved without being buried with Christ into his death (Romans 6:3-5). They are opposed to the Apostle Paul's teaching through the Spirit: "but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Romans 6:17) since it was not a doctrine of "faith only." Tragically, so many men, women and young people who hear this perverted message have not learned how to get into Christ (Galatians 3:26, 27) to experience salvation and enjoy the spiritual blessings of being God's children (Ephesians 1:3).

The conflict between the two beliefs under consideration is a sad example of what takes place when some depart from the doctrine of Christ in preference to the doctrine of men (1 Timothy 4:1). Study the book of Acts of Apostles to learn the Holy Spirit's message on how God redeems sinners. We plead with our neighbors and friends to return to the Word of God for their authority (1 Corinthians 1:10). No man can triumph who sets himself in array against the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Surrender to Christ, serve him and live.

W.O.T.

Tim Childs, the evangelist for the Hillcrest Church of Christ in Baldwyn, Mississippi.

“Plan of Salvation,” *Continued from page 2*

Israel should be saved and his explanation of how that would be accomplished (Romans 10:1ff). So then, according to Paul, hearing is an essential part of the plan of salvation.

The second component is that one must believe what is heard. This component follows on the heels of hearing chronologically and ideologically as well. When we hear something, we cannot help but respond: either acceptance or rejection; belief or disbelief. Of course, belief is biblical for John wrote of the ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:6, 7), “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.” John bore witness of the Light to come, but he was not that Light (1:8), for Jesus was and is the Light.

Those who knew Jesus received Jesus (John 1:10, 11), but those who did not know Jesus did not receive Him. How did they know and receive Jesus? John writes, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (1:12). Believing causes us to make a decision about Jesus and His word. Paul encourages the Roman church, “Believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness” (Romans 10:9, 10). So then, according to Scripture, believing is essential to salvation.

The third component is that one must repent of sins. Repentance means to turn away from something—one hundred eighty degrees. Repentance was part of the message of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2), and it was the instruction of Jesus to Ephesus (Revelation 2:5), Pergamos (2:16), Thyatira (2:21), and Sardis (3:3). More specifically, it is an act of salvation, such as in Acts 2:38 where Peter instructed them to repent of their desire to ignore Jesus as the Christ and their role in His crucifixion. So then, repentance is essential to salvation.

The fourth component is that one must confess Jesus as the Son of God. Confession is not just a verbal statement, but mental and emotional. Return again to Romans 10 and notice verse nine where it says, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Verse ten goes on to say that “confession is made to salvation.” John insists forgiveness comes when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9). Confession becomes the acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord and Christ. It is the evidence of a be-

lieving, penitent heart ready to embrace Jesus as the hope and savior of all who will serve Him. So then, confession is essential to salvation.

The fifth component is that one must be baptized for the remission of sins. The act and place of baptism has been dissected and divided horribly over the centuries. In Acts 2:36-38, Peter answered the question of the multitude about being saved when he replied they must repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Their salvation depended on them being baptized for remission of sins. Peter later compared baptism with Noah and the ark (1 Peter 3:18-22). In his analogy, Peter insisted God saved Noah on the ark by water (3:20), adding, “There is an antitype which saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (3:22). Peter says that baptism by water saves us; not merely washing of dirt and grime (ritual washings), but a washing from a conscience given to God.

Consider that no one in the New Testament was added to the church without water baptism for the remission of sins, including those at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), an Ethiopian (Acts 8:36-39), Cornelius (Acts 10:48), and Lydia (Acts 16:15). So many use the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) as a base against baptism, but it does not invalidate at all the necessity of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. Baptism is a commemoration of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:1-6). So then, baptism would have had no meaning until Jesus was dead, buried, and resurrected, which of course He was not at that point.

