

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The **Word and Work**



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

JULY, 2004

SALVATION:

Is it Easy or Hard to *Gain*?

Is it Easy or Hard to *Keep*?

Ladies Retreat 2004

Ladies (teenage girls too), make plans to attend this year's annual retreat at Camp Kavanaugh in Crestwood, Kentucky—outside of Louisville. Dates: Sept. 24-25: Friday evening starting @ 6:30, and Saturday morning and early afternoon. If you can't attend both days, go for at least one.

This year's Theme: "Above All" ; There will be stirring singing and messages, and encouraging fellowship. Pleasant facilities too. Cost is only \$15.00 IF you pay by Sept. 8; after that, \$20.00. That covers overnight accommodations, plus breakfast & lunch on Sat. For Fri. evening's potluck, everyone is asked to bring either salads, sandwiches, finger foods, or desserts. Please bring only foods that do *not* require heat. The camp provides linens and towels for the adults. But teens will stay in the cabin, and need to bring either linens or a sleeping bag and your own towels. Teens pay only \$15 (if you pay by Sept. 8); \$20 after that.

For further information, contact Wanda Offutt (812) 246-2694 or Ruth Wilson (502) 897-2831.

Church of Christ Worldwide

MISSIONS UPDATE

August - 2004

It is with much joy that we greet you through this report on **Missions Around the World**. We look forward to updating our Prayer/Praise booklet again in November and we'll be sending out information-letters by October.

Who We Are & What We Do

Church of Christ Worldwide was established October 14, 1979 by the Cramer & Hanover Church of Christ, Inc. in the Men's Monthly Business Meeting. It operates under the auspices of the Cramer & Hanover Church of Christ, 199 N. Hanover Ave., Lexington, KY 40502. Our Website can be viewed at www.cramercoc.org

Director: Bro. David Harding was appointed Sept. 9, 2001 by the men's business meeting to serve as director of the Missions Office. *Administrative Assistant:* Sis. Betsy Harding was appointed Dec. 2003 by the men's business meeting and assists David in the receiving and posting of all funds. *Treasurer:* Miss Carla Potter continues to handle all financial transactions.

Continued on Back Cover

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

The Word and Work is published monthly except December by Portland Ave. Church of Christ, Inc., 2500 Portland Ave. Louisville, Ky. 40212. Subscription: \$11.00 per year; bundles of 10 or more to one address = \$10.00 per subscription. Address correspondence to Word and Work, 2518 Portland Avenue, Louisville, KY 40212.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Louisville, Ky. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Word and Work, 2518 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY 40212.

Vol. XCVIII

JULY, 2004

No. 7

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Salvation – Free but Costly

Alex V. Wilson

I remember a period when a fervent Christian challenged me several times. He felt I was too lax in my preaching. He quoted numerous passages to show that I should be more demanding – more insistent that people repent. This surprised me, for I often called for repentance, urging my listeners to take up the cross and follow Christ in full surrender. I agreed with my critic on the absolute necessity of these matters which Jesus and the apostles stressed.

In one evangelistic sermon I did not use the words “repent” or “repentance” even once. That really agitated him, and he challenged me again. I made two points in defense. First, while I had not used those *words*, the *idea* had clearly been there. Second, in the same way, the apostle John in his Gospel plus his three epistles never once uses either word! Obviously John believed that repentance is essential for spiritual life and also growth. But he expressed that truth using other terms. (Study this for yourself.)

I was glad my brother and critic believed these truths were essential. For “easy-believism” is all too common today. This approach of “just believe in Jesus and everything is okay” has led multitudes of people to feel they are saved when they are not. It is truly a trap of Satan. Of course if people truly believe in Him they *are* saved. John vouches for that. But what needs to be proclaimed far and wide is that *there is no real belief without repentance. And no real repentance without belief.*

Due to my friend’s challenges I re-studied these matters in some depth. The next two articles resulted from that study years ago. I hope you will find them helpful, whether you agree or not.

SALVATION:

Is it Easy or Hard to *Gain*?

Is it Easy or Hard to *Keep*?

During a Bible class I took one time, we wrestled with the above questions. Later the professor handed out a list of scriptures for us to analyze. He entitled the paper, "Passages Related to Salvation in the Four Gospels." There were two sections. First, "Passages that seem to indicate that **salvation is easy and simple.**" For example, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I'll give you rest." Second, "Passages that seem to indicate that **salvation is difficult and complicated.**" For example, "Unless you take up your cross and follow me, you can't be my disciple." By his tabulation (I didn't agree with it entirely) there were 10 in the first group, and 25 in the second (plus 6 scriptures which he called "passages difficult to classify in these categories").

Since God's word contains both types of statements, we must see if we can reconcile them without twisting any of them. Many folks love the "easy" verses of comfort, and abuse them by living lax lifestyles but feeling secure. I wish I had a nickel for every person who, though obviously not living under the lordship of Jesus, has told me, "Hey, I'm okay. I believe in God and I pray every day." But from the evidence of their conduct, I suspect their prayers are the "God, gimme this and gimme that" variety. And even demons believe in God. Such people are in deadly peril unless they repent! For Jesus declared, in one of His "hard" sayings, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father...." (Matt. 7:21).

On the other hand, some folks tend to minimize the grace of God and the many strong assurances He gives in His Word. They think almost entirely about God's commands and our duties, with little appreciation for His love and our privileges. They may feel that salvation is uncertain and that it's even dangerous to feel sure that you're saved. These attitudes have been rife in many Churches of Christ during the past one hundred years. But downplaying God's gracious promises robs us of the joyful certainty He wants us to have. Surely there is a Biblical balance which avoids both extremes. Let's seek it, handling His Word carefully.

First, to come to grips with the problem, let's look at some of the all-inclusive demands made in the New Testament scriptures. Second, we shall examine our Savior's dealings with His apostles.

Third, we shall see some of the earliest churches, and what the apostles wrote to them. Then we'll try to draw some conclusions which include all the various strands of Biblical teaching.

A. Christ's High Demands

Jesus often made breathtaking demands on people. And why shouldn't He? He is *Divine*, and our *Creator*, and our *Savior* who *gave His all for us*. Any one of those four facts qualifies Him to *demand our all for Him* – full surrender, total allegiance. And that's exactly what He required and requires.

We think of the rich young ruler – so moral, religious and earnest. Though he came to Jesus with great expectations, he went away sad. He was willing – even eager, it seems – to give Christ second place in his loyalty and affections. But that wasn't enough for our Lord. He had to have first place in his heart or none at all. This raises the question, how many people today, even church-members, give Him as much as second or third place? Are such folks truly saved? Consider next some statements in His sermon on the mount. "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." Though He spoke with dramatic exaggeration there, the obvious meaning is still severe: Let nothing – no thing at all – keep you from wholehearted devotion to God and righteousness. Put Him first, at any cost! Later in the same sermon He declared, "Enter through the narrow gate. For...broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But...narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." A few minutes He added, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven." These are searching words which we dare not evade.

Then there is Luke 14:25-33. Jesus was extremely popular, till He gave the crowds His three "cannot be" statements. That thinned them down considerably, no doubt. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate [his dearest loved ones] – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." Not a whole lot of people seem to meet those requirements.

Again, Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you too shall all perish." And for emphasis He uttered the very same words just three sen-

tences later. (Luke 13:3,5.) These are just samples of His striking demands. A number of other examples could be added.

So it doesn't surprise us that we find similar statements in the epistles. For example, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction" (Gal. 6:7-8). Again, "Of this you may be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ... Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on the disobedient" (Eph. 5:5-6). Again, Christ "became the source of eternal salvation for all who *obey him*" (Heb. 5:9). And again, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Just like their Master, the apostles didn't beat around the bush, did they? Neither should we.

Having seen Messiah's lofty demands, let's now look at how He applied these standards to His followers, especially the closest ones.