New Testament baptism is not only for remission of sins and essential for salvation, but also it is by immersion and by no other method. Romans 6:1-6 helps us with this. Paul says that as Jesus died, we die to sin. As Jesus was buried, so we are buried in baptism. As Jesus was resurrected, so we rise to newness of life. The Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-39 asked to be baptized, so they found a body of water (oasis). They went down into and came out of the water. Surely, if baptism by immersion is not essential to salvation the water in the chariot would have sufficed—desert travel required it—unless that water was insufficient for the purpose of salvation.

Baptism is essential for salvation—water baptism by immersion for the removal of sins. How can someone already be saved if he is still covered in sins? One does not enter into baptism as a saved per-

son: by faith, confession, or whatever. One enters into baptism as an unsaved sinner. One then comes out of baptism a Christian—not before but only after. If this is not true, then Peter and Paul lied for they demanded its necessity.

The sixth component of the plan of salvation is that one must live a faithful life. This is made very clear in Matthew 28:18-20. This passage is about the authority of Jesus and about baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Yet part of its conclusion commands, "Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." This statement destroys any idea of a once-saved-always-saved doctrine. This verse substantiates the realization that one can lose salvation. Paul warned the Galatian churches, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9). Since Christianity and discipleship are symbolized by the harvest (cf. Matthew 9:37, 38; John 4:35), then Paul's warning is about reaping the bountiful harvest of salvation by working until the end of our labors. John warned against deceivers who deny the incarnation of Jesus, adding, "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (2 John 7-9). It is essential to our salvation that we remain faithful, and to observe all things Jesus has commanded us to do.

Conclusion

It is clear no part of the plan of salvation is expendable; nothing in it is insignificant. One component cannot be traded for another, and nothing is to be ignored or forgotten. The plan is simple, but definite. One must hear the word so that he/she can believe. That belief (faith) leads to action and reaction. It is impossible to believe something and not act upon it. Belief (faith), however, is not the final step—it cannot be. The reaction is to remove all that stands in the way of God coming into our hearts and lives. Having heard, believed, repented, and confessed, baptism becomes the crowning achievement. This is not about Holy Spirit baptism, however, for if that were the case, Pentecost was a gross example of overstatement and exaggeration of the facts. The same could be said, then, regarding the instructions given to the Ethiopian and the Centurion. This is also not about sprinkling or pouring, for baptism is a burial in water, such as is described in Romans 6:1-6.

Continued on page 7

Dear Soldiers

Dear soldier men now coming home,
As you're returning one by one,
May God cause war and hate to cease,
That you may settle down in peace.
You've spent so much of youth in pain,
Fought in the heat, the cold, the rain,
Wished for a loved one to be near,
To cheer through dreadful nights of fear.

To save our freedom some have died.
No doubt a buddy by Their side.
That wished and prayed back home to be,
Across the wide and roaring sea.
For their returning loved ones yearn,
Though never will they all return.
In death and ruin, war takes its toll.
But war can never touch the soul.

And every one left sleeping there,
Sleeps not alone, but in God's care.
I have not fought I do not know,
The horror of your pain and woe.
But there is one who reigns above,
A God of mercy and of love.
He knows the trials you've been through,
He bore the marks of suffering too.

To heal your wounded broken heart,
Have faith and make another start.
Then He today will be your guide,
As in fox holes, where soldiers hide.
Now to begin your life anew,
I know you're looking forward to
A future, brighter than the past.
And thankful to be home at last.

So soldiers, may God bless you all,
And may this nation never fall.
Into the hands of evil men,
By trusting God, we'll always win.

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

Continued from page 6

But baptism is not the only act of salvation. It is the result of hearing and believing the truth with a heart turned away from sin, toward Jesus Christ. Anything else is just getting wet. One is not, indeed cannot be a Christian until he or she is baptized; nothing else is Scriptural or logical. Baptism begins a new life given to Jesus Christ, a life of discipleship and service.

There is a plan of salvation, a pattern of action, leading to the saving of the soul. It is God given, God ordained, and God authenticated. To cheapen it is to cheapen what belongs exclusively to God. To not follow this plan of being saved is to, perhaps, fall into the trap of becoming like those in Matthew 7:21-23. They believed their "Lord, Lord" attitude allowed them to belong to Jesus, but He said He did not know them, except as workers of iniquity.