B. How Jesus Dealt with His Twelve Apostles

He lived among them, and put up with their failures and weaknesses. He taught them, demonstrated His miraculous power to them, lived His perfect life before them, and thus persuaded them of His divine identity. They became believers, committed to Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16). They left everything to follow Him (Matt. 4:20, 22 & 19:27), and were willing (they thought) to die for Him (Mark 14:29-31). Because they believed the message He spoke to them, they were "clean" – forgiven, saved (John 15:3). – except for the unconverted Judas, of course.

But though they were believers and committed followers (from the human side), and saved (from God's side), look at their many failures and sins after that: (1) Peter rebuked Him, refusing the idea that Jesus would be killed. (2) Due to unbelief, nine of them were unable to drive out an evil spirit – though Christ had earlier given them such power. (3) Several times they argued among themselves over who was the greatest. (4) They tried to stop another man who was successfully exorcising demons in Jesus' name – because "he was not one of us." (5) They tried to stop parents from bringing their children to Jesus. (6) James and John, via their mother's mediation, tried secretly to gain the two highest positions in the coming Kingdom. (7) They slept in Gethsemane, though He repeatedly urged them to stay alert and to pray. (8) After men seized Jesus to arrest Him, all the disciples "deserted Him and fled." (9) Peter disowned Him three times. These nine failures are all recorded in only four chapters (8-10, 14) in Mark's gospel. Other chapters and gospels re-

cord additional ones. Review what we have just recorded. They were guilty of unbelief, pride and selfish ambition, envy, careless neglect, and fearful desertion and denial. An ugly list!

These sins and errors deeply grieved our Lord. He reproved the apostles about them many times. He kept teaching and demonstrating to them His divine standards and attitudes. But He never took away their salvation. He never even fired them as apostles! He gave them chance after chance. He prayed for them. He ate the Passover with them, establishing His holy supper. He commended them, and promised them great rewards: "You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom...that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30). After He arose, He entrusted them with His great commission, promising them the power of the Holy Spirit. Truly, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1). That is astonishing grace!

C. The First Churches – Far from Perfect

Now we proceed to the period after the Holy Spirit came to indwell all God's people. The churches were made up of believers whom the Lord had transformed. Their new lives of love and purity were a great testimony to those who had known them. But they were not perfect yet. Some of them were far from it. Notice just three examples; more could be given.

Two women in Philippi who had been active "in the cause of the gospel" along with Paul, later fell out between themselves (4:2). Paul urged them to "live in harmony," or "settle your disagreement" (NAS, NLT). It seems other members were beginning to take sides in their conflict, for Paul several times calls the church to oneness of spirit and purpose, and condemns selfish ambition and vain conceit. He pleads with the troublemakers to be reconciled, and asks others to mediate their dispute. Most of all he urges the entire group to have the mind of Christ, the attitude of humble service which He demonstrated. Yet note that Paul acknowledges the two women as his "fellow workers whose names are in the book of life" (4:3). They had not lost their salvation, even though Paul listed as "acts of the sinful nature" such traits as "discord/quarreling, dissensions/divisions, and factions/feeling everyone is wrong except those in your own little group" (NIV/NLT). And of such "works of the flesh" he solemnly added, "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:19-21.)

Second, some of the Thessalonian Christians were lazy and idle. Being busybodies rather than busy, they were sponging off of the other believers. Paul commands them to start earning their daily bread. To the other disciples there, he repeats the rule given earlier: give no food to those who are able to work but refuse. If the lazy loafers continue to defy his command, the others should shame them by not associating with them. But even in that case, he writes, "don't regard him as an enemy but warn him *as a brother*" (2 Thes. 3:6-15).

The church in Corinth was the worst of all (until we get to the seven churches in Rev. 2-3). There was gross sexual immorality, which the leaders ignored instead of confronting. Plus fleshly jealousy and quarreling, resulting in church divisions. Plus lawsuits between the members. Plus confusion and disorder in their gatherings. How could people like that really be born again believers?

Paul sternly rebukes all those sins, and commands the members to disfellowship the immoral man in their midst. Yet note that he calls this group of very flawed believers "*the church of God... sanctified in Christ Jesus... saints.*" And over and over he addresses them as "brothers." The one obvious exception was the man living in immorality, whom Paul refers to only as "a man," "this man," "the wicked man," etc. He says that the church should expel him so that hopefully he would repent and be saved. (1 Cor. 5.) We cannot be sure, but this man may be the same one mentioned in 2 Cor. 2:5-11; if so, he later did repent and was restored).

Also at Corinth selfishness toward fellow-believers and disrespect toward Christ's death reigned during the Lord's Supper. (1 Cor. 11:17-22, 27.) Due to this, God had indeed judged the members. Many had become physically weak and sick, and a number had prematurely died! (11:28-32.) But notice the terminology Paul used for those whom the Lord had so severely chastened. He writes that they "have fallen asleep." This is the expression used for Christians who die (see Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:6,18,20, etc.) This seems to indicate that those selfish, irreverent Corinthians still had eternal life even though the Lord judged them with early physical death!

God knew the incredibly difficult circumstances which provoked many of their failures: Corinth was a moral sewer; many of the Greek religions which they had formerly belonged to were wildly emotional; etc. He could also read their hearts, and see faith there along with their immaturity and serious shortcomings. He disciplined a number of them as a warning to the others, and He inspired Paul to sharply admonish the church. But He also inspired him to write encouragement like this: "Christ will keep you strong to the end, so

that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you....” (1:8-9).

In contrast to those “brothers” (11:33) whose sins God judged with early death but who nonetheless “fell asleep,” we read in Acts 5 of Ananias and Sapphira. Together they conspired to lie to the Lord and the church by claiming to be more dedicated and generous than they were. We read that each of them “fell down and died,” not “fell asleep.” That seems to indicate they were not saved.

To review: In Philippi some members were seriously disrupting the church. In Thessalonica some lazyloafers were deserving of disfellowship by the other believers (unless they repented). In Corinth some carnal members were being chastened by God with sickness and early death. Yet in none of these instances did Paul say the troublemakers had lost their salvation. Despite the high demands which the N.T. sets forth (as seen above in section “A”), it still speaks of those sinning churchmembers (except Ananias, Sapphira and the Corinthian man living in flagrant immorality) as though they were saved.

Conclusions

These facts call for us to be balanced. **(1) We must not neglect nor dilute the high standards in God’s Word.** Instead, we must sound them forth, all the louder and clearer in these days when laxity runs rampant and many preachers muffle the call to repent (if they even mention it at all). This is important for all disciples, but especially for preachers and teachers. Such need the counsel which Paul, the apostle of grace, gave Timothy:

Train yourself to be godly. Command and teach these things. Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (From 1 Tim. 4.)

(2) At the same time we must avoid being judgmental and unbelievably pessimistic. We ought not apply Christ’s high requirements more strictly than He and His apostles did. We must tell *unbelievers* who follow a vile lifestyle and are sick of it that Jesus is the friend of sinners – that He will accept anybody and reject nobody who comes truly seeking to be saved from sin. He will not despise a broken, contrite heart. Whoever comes to Him He will never drive away. He gives the Holy Spirit to provide new life and moral power for all who turn to Him as Lord and Savior. God welcomes into His

family all – all – who trust and are committed to His Son. (Luke 7:34; 5:29-32; Psalm 51:17; John 6:37; 1 Cor. 6:9-11 & 19-20; John 1:12-13.)

We also should teach *believers* that whoever trusts in and is committed to God's Son (for such is the true meaning of "believe in") receives spiritual life. They have eternal life now, and they can *know* they have eternal life, in Christ, now! He will never leave nor forsake them. The Lord who began a good work in them will carry it on to completion until Christ returns – as they abide in Him. Christ set His seal of ownership on them, and put His Spirit in their hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come – as they hold firmly to the Gospel by which they were saved. (1 John 5:12-13; Heb. 13:5; Matt. 28:20; Phil. 1:6; John 15:1-10; 2 Cor. 1:22; 1 Cor. 15:1-2.) This was how the inspired writers of the New Testament scriptures taught, and we should do the same.