The plan of salvation is not negotiable but firmly set in the commandments of God's word. Put simply, there is no other way to be saved.

W.O.T.

Robert Curry preaches for the Johnson Church of Christ in Springdale, Arkansas.

HURRICANES: JUDGMENT OF GOD?

David Courington

The recent Gulf Coast hurricanes have been tragic for many people. There are those, including Hank Erwin—a former Alabama legislator and talk show host, who have said that these hurricanes were God's wrath being taken out on the wickedness of the area because of all of the drinking, gambling, and immorality there. Those of other faiths have seen a different message. Louis Farrakan sees it as God's judgment against the United States because of all of the Muslims that we have killed overseas. Did God really use these terrible hurricanes to send us a message?

We first should note that in Bible times God did use natural disasters to accomplish His will. We know that the great flood of Noah's day came because of the extreme wickedness of mankind (Genesis 6:1-13). He later gave the rainbow as a sign that He would not ever again destroy all living creatures by flood (Genesis 9:14-17). Furthermore, God used other means to send death on men for their re-

bellion. He used fire to punish Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), a death plague on the first born of Egypt (Genesis 11, 12), and serpents on the Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 1:6). Certainly, God is a God that will punish the wicked; and the Scriptures describe a lake which burns with fire and brimstone as the ultimate fate of all of those who do not obey Him (Revelation 21:8). God is a God of punishment as well as a God of mercy and grace to those who turn to him.

But does God use natural disasters as punishment today? Here is where we disagree strongly with men like Senator Erwin. There is no Bible evidence that God directs hurricanes or tsunamis to certain places today for judgment. In fact, the Bible tells us plainly that God sends the rain on both the just and the unjust. In speaking of how we are to love our enemies, Jesus said, Matthew 5:45, ". . .for He makes His sunrise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." Certainly good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. Solomon made this observation in Ecclesiastes 9:11, 12, "I returned and saw under the sun that—The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them."

Yes, God does have general laws that show that men and nations will suffer if they do not obey His will. Proverbs 14:34 says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people." Sinful nations and sinful men will fall as a result of their sin, but time and chance also happen to them. We cannot assume that natural disasters are a result of God's wrath when he has given us no indication that such is the case. I am reminded of the question that Abraham asked God when he was about to destroy Sodom, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Genesis 18:23). God allowed Lot and his family to leave. Were there no righteous in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama in the recent hurricanes? Surely there were. They were victims of time and chance, the way nature works, and not victims of God's wrath.

W.O.T.

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“PRAISE THE LORD, O MY SOUL”

Ted D. Burleson

David uses the same words to begin and end Psalm 103: “Praise the Lord, O my soul.” Throughout this psalm, David pours out his heart with praise and thanksgiving to God. In many psalms we find a mingling of sorrow with glee, of pain with trust, of requests with thanksgiving. But in this psalm, David extends his own thoughts of praise by urging that all of God’s dominion on earth and in heaven join him in praise for the wonderful blessings from God.

Have you ever gone before the throne of God and given praise only without asking Him for any gift or blessing? So often our prayers are filled with our requests, and perhaps at the end, we tack on a sentence of adoration to Him. It’s very hard to continue all through a prayer and only give thanks and praise to God without asking for something.

At this time of year as we remember all the good that is ours, do we truly appreciate that “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17)? God will continue to send down good gifts to us, but let’s use this occasion to give a special prayer of thanks.

On Thanksgiving Day as we gather with our family and friends for a sumptuous meal, it would be time well spent to read Psalm 103 and offer a prayer of thanksgiving without mentioning our *desires*.

W.O.T.

The Words of Truth

**Sixth Avenue church of Christ
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The words of

Truth

TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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The words of

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

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December 2005

"IS IT FROM HEAVEN, OR IS IT OF MEN?"