Perhaps the short letter of Jude sums it up as well as any. In verse 1 he tells his Christian friends that they "are loved by God the Father and *kept* by Jesus Christ." In verse 24 he assures them that God "is able to *keep you from falling* and to present you before his glorious presence without fault." What joyful comfort and assurance! But he also adds a sober challenge to them, lest they accept their privileges carelessly. Verse 21 says, "*Keep yourselves in God's love.*"

Blessed assurance! Solemn warnings! What God has joined together, let no one put asunder.

Thought-Provokers On our Theme

Grace without Repentance?

Goffried Osei-Mensah, an African church leader, said, "Although the church in Africa is experiencing tremendous numerical growth, it has failed to halt Africa's moral degeneration. *The church has offered the grace of Christ to people without demanding thorough repentance. This has resulted in a lack of moral transformation.*"

* * *

Numerous Warnings

Robert Shank in his book, *Life in the Son*, lists 85 warnings written in the Old and New Testament scriptures against falling away from the Lord. Would God have bothered to put such warnings – and so many of them – in His word unless there is a real need for them?

* * *

"Beloved, the Bible teaches the security of the *believer*, but it doesn't teach the security of the *make-believer!*" --J. Vernon McGee

* * *

He didn't bring us this far to leave us;
Didn't teach us to swim to let us drown.
He didn't build His home in us to move away;
He didn't lift us up to let us down.

[--an old gospel song, author unknown to me]

* * *

This is the concluding paragraph from a pamphlet by R. H. Boll:

Finally, instead of taking up the matter of Eternal Security as an abstract and speculative question, let us be realistic. We need not decide such questions as whether one who has once been a true child of God could finally be lost. Such theoretical problems (like that of God's sovereignty and man's free agency) tend to confuse our minds and take our thoughts off the practical aim and end of God's teaching.

If I see my brother sinning a sin not unto death, let me pray for him (I John 5:16) and let one who is spiritual restore him (Gal. 6:1); for if one of us "err from the truth," I shall not stop to speculate whether he could or couldn't be lost. Let me seek to win him back. For "he who converts a sinner [i. e. a sinning Christian] from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19, 20.)

If I see a brother walking after the world, the flesh, and the devil, I would tell him he is on the way to perdition; for that road cannot lead home. I would neither tell him that he never was a child of God, nor would I tell him if he had ever been one he couldn't fall from grace. The one word he needs is the call to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul; and the solemn warning that except he repents he must perish. That is the point of it, plain and simple.

But as for those who are in the way, yet discouraged and despondent (as all of us are prone to be sometimes) -- I would point them to God's exceeding great and precious promise, and assure them on Christ's behalf that underneath them are the Everlasting Arms, and that by the grace of God they will get home despite weakness and obstacles and all malice of the enemy.

* * *

Here is how I would apply Brother Boll's wise counsel above:

Safety and Security in Christ

2 Peter 3:17-18 NIV, "Dear friends, ... *be on your guard* so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. 18 But *grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Your position is Secure, he says;
so Don't Fall from it!!

That may sound contradictory,
but instead it is wisdom inspired from above:

Don't feel so secure that you ignore the possibility of falling.
Don't feel so fall-able that you minimize your security in Christ.
Instead, **be on guard**, and also **grow**. Those are the two antidotes.

[avw]

Further Thoughts:

Is Our Relationship with God an On – Off – On Again – Off Again Matter?

A. V. W.

1. God rightly demands our all (see the preceding study), but the "all" we give Him is in various ways **ignorant, weak and fallible**--perhaps with deeply entrenched evil habits. New converts need a vast change, and the Lord can *produce* that vast change. But some questions arise. To what extent do they understand how vast are the amendments they need? Second, do they really want them? To express it better, Once they understand what changes Christ requires of them, are they willing to seek them? If not, they are not truly repentant -- haven't truly changed their mind and attitude. And without repentance there is no salvation. On the other hand, they may be penitent but having difficulty **applying repentance to their attitudes and lifestyles**. It requires time, effort, encouragement and help to do that. Some stumble many times, and we may often wonder if they are really committed to Christ or not. He knows, but we don't.

Think about Jesus' parable of the soils. It is true of course that some of the stony-ground and thorny-ground hearers of the Gospel at first appear to be true believers but in the end prove not to be (Matt. 13:20-22). But it is also possible that some of the good-soil hearers may at times appear not to be genuine (especially if they are only "30-fold" believers rather than 60- or 100-fold) when actually they are good soil (v.23). God sees their hearts and knows their circumstances; we can't know the former and may not know the latter.

2. Let's examine more **Biblical examples** of God's dealings with His weak and stumbling people: After the Exodus, Israel murmured time after time against God (10 times, if I remember correctly). This was serious, and He chastened them -- sometimes severely. But they were still His people, **except for those who deliberately rebelled against Him** (such as at Sinai while Moses was on the mountain, and at Korah's rebellion; in the former case God had the faithful Israelites execute them, and in the latter case He did it Himself).

But then at the border of the Promised Land, the people as a group **defiantly disobeyed** Him due to unbelief. The result: "Wander in the desert till you die." Thus the great majority of that generation, which saw His mighty miracles, failed to reach the Promised Land! (We are not told how many repented during those next 40 years and became saved.)

Speaking of that generation, Heb. 3:12- 4:13 shows that they did not inherit God's promise due to *stubborn hearts and rebellion* (3:15), *unbelief* (3:12,14,19; 4:2,3), and *disobedience* (3:18; 4:6,11). On the one hand this shows that salvation is not lost by some slip-up in an unguarded moment, nor even by repeated bad attitudes like their continual complaining against God -- serious as that was. Rather, it is a matter of deliberate, defiant rebellion. It's important to teach this, most especially to people who by nature feel insecure and hesitant. Such people fear they've sinned away their opportunity to be saved, or lost the salvation they had, when they haven't at all--as evidenced by their still-tender hearts. Jesus receives *all* who come to Him.

On the other hand, since unbelief is the root of such defiant disobedience, and since unbelief can creep into our hearts sneakily--look out! Take good care of your faith, for it can grow weaker as well as stronger. **The way to avoid the total, defiant rebellion which is spiritually fatal is to avoid the lesser sins which may lead to it.** Paul Little said, "Spiritual failure is usually experienced not as a big blowout but a slow leak." So look out; examine yourself. For **people who end up stubbornly rejecting God usually start out carelessly neglecting Him.** Thus Hebrews cautions us not to ignore or neglect the great salvation God offers us (2:3, NIV/ ASV). Don't neglect *taking* it; don't neglect *keeping* it. As Paul told Timothy "*Guard what has been entrusted to your care*" (1 Tim. 6:20).

However, the context in Hebrews also provides several *encouragements*, lest the reader become over-whelmed with despair. He tells them: Our High Priest sympathizes with our weaknesses. God reigns from a throne of grace. We may approach Him confidently to receive the mercy we need. The Old Covenant high priest dealt gently with those who were ignorant and going astray, etc. (4:14-5:3). Such reminders are important, especially for those who feel, "I'm too weak; I'll never have enough faith. I'm not strong enough to hold out to the end. If all those Israelites failed, then I may as well not even try because I'll never make it;" etc. Thus the writer of Hebrews, having shown *God's high demands*, went on to emphasize *both His grace and power to sustain*--so that his readers wouldn't give in to such doubts and fears. In our evangelism and teaching, we need to do the same.

Of course in Heb. 6:4-8 and 10:23-31 the writer urges them not to fall away from their repentance and faith in the Savior and thus lose the salvation He gave them -- crucifying Him again and trampling Him under foot. We need to heed these divine warnings. But notice that once more he adds words of positive encouragement: "We are confident of better things in your case." "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus;" etc. (6:9-

12; 10: 19-22, 32-34). In both his challenges and his comforting statements the goal is clear: "We want each of you to *show...diligence to the very end*, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy " "You need to *persevere* so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised," (6:11-12; 10:36.)

3. Since Heb. 6 and 10 speak of *apostasy*, let's consider that subject. It means to fall away, turn away, rebel. There are both *mental and moral aspects* of such turning away. That is, one may turn away from *his faith*: "I don't believe in Jesus any more; he was not who he claimed to be, but a deceiver (or else his followers put claims in his mouth which he never personally made). I used to believe in him, but no more." Or, one may turn away from *his repentance*: "I'm not concerned about doctrine--Jesus' deity, and all that stuff. Regardless of who he may or may not be, I withdraw my allegiance to him as lord, leader, boss, whatever. I used to be committed to his commands, but I renounce them now. The lifestyle he forbade is what I now embrace. Christian moral standards are too hard, and unrealistic. I've said goodbye to them, except for the ones which fit in with my current ideas and desires -- hey, I'm not a total skunk, you know!"

These mental and moral aspects are closely intertwined, of course. Usually they go together. Though a man may claim to believe in Christ while living in obvious disregard of His will, such faith without works is dead -- not a real faith at all, but humbug. James 2 makes that clear; so do numerous other passages. On the other hand, people who claim to "believe the principles of Christianity but not in Jesus' deity, resurrection, etc." are denying the Good News which is the heart of the Christian faith. (1 Cor. 15.)

4. Let's change pace now and look at some other passages. Psa.103 includes both of the truths we noted in Hebrews -- God's demands and His grace -- but with the opposite emphasis. Yes, David points out that God's compassion and love are for those who fear Him, those who keep His covenant and obey His precepts (13,17-18). No "easy-believism" there! But note what David *emphasizes* over and over: The Lord's compassion, grace, slowness to get angry, quickness to get un-angry, abundant love, not punishing us as our sins deserve, removing our guilt from us! David still isn't through: he celebrates God's sky-high love, father-like compassion, never-ending goodness, and patient understanding of our limitations! Re-read those eleven beautiful facts about God, and rejoice. **Immersing our minds and hearts in His loving character motivates us to put Him first and obey Him.**

5. The preceding sentence may be more important than it seems. For example, several of Paul's letters are based on that principle. In Ephesians 1-3, the first half of the epistle, he writes hardly anything about our duty. Oh, he refers to it in passing. But mostly he portrays the grandeur of God's breathtaking greatness and grace. In paragraph after paragraph he unfolds the beauties of God's wise purposes and His unmeritable favor toward us. As a songwriter put it,

*O the love that drew salvation's plan,
O the grace that brought it down to man,
O the mighty gulf that God did span,
At Calvary!*

And then, after we are deeply moved to obey such a God, Paul starts telling our responsibilities. After taking three chapters to reveal our lofty divine calling, he says, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (4: 1). That introduces the 2nd half of the letter, where of course he gives strong practical advice, commands and warnings.

His letters to the Romans and the Colossians follow pretty much the same form. First, the positive presentation of our privileges from God. Second, the obligations such privileges place upon us.

6. Thinking of our privileges reminds me of a question I was asked, "**How do we know that salvation is not an 'on/ off/ on-again/ off-again' matter?** If it can be lost, and the Lord's standards are so high, maybe we are in far greater peril of perishing than most Christians imagine. "

I reply, Yes, His standards are high, but **notice our privileges**. First, *we are already justified*, not by works but by faith (a faith which works, to be sure). We thus have a standing of peace with God and no condemnation, based on Christ's redemption. (Rom. 3: 21-24; 5:1; 8:1; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10; etc.) Yes, it is possible to renounce this great gift and thus crucify the Son of God afresh. But don't do it, and you may rest confidently on Christ crucified. "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Rom. 5: 10). That logic can't be re-futed.

Second, *we are God's children*. Now (1 Jn.3:1-2, etc.). He has both adopted and begotten us! If *we* don't kick our children out of our home each time they misbehave, and if God is a better Father than we are -- draw your conclusion. True, the prodigal son ran away from his dad and forfeited his privileges. But shall we do that

to a Father like ours? It's not impossible, but it is unthinkable. It would break His heart. If someone does run away, let's remind them of what they are missing and urge them to run home to His outstretched arms. In addition, being born again we now have a new nature. John makes a statement that both challenges and assures us: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). And Peter writes that those who believe God's "very great and precious promises...participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Of course we still need to heed the commands Peter gave us in the very next paragraph: "make every effort" to add to our faith the seven virtues he listed, and "be all the more eager" to make our calling sure. So, let's do all this, knowing that we *can* -- because of our new, divinely imparted power (v. 3).

More than that, *the Holy Spirit Himself dwells within us*. At least three times Paul writes of a special function He fulfills. "God...set His seal of ownership on us, and puts His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." "God...has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." "The promised Holy Spirit... is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14.)

Those are inspired words that inspire, powerful words of assurance. Of course they do not cancel Biblical conditions, warnings and threats we mentioned above. But those conditions, warnings and threats do not cancel *them* either! If we want to be Biblical Christians, somehow our "theology" or fitting together of God-given truths must be big enough and flexible enough to include them all. We may not see how this can be done. But we should strive to "heed all God's warnings to us, and believe all God's promises to us," as R.H. Boll used to teach. For *all* of Scripture is profitable and needed. "The *sum* of God's Word is truth." (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Psa.. 119:160, ASV.)

God's Grace, Our Response

Roy Weece

Assurance: God is my Father!

Recently returning from summer camp, I stopped to fuel my car in my hometown. A man questioned, "Aren't you one of Leonard Weece's sons?" I didn't answer by saying, "I'm trying to be. I hope to be someday! I want to be. I've asked to be and am waiting for an answer, but you can't be sure about a matter like that."

I answered, "Yes"....

I'm no more a child of my parents today than I was the day I was born. In like manner I'm a child of my heavenly Father. No guessing or wondering or hoping or trying to be. He doesn't hold off acknowledgement of my sonship until I've been inside 50 years. I'm no more a child of my heavenly Father today than I was the day I believed and was baptized. If God forgets your sins then you can forget them too. Don't forget to forget!

But -- Is it Possible to Fall?

Is it possible to end up on the outside once we've been on the inside? Yes, it's possible, but not necessary. I plan to be once in, always in. God wants me to be once in, always in. Yet not everyone will stay. Some will "fall from grace" (Gal. 5:4); return to the mud holes and "vomit" life of the world -- the hog and dog life (2 Pet. 2:20-22). They'll crucify Jesus again, subjecting Him to public disgrace, as they fall away (Heb. 6:4-6). They'll spurn His kindness (Rom. 11:22).

In conversation with a smalltown drunkard I asked, "Did you ever consider becoming a Christian?" "Yes, I became a Christian at age sixteen," he answered, "and once you've got it you can never lose it!"

I asked another question, "How do town folk view you?" "Oh, they know I'm a drunk," he confessed.

I questioned a third time, "How do you harmonize Bible teaching that 'a drunkard cannot inherit the kingdom of God' [1 Cor. 6:9-11] with your being a Christian and going to heaven?"

"That's easy," he responded. "God won't let me die drunk."

"Then stay drunk and you'll never die, Charlie," I suggested....

But -- Count on God's Grace

God doesn't want to lose you! More than you want to be kept, He wants to keep you. One 5-year-old neighbor boy wanted his parents to give his 2-year-old brother away. They didn't!

Wouldn't God practice what He preaches? He tells us forgive a repentant brother who sins against us "seventy times seven." The key is repentance.

[Excerpts from an article in *Christian Standard* (9-29-91)]

An Interesting Email Conversation

The following exchange was between a seminary professor and his friend Don C. Smith (son of the late Earl C. Smith, whose articles appeared in W&W decades ago, and next month too, D.V.!).