Tim Childs

Jesus, the Master Teacher, once answered a question posed by the inquiring Jewish leaders by asking one of His own. They demanded to know just who had given him authority to teach in the temple; obviously, they had not given him their consent to do so. Jesus replied, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?" (Matthew 21:25). Their cowardly fear and pride would not allow them to answer Jesus. As they would not answer his question, He chose not to answer theirs.

In this present article I want us to consider a pertinent question: "Is it From Heaven, or is it of Men?" Where there is a doctrinal position, a moral guideline, or a practice one engages in religiously, the question should be asked pertaining to it. Is it from Heaven, or is it of men?

It should be recognized that the question is worded in such a way that under consideration is an "either, or" proposition. It is so fashioned that we can't have it "both ways" since a doctrine, for instance, cannot have its origin from God and from man simultaneously. A given moral standard is one that either comes from God, our Creator; or it is one that has been proposed and espoused by man, the created being. Sometimes men devise their own doctrines and religious practices in preference to the ones God has revealed within the Sacred Text. Sadly, man has failed to resist the temptation to rewrite the Bible according to his own liking. We cannot walk with God "by faith" or "live by faith" (Romans 1:17), when we are doing "what I please" rather than what pleases God.

You and I must recognize God's sovereign right to guide and govern our daily lives. His standard is not one that is designed to enslave us, but rather it enables us to enjoy the greatest peace and freedom from the dominion of sin and the effects of guilt. Jesus did not only come to be our Savior; He came, as well, to be our Lord. We must crucify self along with the affections and lusts within, and yield ourselves wholly to him as his servant of righteousness.

Religious division exists in a multitude of denomination bodies. Is it from Heaven, or is it of men? God has not been silent with regard to His view about religious division (1 Corinthians 1:10).

The church that Christ promised to build (Matthew 16:18) was fulfilled on the first Pentecost following the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of our Lord (Acts 2:47) as the Lord added daily to His everlasting kingdom. Is it from Heaven, or is it of men?

The terms of entrance into the church (also designated as the body, and kingdom of Christ) that the Apostles, commissioned and sent out by Christ throughout Judea, Galilee, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth, preached concerning believing on Christ, repentance of sins (Acts 2:38), confession of faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32-33, Acts 8:37), and baptism for or "unto" the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16). Is it from Heaven, or is it of men?

Consider the doctrine of "faith only," that is, salvation comes to man apart from any "act of obedience" to the gospel of Christ. Is it from Heaven, or

is it of men? (Romans 10:16; 6:17).

What about the doctrine of the intercession of Mary, the mother of Jesus and other departed people who have been "canonized" and made "saints" by a religious order? Is it from Heaven, or is it of men? See that God has not had His penmen to write about these things; hear His silence.

What about the practice of calling mortal men, "Father?" Is it from Heaven, or is it of men? Men object to the teaching of Jesus: "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."

In his Gospel Narrative, Matthew records in chapter 16:21-23, how Jesus shared with Peter and other of His disciples what was soon to transpire in Jerusalem. He would be killed; however, he would be raised again the third day. Peter could not conceive or accept that such could possibly take place, and so he began to rebuke Jesus. Jesus replied, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (16:23). What about us? *W.O.T.*

Tim Childs may be reached at 950 S. 4th Street, Baldwin, MS 38824.

THE MOST UNUSUAL WORSHIP SERVICE I HAVE EVER ATTENDED

Neal Pollard

My family and I decided to "make a day of it" in Washington, D.C. We live less than two hours from there, and we all had the day off to do it. We parked at our hotel and took a shuttle to the Metro stop nearby. The train eventually got us out to RFK Stadium, where we bought five tickets to that evening's Nationals-Phillies game. After seeing a few landmarks during daylight hours and returning to our hotel, we were back on the Metro that evening to get out to the ballpark.

We had to transfer trains at L'Enfant Plaza to get on the line that would get us to Stadium-Armory stop. Trains headed that direction were coming in almost every minute. A large crowd of us waited at the platform, but the "blue line" train could only accommodate some of us waiting to board. It was standing room only and then some! Our family decided to wedge our way onto the "orange line" train that immediately followed. This level of enthusiasm was for a home team not in playoff contention and a visiting team with only a faint hope of such. The train arrived at the stadium stop. When we surfaced at street level, the throngs of fellow attendees were merrily rushing headlong toward our collective destination. No one moped, hesitated, or drug their feet. In front of the turnstile, people pushed and crowded forward to get through security and on into the stadium. Many were like us, holders of tickets that required a veritable hike to reach our assigned seats.

Once in our upper reserve outfield seats, we settled in with a small measure of chagrin that we had not gotten there early. We had missed the first few

minutes of things! I am a big baseball fan, but I could not help on this occasion of being a spectator of the spectators, too.

I noticed that there was singing going on, from music groups blaring over loudspeakers to even occasional, spontaneous chants and sing-alongs. For particularly the Phillies' fans, there was some praying going on (they would not be eliminated from the playoffs until the final day of the regular season). There was an individual regularly speaking, admonishing, and exhorting using the stadium microphone for all the fans to hear. On the outfield wall was a list of names, their "Hall of Heroes"—great Senators and Expos players of days gone by, that made a perpetual memorial for discerning fans to commemorate. Then, there was the giving! Fans with liberality and free will gave their money, lots of it, to buy food and drinks. The guys peddling the stuff in the brown bottles really took up quite a collection.

I saw zeal and ardor, passion and emotion. Sacrifices of time, money, and effort characterized the more than 30,000 present to see just one of 81 home games in a scenario typical of every other game played by every other team in that and several other sports. The seats at RFK are old, wooden, and unpadded, but the teams playing were such an attraction that any discomfort and cost was happily ignored for the thrill of the experience. It was the most unusual worship service I have ever attended. *W.O.T.*

Neal Pollard can be reached at 6856 Cold Harbor Road, Mechanicsville, VA 23111.

“PEACE MAKERS”

Scott Pena

Life is full of conflict. Some people are not happy unless they are involved in some dramatic conflict, and therefore, they are constantly stirring up trouble. We know from the inspired words of God that being a peace maker is not optional; it is a requirement. An interesting fact is that all of Paul's 13 epistles (letters) begin with a greeting of peace. The word “peace” is mentioned over 400 times in the Bible.

A Basic Definition of “Peace”

Peace is not the absence of hostility...just because you avoid people and don't have some sort of physical or vocal altercation does not mean you have peace and harmony. Maybe you like to use the “silent treatment or cold shoulder”; however, this is not “peace.”

Peace is not the absence of bad, but it is the presence of good. Biblical peace involves “completeness,” “soundness,” or “well-being.” A “peacemaker” is one who through personal work and preaching brings about an effectual peace between God and the sinner. At the same time between fellow men, the peacemaker is one who works to bring harmony and well-being to conflicts. Jesus, of course, was the prime example of “peace making.” Not only did He come to this earth to reconcile man to God (Ephesians 1:7), but also He left us many examples of peacefully resolving or handling conflict. When struck, He did not return the evil. Romans 12:9-21 gives a great discourse of how to handle ourselves in the face of conflict.

Types of People in Regards to Peace

Peace Breakers—These are selfish, divisive, and arrogant people (Romans 16:17, 18). We remember Cain of the Old Testament (Genesis 4) who broke peace between himself and his brother, or Pharaoh in Exodus 14:5ff who finally allowed Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt, yet chases them in anger, in order that he might slay them. We know of many peace breakers in our life today. These are the people who purposefully instigate and retaliate in order to stir up more conflict.

Peace Fakers—1 Corinthians 12:20—These are likely the people who act like they have made peace; they are “playing church” or “playing Christianity.” They may even co-exist with the attitude of “you stay on your side and I'll stay on mine; you do your thing

and I'll do mine.” They are fake when it comes to being civil. They secretly are thinking and looking for opportunities to break that so-called “peace.” Judas, I believe, was a peace faker. One of the twelve, he was the one who devised the plan to bring Jesus to “justice.” Here is a guy who was among Jesus' disciples and who “befriended” Jesus, yet in Mark 14:44 with a “kiss” (a show of love and affection) betrays Jesus. If this is not fake...I don't know what is.