Prof. D. F. wrote: I keep hearing Paul's "faithful saying" in 2 Tim. 2:11-13 quoted in sermons. Paul wrote, "...if we deny him, he will deny us, [but] if we do not believe, he will remain faithful; he cannot deny himself."

The preachers do not define "he will remain faithful; he cannot deny himself" as God's remaining faithful to himself, as per Isaiah 48:9, "I can do nothing to defile my holy name." Instead "he will remain faithful" is expounded to mean that God will stay by his "unconditional grace" and save a person despite apostasy. So one often hears, "There is nothing you can possibly do to make God love you less."

I think it means that if I persist in drawing back from confidence in God's promises he will remain faithful in upholding his glory by having no pleasure in me and causing me to lose my soul (Heb. 10:38-39). God's severity in cutting off from the olive tree a person who does not persevere in faith (Rom. 11:19-22) is certainly consistent with his concern to do "nothing to defile his holy name." What do you think?

Don Smith's reply: I don't recall studying 2 Tim. 2:11-13 in particular detail, but I am sure that I have heard it cited by various teachers in defense of unconditional security. I inherited many of my father's commentaries and Bible/Greek study books. I found one that I believe is right in line with your interpretation. It is Vol. 4 of a *Commentary on The New Testament*, by D. D. Wheldon (written before 1877). I will copy his comments on verse 13.

"13. **Abideth faithful**— Faithful to what? Not **faithful** to restore us from our apostasy and still save us. Nor, as Alford says (and, indeed all the commentators we consult seem to miss here), faithful to his promise above to **deny us** if we believe not. But faithful to the very one to whom we are unfaithful and unbelieving--himself. He will be true to his own identity, his own glorious self. That he will be firm to his purpose to **deny us** for our unfaithfulness is, however, inferentially included. **Cannot deny himself**-- His own glorious nature will forever unequivocally assert itself, both in being what he is, and doing with absolute perfectness all that becomes his nature. And that nature will take all who are in accordance with it into glorious unity with itself, and reject all that are discordant with

it from itself." I believe this brings out the likely meaning of the verse and is essentially in accord with what you said.

What the New Birth *Does*, and *Doesn't Do*

Carl Kitzmiller

Question: Does God take away the sinful appetites when one becomes a Christian? For example, does He take away the taste for alcohol from the drunkard, the ambition for material things from the thief, the sexual appetite of the sex offender, etc?

Answer: God does what He has promised to do! But let us be careful that we do not have a preconceived or false notion as to what He has promised. It seems to me that the thing God has promised to the one who comes to Christ is power for victory over sin. Christians are new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who "transact business" with the Lord come out of the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Of this there can be no doubt. The indwelling of the Spirit of God in the Christian is a fact (Rom. 8:1-10; 1 Cor. 6: 19-20), and one of the great works of the Spirit in the Christian is enabling him to overcome the flesh. Moreover, one of the greatest promises in the entire New Testament in this writer's judgment is 1 Cor. 10: 13. He will not permit us (Christians) to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. He can do this by limiting the temptation or by enabling us to face it victoriously. I do not find that He anywhere promises to remove temptation in an absolute sense. In that case there would be no reason for a Christian's failure. There would have been no need for the apostle Paul to write to the Corinthian church, to those who had been "washed... sanctified... justified" (1 Cor. 6:11), to correct sin problems which had arisen among them. Temptation is not sin. Christians are tempted. But Christians have power to be victorious over sin.

While God is not a respecter of persons, neither does He have to be mechanical in His dealings with mankind in order to maintain that standard. He knows us individually and personally, not just as a computer figure. He knows our needs. He knows our "load limit." Just as a wise parent does not deal mechanically in the same way with each child but recognizes the make-up and need of the individual child, how much more our heavenly Father is able to deal with His children. There are those who being converted to Christ declare that their temptation for some particular besetting sin was completely taken away. I don't believe in putting God in a strait jacket or denying that He has such power. So far as I can tell there may be genuine

cases in which this happens. There are also those who in a given environment and because they are expected to do so, declare the removal of an appetite but who later yield to the same and fall, showing that they were tragically deceived. The experience of many Christians is that they may have to continue to struggle with some weakness. The temptation will still be there in some measure. Like the apostle Paul with his thorn in the flesh, they may pray for removal of the problem and find the Lord's answer that His grace is sufficient. It is not the removal of the temptation that makes us strong, but the overcoming. The temptation may make us lean all the more on the Lord, finding strength for our weakness.

Now it is evident that genuine repentance will have a strong effect on the power of temptation. For example one man does not like the thing that alcohol does to his family, his job, etc., and may want to quit drinking, but he does not regard drinking as a sin. Another faces up to the fact that he is sinning and genuinely repents before God. The latter stops making excuses and has a real change of mind toward his old ways. He can expect to have a great deal fewer problems with continued temptation than the former. The person who becomes subject to God and who in harmony with that resists the devil (Jas. 4:7) will find the devil fleeing. Decisive action, as we look to God, is one of the ways we can take a great deal of power from temptation. It may not totally eliminate temptation in a lot of cases, but there will be cases in which it will be so completely set aside that it will seem that God has taken away the taste for the wrong. God calls for us to act decisively about sin, to choose whom we will serve, and those who go limping between the two sides will have much more trouble with temptation. It is no secret that a lot of the powerless, defeated "Christianity" we see today is because people are trying to hold to Christ with one hand and to the world with the other. What some may see as the Lord removing all taste for something may be in great measure the result of genuine repentance.

It is a dangerous doctrine, however, which says that becoming a Christian removes all the taste for the wrong. The old man, the flesh, must still be contended with. We are new creatures, but also babes in Christ who must grow up spiritually. We do have power to overcome, but we may not have learned how to use it. If the Lord always removes the taste of alcohol from the drunkard, then any slip into temptation after the individual supposedly became a Christian must prove that there was never any new birth. And that is simply untrue in some cases. We do not deny that there are those who try to play games with God, so to speak, but there are also genuine Christians who stumble. And they stumble because they are tempted. How better could we destroy a person than to lead him to expect that in the process of his conversion all his old appetites are going to be miraculously removed? He turns to the Lord in all sincerity but the

temptation is still there in some measure. So, he concludes, his change was only a mockery. Certainly we want to claim every promise the Lord has made us but to enlarge a promise beyond what He has promised is not only wrong but may have destructive consequences.

We repeat that what is promised is power for victory. The Christian never has to sin. He will never be put in the position that the only thing he can do is sin. He can never plead that there was no righteous way out. God will provide either a way out of the temptation or power to overcome. If, indeed, removal of the taste is needed or according to His Will, He can surely do that. But if He chooses to exercise us unto godliness by allowing us to have a practical victory, that may be the better thing. We do not say victory is always easy. It is possible, however, to the one who belongs to God.

Our age has marked some sins as almost impossible to overcome short of a miracle from the Lord. Nor would we deny that there are sins which get such a hold on people that giving them up is very difficult. God's power as seen in the lives of some of the people at Corinth is still available though (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Fornicators and adulterers became Christians. Homosexuals became Christians. Thieves and those greedy of gain became Christians. Drunkards became Christians. Note that we did not say that they continued to live in those evil ways as Christians. This is not a mere show of religion while they continued to live in the old ways. They were "washed... sanctified... justified." It is declared that God had done His work in their lives. They had repented of their sins. There was victory for them in Christ.

A Pastoral Perspective on the Homosexual Debate

Bradstreet W. Smith

Last quarter I had a class with several students from a denomination rocked by debate over the place of practicing homosexuals in the Christian church. Sometimes we stayed late, trying to get a biblical perspective on the issue.

The argument for blessing homosexual unions in the church usually goes something like this: John and Frank are members of a Christian congregation. They love each other, and they desire to have their relationship blessed by the church. Since God is love, surely He would approve; He would not have created them with a desire for each other and then forbid its fulfillment.