Peace Makers—This is the type of Christian that God wants His people to be. This is actually not one of those optional characteristics in the Bible but is required of God's children (Matthew 5:9; Hebrews 13:20, 21; Ephesians 4:25-31). Peace makers look for ways to resolve conflict and move on. They are the ones who are seeking to do God's will (unlike the breakers and fakers). Peace makers are the ones who forgive and forget without holding a grudge, just as God forgives us.

Conclusion

At the end of the current war, our soldiers will have to serve in some capacity as “peace keepers,” whose presence insures the absence of conflict. The United Nations has soldiers who are “peace keepers,” but brethren we are not called to be peace keepers, or breakers, or fakers. . . we, as God's people are called to be peace makers (Matthew 5:9).

Hatred looks for a victim, but love looks for a victory. When it comes to being a Christian and one who is “peaceful”, we must be the third category (makers) if we are to please God. When it comes to your fellow man and conflicts, are you a peace breaker, faker, or maker? I pray that you are a peace maker. Our relationship with God is of utmost importance. Are you at peace with Him?

Do you continually break your peace with God by living a disobedient, sinful life? Do you fake peace with God by merely doing the minimum of His requirements but not really allowing Him into your heart? Or are you one who actively seeks to obey His will, live in it, seek Him, and live in full harmony with Father God? Let us resolve to be peace makers, not only with our fellow brother, sister, man, but also with God!

W.O.T.

Scott Pena may be reached at 91 High Street East, McEwen, TN 37101.

THE FAITH THAT NEVER DIES

Johnny Ramsey

The victory that overcomes the world is a strong and steadfast faith in God (1 John 5:4). This trust is based upon confidence in the Lord and the Bible. It is a very powerful tool in defeating Satan and dominating sin. James Gray paid this tribute to scripture:

*It fills the world with fragrance
Whose sweetness never dies
It lifts our eyes to heaven
It heightens human joys,
Yes, dynasties have fallen
And the Bible still stands*

Since faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), we can draw nearer to spiritual values through daily and diligent study of the sacred text day by day. Let us not rob ourselves of the rich treasure within our grasp! The Bible is compared to a sword, a mirror, a lamp, a hammer, and fire. Each of these metaphors tell us of the wholesome power and discernment that emanates from the piercing Word. All we can know for sure about the Savior is revealed in the glorious text of the Bible. Someone has blessed us with these informative reminders concerning Christ:

In Him We Have:

A life that never dies
A love that cannot be fathomed
A beauty that is never marred
A joy that is never diminished
A light that is never darkened
A purity that is never defiled
And resources that can never be exhausted!

Some of those in the Bible whose faith did not waver and whose courage still inspires us are:

- **Gideon**, who with God's providence, took 300 men and defeated 135,000.
- **Esther**, who put her life on the line to preserve the seed of Abraham.
- **Nathan**, who boldly rebuked King David.
- **Ruth**, who left home to follow God. **David**, who defied Goliath against all odds.
- **Peter and John**, who obeyed the Lord and not men (Acts 5:29).
- **Paul**, who preached the gospel in wicked Corinth.
- **Titus**, who on the evil island of Crete denounced sinful men.
- **Moses**, as he challenged Pharaoh. **Jeremiah**, in the dungeon, often because truth was worth it!
- **Amos**, the fiery and honest prophet, who demanded that Israel repent or perish.

It took tremendous faith, courage, loyalty and dedication for all these folks and many others to stand for the truth. We live in an age that calls for full commitment also. Let us build within our hearts a faith that never dies!

W.O.T.

Johnny Ramsey may be reached at 4839 Tin Top Road, Weatherford, TX 76087.

LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

May our understanding Father help you bear your sorrow,
And fill your heart with courage to meet each new tomorrow.
May He give you added strength to make your grief seem lighter,
And may the sunshine of His love make your way seem brighter.

May the thoughts and prayers from friends let you know we care,
And though our words seem effortless, we truly want to share
The weight of grief you carry, and may it help somehow
To know the love of God and friends, and feel their closeness now.

— Earlene Rose

HE PULLS ME THROUGH

Whenever I think that I am all alone
and have nowhere else to go,
Sadness and frustration are prone
I feel like giving up and letting go.
But He tells me to have faith and be strong
for, the storms will not last,
He encourages me to keep pushing on
for, everything shall pass.

HE PULLS ME THROUGH

Whenever I feel my friends have forsaken me
and my enemies are at my heels,
I cannot help but become tire and weary
because this is the way that I feel.
But He tells me to hold on to His unchanging hand
for He will always be there,
This concept I find so easy to understand
because I know He really cares.

HE PULLS ME THROUGH

Whenever troubles happen in my home
and I feel there is no relief in sight,
I feel everything is going wrong
I feel I have not enough strength to fight,
But He tells me to stand firm and strong
and believe in His every word,
He lets me know that things in my life will go
wrong
but I should continue to find comfort and shelter in
His every word.

HE PULLS ME THROUGH

He pulls me through every situation
with the greatest of ease and love,
That is why I strongly believe in His salvation
that is why I pray to only Him above.

HE PULLS ME THROUGH

—Wanda Kartina McKinney

A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Of a meek and quiet spirit, who else could it be?
So trusted, so gentle, so loving as she
Who seeks to do good, keeping her marriage vow.
Sinful traits in her life she will not allow.

Bears fruits of character, she wears modest clothes.
From the garden of youth, a beautiful rose;
The heart of her husband believeth in her.
Talking to the children, of him she'll refer.

She sews, and she cooks, her work is at home.
Like the ant, she's so busy, while others are gone.
She follows God's will. In Him is her trust,
Not in things of the earth that canker and rust.

She considers a field; the value, the price.
When needed she's there to give others advice.
With strength and courage, God's word fills her life.
Faith gives her comfort through temptation and strife.

With hurt that's untold, secret tears fill her eyes.
A good wife and mother, to please her husband she tries.
Their children are blessings, she has much concern.
She's willing with patience to teach while they learn.

Broken hearts she can mend, for training she's there.
The family together knows the value of prayer.
Like merchants' ships bringing her food from afar,
To the widows and orphans she's a bright morning star.

From the vineyard of fruit, with the words of her hands
She gives to the neighbors from increase of the land.
For her household, she's not afraid of the snow.
Their clothes silk and scarlet, their smiles have a glow.

With kindness and wisdom, no idleness of time,
The light of a candle, The voice of a chime;
Others do well, but thou excellest them all.
With blessings and praise, each day she stands tall.

Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain.
With fear of the Lord, from evil she'll refrain.
Unselfish and loving, she's a queen every day,
Listens and learns from what others say.

Her works will praise her. In the palace she's known;
In the home where her husband sits on a throne.
She's a woman of virtue; her price is untold,
Above rubies and diamonds, silver, or gold.

(Read Proverbs 31)

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

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HAVE YOU HEARD?

Craig W. Gadow

The Gospel of John begins a great explanation of who Christ is. We learn that Christ was in fact God (John 1:1). We read about how He was there from the beginning, how all creation had to go through Him, and how He was the light to the darkness, but that the darkness did not accept Him.

Beginning in John 1:6, we read about John the Baptizer, a witness, sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. What a great privilege it must have been to be sent by God to tell about the coming of Jesus, the true light to the world.

John 1:10 tells us that Jesus was actually a physical man. He came to earth, but the world did not know Him. Because John had prepared the way, there were some that did know Jesus, and through Him they received life. The life Jesus gave was not through human birth, but a birth into the family of God.

Jesus came to earth as a real person. He came to tell the world about His Father and the love He has for them. Have you heard that God loves you, and if you have, did you share that good news? Jesus did.

W.O.T.

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TED BURLESON, EDITOR

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