What does the Bible say? Jesus set the standard of celibacy (including purity of thought) outside of marriage, and lifelong fidelity within marriage. Paul's letters cited homosexual behavior as inappropriate for those who are in Christ. (See Matthew 5:27-32; Romans 1:18-32; and 1 Cor. 6: 9-11) The Bible gives no indication of the Apostles or the New Testament church blessing any sexual relationship apart from marriage between a man and a woman. As John's and Frank's pastor, or even as their friend, how are we to respond to their frustration at not being able to express their feelings sexually?

John and Frank are not the only sufferers in our congregations. Mary's husband is beginning a fifteen years sentence for armed robbery, leaving her lonely and with children to raise. Alan's wife is in a coma, with a life expectancy of up to ten years. Sean is unlikely to live past forty due to a degenerative disease. He yearns for female companionship, but does not feel right to marry. Arlene, Joe, Andrew, and Mitsuko would all love to be married, but nothing has worked for them.

Why bless a union between John and Frank? How about a union between Mary, whose husband is in prison, and Sean, who has only a few years remaining? It would ease their loneliness, and Sean will have died by the time Mary's husband is released. Alan, whose wife lies in a nursing home, and Arlene, who longs to be married, could enter into an informal marriage. It would bring joy to both of them, give Alan's children a mother, would do no harm to his comatose wife, and could result in full marriage once Alan's wife passes away. Certainly God does not want anyone to suffer sexual and relational frustration, does He?

Such a kindly "quick fix" to suffering is in fact cruel for at least two reasons. **First, God's commands are always for our benefit.** He would not have commanded what was not in our best interests. While it is true that we may have to suffer, Christ accepted suffering for the glory that awaited Him, and He is our model. (See 1 Peter, especially chapters 2 and 4.) God plans for us to become like Jesus, even if the process includes suffering. It is never kind to offer an unbiblical solution that will short-circuit God's good plan.

Second, God is full of surprises. Mary's husband might be given an early release; Sean might live years longer than expected. Alan's wife could come out of her coma, and his faithful visits might have a part in her recovery. John, Frank, or both might find they are capable of developing a heterosexual attraction.

Those on both sides of the homosexual debate must be truthful. Some men and women with same-sex attraction never experience

anything else. They suffer as do those heterosexuals who never find an outlet. But there are numerous cases of persons with homosexual desires who develop, with loving support, a physically and emotionally satisfying heterosexual relationship. One prerequisite for such relationship is a strong motivation to change. It will not happen if the church sidesteps biblical commands.

If we do not go for the quick fix, then how can the church be a place where those (all of us at some time or another) who suffer unfulfilled sexual desire can flourish? Let me offer a few suggestions:

The church needs to resist society's lies. Fornication and adultery are not the only options for those who do not have sexual outlet. Numerous people, single and married, with heterosexual and with homosexual inclinations, have flourished in a supportive fellowship of believers while dealing appropriately with their sexual frustration.

1) Congregations should be safe places where we can pour out all our triumphs, failures, fears, and feelings with at least a few friends; it should be a place where we give and receive practical help in developing strategies for redirecting sexual energy that cannot be released directly.

2) There should be places of service and leadership in the church for those who are single for whatever reason as well as those who are married. Congregations may want to move towards social events and outreach projects that mix singles and married, so that all experience the emotional support of a loving family.

It won't be easy. We must never minimize the suffering involved in unfulfilled sexual desire; neither must we ever lose sight of the promise that all will be made right: certainly in the life to come, but (more often than we might think) even in this life.

[Bradstreet W. Smith ministers in Hawaii, and teaches at the Bible Institute of Hawaii.]

Other Arguments that Refute Same-gender Marriage

A. V. W.

Here are more arrows for our bow in the ongoing controversy about marriage. (See our April issue.)

On *Focus on the Family* radio program, guest speaker Dennis Prager presented these (and other) reasons to work hard to amend the U.S. Constitution (or, failing that, to amend the constitutions in as many states as possible) so that marriage is limited to one man and one woman.

Supporters of same-gender marriage say, "Look at all the divorces now, in 1-man/ 1-woman marriages. That proves it has failed, so you gay-bashers can't say other forms of marriage should not be allowed." We deny we are gay-bashers, but we must admit marriage as now defined has great problems. Yet think of it this way. Marriages fail, just as seat-belts fail. But that's no reason to take away the laws requiring us to wear seat-belts!

Advocates of homosexual marriage also say, "Homosexuality was not considered bad till the Jews came up with that idea as the Old Testament was written." We should reply, It's true that homosexual *practice* was not uncommon through the ages and now, but homosexual *marriage* has never been legitimized by any people or culture in history.

You may think, why get so hot and bothered about this issue? Well, Prager gave an example of the lengths to which the pro-gay movement has gone, and the influence it has. Harvard University ruled that having restrooms only for "Men" and "Women" was unfair to bisexuals and transgendered people. So they added special restrooms for them too! This gives a preview of upcoming changes everywhere.

But here is the strongest point Prager made. "Liberated" folks say same-gender marriage should be allowed because it is so unfair, unkind and inhumane to stop people who truly love each other from getting married. Any two people who love one another should be allowed to marry. Ask them this: Then is it o-k for a brother and sister to marry, even though that's not same-gender? Or for a son to marry his mom if she divorces his dad? Or, if same-sex marriage is made legal throughout the U.S., should two brothers be allowed to marry each other? Or two sisters? Or a widowed dad and his son? Etc. It is repulsive just to mention such matters, but we need to realize that the "be tolerant to all / be tolerant of everything" movement will tear apart the very fabric of our society.

SEXUAL INTIMACY AND HOLINESS

Edward Fudge

A gracEmail subscriber writes: "I am a devout Christian. I am also a lesbian. For several years I have been celibate but very lonely. I have been studying some material that reconciles faith with gay sexual orientation. It notes that Jesus himself was notably silent on the subject, that the Greek and Hebrew words translated as 'homosexual' roughly mean a male prostitute, and that Paul's comments may have been addressing pagan religious rituals and practices rather than monogamous homosexual relationships. I'm really feeling confused."

* * *

I commend you for seeking the Lord's will about sexual activity in a time when most people give little if any thought to God's wishes. Our culture thinks nothing of sexual intercourse between heterosexual singles. Modern society regards divorce as an easy escape from discomfort or as a means to self-fulfillment when one's spouse loses that "special" aura or appeal. There is also a great move afoot today to legitimize homosexual intimacy. Such attitudes and opinions result from worldly thinking not informed by the Holy Spirit. We need to renew our minds based on biblical revelation so that we are not deceived.

God's plan for sexual relations calls for joyful and self-giving intimacy between one man and one woman who are married to each other for life. This excludes sexual relations between singles, between a married person and anyone other than a spouse and between people of the same sex. Jesus did not specifically address every form of sexual immorality. Instead he condemned impurity in general and reaffirmed God's positive plan (Matt. 19:4-6).

Paul's language in Romans 1:26-28, 1 Cor. 6:9-11 and 1 Tim. 1:9-10 clearly prohibits homosexual relations by either women or men. These prohibitions and warnings certainly include pagan practices, prostitution and promiscuity, but there is no biblical or linguistic basis for limiting them to that. Contrary to common assertions, the ancient world also was familiar with loving, long-term homosexual relationships (as documented by Dr. James DeYoung in *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law*, published by Kregel.) Such rela-

tionships are no exception to blanket biblical condemnations of homosexual intimacy.

Homosexual orientation is a "brokenness" in our fallen world but a person is not sinning merely because they have such an orientation. Many heterosexual people also have "broken" cravings to which they too must say "No" for Christ's sake. God can heal sexual brokenness of all kinds and he can supernaturally enable a holy life. This applies to homosexually-oriented persons as well as to the far greater number of unmarried heterosexual persons.

Meanwhile, those of us who have truly experienced God's love and forgiveness regarding our own sins need to come alongside our struggling brothers and sisters to encourage them in holiness and to offer godly friendship and spiritual intimacy. For a pastorally-sensitive presentation of the larger biblical perspective on this subject, I recommend "The Gay Debate", a little booklet by Stanton Jones, published by IVP, Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515.

True Power for the Church

Mark 10: 35-45

Nick Boone

It is an election year, so naturally that nasty word, *politics*, is forcing its way into more and more of our conversations. Have you ever noticed that no one truly enjoys discussing politics? Even those we know who talk politics incessantly seem to do so more out of necessity than out of real enjoyment. I believe this is the case because, at bottom, politics is the art of gaining and distributing power; and since few of us are ever the ones doing the gaining and distributing, we resent having to be involved in politics at all.

But, most of us understand that, as citizens of this nation, we have a responsibility to be informed and to get involved in politics, if only at the basic level of voting. Certainly, I believe Christians ought to be involved in the political system—we must make our voices heard, lest we be ignored. But, while I believe political participation in the secular government to be important for Christians, within the Church itself, politics should be banished.

More and more I hear people talk about individuals in the Church in political terms—*He's liberal*, or *She's conservative*. I have witnessed churches that were nearly completely divided along these political lines. I've seen brothers and sisters stereotyped, and

thereby dismissed, members viewed as pawns, elders run ragged trying to please two sides, forced to speak the weak political language of compromise rather than the authoritative words of Scripture. Politics is about gaining and distributing power, and churches caught up in internal politics are places of power struggle. Church becomes more about getting one's way than about "The Way, The Truth And The Life." I hope all of us will realize that this should not be so. We need to keep politics of this sort out of the church.

But this is not a new problem. The Bible shows us that political strife was with the church even in its rudimentary stages of development. Take, for example, Mark 10:35-45. In this passage we see not only the detrimental effects of politics on followers of Christ, but more importantly we see Christ's response to those who would confuse the power of politics with true power—the power of God's grace.

In Mark 10:35-45, James and John ask Jesus if they could be the ones to sit beside him when he achieves his glory. In other words, they want to be recognized as the most important disciples. Jesus' response is twofold. First he tells them the literal truth of the situation: "You don't know what you are asking, Jesus said" (v. 37). Then Jesus asks them a question that moves the discussion into a more spiritual direction. He asks, "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (v. 38).

Amazingly, James and John answer this question in the affirmative: "We can, they answered" (v. 38). Here we see James and John at their lowest point in Scripture. Often we remark on how Peter did and said things without thinking, or at least without fully considering the implications of his words or deeds. James and John are guilty of the same kind of hubris in this passage. Even after Jesus warns them that they don't know what they are talking about, they still have the audacity to say that they will be able to endure whatever ordeals Jesus will endure. Obviously, at this point, they cannot know what will happen to Jesus, so Scripture makes clear that their arrogance had clouded their judgment.

More amazing than the audacity of James and John, though, is Jesus' reply. He says, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (v. 39-40). It is in Jesus' divine words that we can find the wisdom to heal our churches that have been wounded by political battles. Jesus responds to a political question by disregarding the political altogether (it's "not for me to grant"), and focusing, instead, on the spiritual. In his response to James and John, Christ shows us that true power does not reside in politics, but

in the graces God offers us through baptism and communion. Indeed, James and John, like all true followers of Christ after the Ascension, will be baptized with Christ's baptism, and they will partake of his cup. This is true power: the grace God allows us when we are united with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in our baptism, and the power we receive weekly through partaking of the symbolic body and blood of Christ. Compared to these graces, the kind of power politics affords seems rather weak, even irrelevant.

When someone makes a political "power play," other people typically feel hurt and betrayed. Such was the case for the other ten disciples in this passage. Once again, though, Jesus focuses his disciples on spiritual truths. Followers of Christ should eschew the secular "power play" politics they are familiar with. Relationships in the Church are not about power, rather they are about truth and love. All our actions should demonstrate "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Jesus says to his disciples, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v. 42-45).

Internal politics in churches leads to nothing but division and strife. Gaining power in that way is really to gain no power at all, for true power comes from the example of Christ—of laying down one's life in service. The graces God provides in baptism and in communion puts us in contact with true power—the power of God to overcome all evil, all sin and strife. When politics threatens our churches, we must, like Christ in this example from Scripture, turn our minds to spiritual things and meditate on what we all share in common through our baptism and through communion—the grace and power we all share in Christ.

WHY Did We DIVIDE? -- TWO ANSWERS

Leroy Garrett

When emphasis is given to the fact that the Stone-Campbell Movement -- sometimes called the Restoration Movement -- emerged on the American frontier in the early 19th century as an effort "to unite the Christians in all the sects," the question always comes up, "If it started as a unity movement, why did it eventually divide again and again?"

The question is all the more germane when it is noted that the Movement remained united through the Civil War -- when most denominations divided -- and for a generation afterwards. The first division -- the separation of Churches of Christ -- did not begin to crystalize until the 1880s, and was not officially declared a separate church until the 1906 Census.

Even outsiders took note that the Campbellites survived the bitter War Between the States without forming two churches -- one northern and one southern -- as did the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. It was surmised that it was because we were loosely organized with no central headquarters, but that was more or less the case with the Baptists as well. One astute observer noted that our unity might have been because of our people's broad view of opinion, allowing for considerable diversity. Even slavery and the war were held as matters of opinion!

This is not to say there were not tensions between our northern and southern churches -- some of them serious -- but we survived as still one church. It led one of our leaders, Moses E. Lard, to opine that if the Civil War did not divide us, nothing could divide us. *We would never divide!*, he avowed.

Decades earlier Alexander Campbell expressed confidence that his people would never divide into sects as did their neighbors -- *so long as they hold to the principles of the ancient faith we have laid down*, he cautiously added. When he died in 1866 we were still one church, and even on his death bed he shed tears of joy at the news that his people and the Baptists were talking about uniting in nearby Pittsburgh. The old reformer died with a passion for unity still in his heart and mind.

You know the rest of the story. Once we started dividing -- two major divisions by the first half of the 20th century -- we divided at the rate of about one new faction each decade. Today, depending on how one wants to count, there are at least eight or ten factions

among us with at least 100 congregations -- mainly in Churches of Christ -- who have no fellowship with each other.

What happened? In my own writings I have argued that the reasons usually given are not the real reason -- "the reason is not the reason," which is often the case in trying to explain the cause of a divorce. Contrary to common understanding, we did not divide over instrumental music and societies. We had those "innovations" long before divisions came. The answers are not that simple.

I had the pleasure of personally knowing the two "deans" of Disciples of Christ history, Alfred T. DeGroot of Texas Christian University and Winfred E. Garrison, first of the University of Chicago and then of the University of Houston. Together they wrote our first definitive "modern" history of the Movement -- *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (1948). Moreover, they lived through much of that history, and they were witness to some of the divisions. One could not find more authoritative voices to answer the question I have raised.

But I didn't want a textbook answer. Could they tell me in just a few sentences -- as if on a postcard! -- why we have divided as we have. I was able to ask each of these historians that question -- both in their declining years -- Garrison in a visit with him at the University of Houston, and DeGroot in a visit with him at a retirement center in Dallas long after his retirement from TCU.

Their answers were clear and concise -- Garrison in just a few sentences, DeGroot in just a few words. Neither knew how the other had answered me. Their answers were different but complimentary. Both were informative and liberating -- worthy of passing along.

Garrison said our divisions emanated from a mistaken view of the New Testament and by making it something it is not -- the misconception that in its pages there is a pattern for a detailed restoration of the primitive church. This "illusion of restorationism" presumes that there was a golden age of primitive Christianity -- something that never was -- and that our mission is to restore that church in name, organization, doctrine and practice. Such a myth brought no unity and only multiplied the divisions because each would-be restorationist had his own interpretation of what that "golden age" church was supposed to be.

DeGroot said the divisions were simply a matter of, "It could only be one way." That is all he said, leaving it to me -- and Mark Berrier of Dallas Christian College who was with me for that visit -- to fill in the details. He was saying our people were victimized by the old "Either/Or" fallacy. To insist that it has to be either A or B

when it might be *both A and B*, may lead one to make a law where God has left us free, and thereby be factious.

He was saying we can have *both* congregations that sing with instruments *and* those who do not, and still be united. We can have churches that support societies or programs like Herald of Truth and those that do not, without division. It doesn't have to be just one way.

The problem has not been how we have sung -- whether acappella or instrumental; or how we have served the Lord's supper -- whether with one cup or many; or how we have done mission work -- agencies or direct support; or how we have interpreted prophecy -- whether premill or amill. The problem has been, as DeGroot pointed out, that one side says *It can be only one way -- our way!* The two answers as to why we have divided are complimentary in that patternism (Garrison) has been the basis of exclusivism (DeGroot). One sincere leader looked at the pattern and saw one kind of "restored" church. Another equally sincere brother looked at the same pattern and saw it another way. Both were locked in to a legalistic view of the New Testament.

But it didn't stop there. Each one concluded that his interpretation was the right one, and it could be only one way, so each became an exclusivist with his own sect. We ended up with almost as many factions as there were opinionated leaders.

This is the very sectarian fallacy that our pioneers thought they had solved, and that is what Campbell meant that division would never come so long as we were true to our unity principles. They spelled them out, clear as a bell: *In essentials, unity; in opinions and methods, liberty; in all things, love.* As Campbell put it, "so long as they hold to Christ who is the Head." Christ is at the center, all else is marginal!

What happened? We lost the vision and we got derailed. We had some leaders following Stone and Campbell -- I call them "editor bishops" -- who sold us a bill of goods, causing us to lose sight of the passion-for-unity people we were supposed to be. They misled us through the multiplication of the essentials, the tyranny of opinionism, and by identifying us as "the right church" instead of a community of forbearing love.

We have blessings to count. We have at last begun to see what happened, and we have begun to make some vital mid-course corrections. PTL!

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

Woodland Bible Camp. Upcoming Dates:

Sept. 11, 2004 - 50th Year Anniversary Celebration (Saturday)

Sept. 12-16, 2004 - Senior Citizen's Week

Oct. 16, 2004 - Annual Corporation Dinner and Meeting

30th Annual Central Louisiana Christian Fellowship

Theme: The Church's Responsibility in the 21st Century

Night Speakers: Sonny Childs & Don McGee

Information: Dennis LeDoux at 318: 748-4243.

150 Years Old! The Salem Church of Christ outside of Cynthiana, KY, will celebrate its 150th anniversary on Sept. 26, 2004. The day will begin with morning worship at 11 a.m., followed by a fellowship meal. The ceremony of remembering 150 years of ministry will begin at 2:00. The festivities will conclude as we reminisce together while enjoying dessert. All are invited. If you have any questions, write the church at 4896 Salem Pike, Cynthiana, KY 41031. Or phone Roger Marsh at (859) 234-4027.

We are sorry to learn that the Southside Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas has disbanded after many years. If anyone wishes to supply any more information—about Southside's past or present, we'll pass it on.

Missionary Biography: the Shewmakers Some W&W readers will remember J.C. and Joyce Copeland Shewmaker. She was a member of the first graduating class (1928) from Portland Christian High School in Louisville. They met at Harding College, married, and spent many decades in Africa. Charles R. Webb has written their biography, *Putting Out the Fleece*. It is available @ \$15 from J.C. Choate, P.O. Box 72, Winona, MS 38967. Phone: 662-283-1192. Or email: Choate@WorldEvangelism.org

Brother Choate also publishes *Silhouettes of Life*, by Myrtle Rowe – also a missionary to Africa in the first half of the 1900s. It costs \$12. Do *not* order these from W&W, please.

WELL SAID! A recent assembly of church representatives originally listed "growth of membership" as a goal for their churches. But then they amended the motion to make it call for "*making disciples for the ministry and mission of Christ's church.*"

One of the representatives explained the difference: "Costco has members. The Sierra Club has members. Members often expect to be served. Disciples expect to serve."

Pray for Gary Pearson, evangelist at Westminster, MD Church of Christ. Some will remember him as a speaker at the 2001 Louisville Fellowship Week. He has been a strong promoter of unity among Christ's followers, and is Alex Wilson's favorite subscriber to W&W – since he gives gift subscriptions to

more people than anyone else! In the church bulletin we read: "Gary Pearson has been seeing several doctors and undergoing tests to determine the cause of pain and stiffness in his feet and legs."

The Kentucky-Indiana Fellowship seemed to many of us to be the best in several years. Thanks to our Heavenly Father who helped the participants - resulting in very good messages by 13 different brothers, wonderful singing, better attendance and heart-warming fellowship. It seems to me (avw) that more young people attended their night sessions (led by Sonny Childs) than ever before - at least in recent years -- despite the fact that the after-meeting special activities for youth were fewer this year than last. And the Mon. night special concert by the Woodland Camp Singing Week campers and staff was splendid. We look forward to having such a concert yearly.

Anyone wishing to buy tapes of the messages &/or singing of the Fellowship may obtain them from Donald Stump, 1720 Plum Creek Road, Taylorsville, KY 40071. Or call him at 502: 477-2252.

Some "missionaries" work in areas where it is dangerous to speak openly of the Savior. Yet God opens doors and uses wise witness to point folks to Him. Ed and Rhoda Perozzi, who formerly taught at Southeastern Christian College and elsewhere, now work overseas in such a situation. Exciting things have happened the past two years. If you wish to get their newsletters, contact Rhoda's sister Flora Schillizzi at 502:776-2319. Or write 2626 Montgomery St., Louisville, KY 40212-1022.

Thankful for Tom Mobley Bro. Tom Mobley is a minister and educator with the Christian Churches. After becoming president of Louis-

ville Bible College in 1990, Brother Mobley began efforts to form a consortium of local Bible colleges with roots in the Stone-Campbell movement. That resulted in the Kentuckiana Consortium of Restoration Colleges, which includes LBC, College of the Scriptures, and our School of Biblical Studies. Students from each school can cross-register, share library facilities, transfer course credits and participate in joint chapel services. The schools take turns hosting an annual lectureship, and share in its expenses. All this has had beneficial results, especially to COS and SBS since they are much smaller than LBC.

During his presidency, LBC grew from about 30 students to over 250. He has spearheaded several educational programs there. But Bro. Tom has been far more than an administrator and teacher. He has served as interim minister at several churches. He has been a regular panel member (and the panel's most conservative voice) in a weekly radio program that addresses spiritual and moral issues. And for 21 years he has served as a volunteer chaplain for the Louisville Police Department, being on-call around the clock to help as needed in hostage situations, homicides, shootings involving police, and traffic fatalities. He also has been coordinator for the team of other volunteer police chaplains. Now he is moving to Bardstown, Ky., to minister at Nelson Christian Church. He will be missed in Louisville.

Sonny Childs went from the KY-IND Fellowship to hold a meeting with the Pine Prairie congregation in Louisiana accompanied by the MAPS kids. Classes were conducted while Sonny preached. They have baptized 2 so far and 2 rededications.

Missions Update Continued

Church of Christ Worldwide serves as a forwarding agent to mission works around the world and helps provide information and assists missionaries when needed. Currently the office handles:

---27 Mission Groups

---8 Bible Colleges

---3 retired missionaries

Church of Christ Worldwide handles 2 different Estates from which interest earned is distributed to designated individuals or works. Those who were faithful in giving while alive had the desire to continue giving to support mission works after their death.

I am personally grateful for the work of the mission staff and appreciate their willingness to continue to serve in these areas without receiving any salary. This enables us to forward *all* funds we receive for work overseas – *in full*. Anyone desiring to know more about the work of the Mission Office and would like to receive a monthly financial report can contact us at Church of Christ Worldwide, P.O. Box 54842, Lexington, KY 40555; (859) 269-1312.